The knowledge, skills and competencies for effective public affairs practice: a UK study

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THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC AFFAIRS PRACTICE: A UK STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis adds conceptual and practical value to the field of public affairs (PA). It connects scholarship from the fields of competencies, careers and knowledge, with the theory and practice of PA. The review of literature clearly demonstrated that a gap existed. This then provided a basis for a mixed methods study that enabled the creation of a model of contemporary UK PA practice; a PA knowledge architecture that supports practice; a conceptual PA competency typology on which a competency framework can be built; and an illustrative PA competency framework that reflects a twenty-first century profession.

The study was guided by a critical realist worldview that suggests reality is complex and to understand any phenomena a broad a set of research instruments is necessary. The study, therefore, integrated qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative study consisted of 31 interviews with PA practitioners and those involved in policy making that allowed the gathering of rich data mirroring the complexity of work and policy construction. A survey of 50 practitioners also informed the study by helping to illuminate relationships and added greater depth. The research also integrated content analysis by reflecting on four competency frameworks against best practice scholarship to provide practical insights.

Findings suggest an evolving field that combines both cohesion and diversity that can be integrated into an embryonic professional identity that reflects a

broad set of agreed competencies and knowledge. This is shaped by postmodernist trends in identity and knowledge construction rather than that which mirrors the traditional concept of what defines a profession.

Limitations relate to its scope: a UK focus. Further studies in different cultural and political settings need to be encouraged and perhaps longitudinal studies developed to look at the longer-term impact of whether a competency approach can lead to improved performance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Background to the Study

Public affairs (PA) is 'a specialised practice that focuses on relationships which will have a bearing on the development of public policy' (White and Mazur 1995: 200), but there are many definitions of the discipline and no agreement on the theoretical concepts and personal competencies that underpin it (Fleisher 2007; Toth, 2006). Yet PA is having a growing influence on all our lives. The Hansard Society's Friend or Foe report (2007) suggested all types of organisations in the UK used PA and that it played a central role in the development and delivery of policy. This in itself was not problematic providing it was done so responsibly and transparently.

According to the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC) in 2015 there were an estimated 4000 people who defined themselves as PA practitioners in the UK. These included those working directly for organisations (in-house teams), as well as those working in consultancy. In addition, there are over 40,000 members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) whose roles encompass all aspect of communications many of which may involve PA. These numbers, however, exclude those who are not signed-up to either professional body as in the UK individuals do not have to be a member of a professional body in order to offer communications advice. So, those involved in delivering aspects of PA may be substantially higher.   This lack of formal accreditation is one that vexes the communications profession (and not just PA) as indicated by Alex Mattisnon

(PR Week, 6 February, 2014). Although these numbers are still significantly less than other occuptions that have professional status – for example the UK's Institute of Civil Engineers represent 80,000 members worldwide – there is now a weight of numbers of those involved in delivering PA activities. This coupled with high profile public interest in the discipline makes an exploration of the practice worthwhile.

The public interest in lobbying has been prompted in part by the continual decline in the reputation of politicians. This came to a head following the Telegraph's reporting of MP's expenses in 2009. Since then there have been a number of confirmed cases of politicians demonstrating inappropriate behaviour, including lodging fraudalent expense claims. High profile cases include Liam Fox's resignation as Defence Secretary in 2011, and the former Transport Secretary, Stephen Byers, being caught on camera in 2010 saying he was 'a cab for hire' who would work for £5000 a day. More recently in 2015 senior politicians Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Rt Hon Jack Straw have fallen victim of media 'stings' suggesting the type of fees they would charge for enabling access to decision makers.

These scandals, however, relate to those being lobbied, rather than those doing the lobbying yet some PA practitioners too have also brought the profession into disrepute, for example, Tim Collins at Bell Pottinger who allegedly offered rogue regimes access to politicians as reported in the Guardian by Patrick Wintour (6 December, 2011). Although there have been cases of lobbyists over inflating their importance, it is fair to say that perhaps

the bulk of the problem lies more with the politician rather than the lobbyist, but the two are perceived to be part of the same problem – those in power and those close to power are in it for themselves.

Against this backdrop, the industry came together in 2010 to establish the UK Public Affairs Council (UKPAC). The aim of the Council is to promote and uphold effective self-regulation for those professionally engaged in PA and emerged from the Public Administration Select Committee's recommendations for there to be a public register of lobbyists. The Council is made up of representatives from the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and the Public Relations and Communication Association (PRCA) many of whose members are actively engaged in lobbying. All lobbyists are encouraged to register. At the same time, all three professional bodies have voluntary codes of conduct – in particular, the APPC who focus on the importance of integrity in PA practice.

Despite this, government has persisted in its intention to establish a statutory register. The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 came into force on 25 March 2015 paving the way for a statutory register of lobbyists controlled by the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists.   Part One of the Act necessitates consultant lobbyists to formally register.   At the time, the Act garnered criticism from the PA industry and others including bodies such as The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (ALT) stating that it does not increase

transparency at all.   It excludes in-house lobbying teams and only provides limited information.   Nor does it tackle the issue of MPs behaving badly.   A view reiterated in an ALT blog post in April, 2016. Iain Anderson, former Chair of the APPC in February 2015 in response to Transparency International's Lifting the Lid report also made clear that the Act does nothing to improve transparency and focuses on the wrong targets and will not prevent MP scandals.

In part as a result of media coverage of these issues, the British public increasing perceive 'the establishment' as corrupt and in need of monitoring. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2015 reinforced this view arguing that trust in government, business and the media was at an all time low, suggesting that less than half of the UK population trust a political leader to return £10 if they lent it to them.

Yet policy formation continues as does the PA role within it. A new style of coalition government in 2010 and a change in the legislative make-up with a significant number of new MPs all impacted on the delivery of PA requiring the need to reassess relationships and understand policy co-creation. Also, this decade has seen the complexity and inter-connectedness of the modern world become increasingly apparent not least with the economic crisis and a decline in deference that places societal issues and grassroots voices higher up the scale of importance. This has brought changes to the nature of governance and business as argued by Schepers (2010).

The 2015 general election did nothing to alter this increasingly complicated world apart from re-establishing traditional majority government, and the recent BREXIT vote has again thrown up different questions for PA practice in terms of rethinking where decision making in the future may reside. Back in 2010, Schepers argued that new ways of business-government cooperation was needed and new skills were required. This has even more relevance today than it did then. As suggested by Spencer (2011), PA is about managing uncertainty and unknown unknowns and this is particularly pertininent as the UK enters a changing political landscape.

1.2. Research issue

McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010), reflecting on the discipline, argued that PA in the future required skilled practitioners able to analyse, interpret and anticipate trends and developments and also be able to provide strategic counsel to organisations. The researcher believes that the question of what constitutes effective PA competencies needs to be explored in detail to improve policy and governance, enhance organisational value and individual professionalism, as well as restoring trust and the reputation of the discipline. Trust is aligned to the behaviours of PA practitioners and connects to the idea of individual self-awareness. The ability to build trusting relationships requires high levels of self-efficacy in order for individuals to evaluate their own behaviours, values and worldviews to improve effectiveness. It is the mechanism of competencies that is appealing as a way of embedding and improving self-awareness and ultimately improving PA practice.

According to the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), competency can be defined as both the behaviours and technical attributes individuals must have to perform effectively at work. The idea of competencies as a way of driving individual performance emerged during the 1980s in both the UK and USA as a response to organisational challenges and increased competitiveness presented by globalisation and the impact of technology on the workplace. The seminal work of Boyatzis (1982) became the start of a significant movement in human resource management (HRM) towards identifying the skills and behaviours necessary for particular job roles and areas of expertise. Over the last 30 years the concept of competencies has become common place and competency frameworks seen as a vehicle to drive high organisational performance.

In the UK, the Industrial Relations Services (IRS) Benchmarking Competencies Survey (2010), the most recent survey they have conducted specifically on competencies, revealed that more than two-thirds of the 168 employers surveyed used competencies for at least some groups of employees. Those that did not cited issues such as time consuming to research, develop and introduce, and lack of support from senior managment. The most widely used type of competency tended to focus of 'soft skills' associated with behaviours and values rather than technical 'how to' functional skills.

Work on competencies has traditionally been associated with organisations and driving organisational value (Hamel and Prahalad, 1993). However, in

the last 15 years the concept has increasingly gained mileage as a mechanism to underpin the skills and behaviours of the 'professions' – that is areas of work that require a specific qualification and accreditation to enable the individual to be employed in that field. This is often associated with practice-based firms that are organised in a partnership structure. This is best illustrated by accountants, lawyers, engineers and architects for example all of whom need to be members of their respective professional bodies in order to practice.   This is also the case if these individuals are employed by other organisations. Additionaly, it relates to professions that are embedded in other structures such as the medical profession in the NHS.   This use of competencies is evidenced by the growth of competency frameworks that are promoted by these professional bodies.

The later part of the twentieth century has also seen the rise of the knowledge-based economy with occupations such as management consutancy and those classified by what Drucker (1989) called knowledge workers – those whose critical work resource within their essential value-creating task is knowledge. The growth of this type of work has led to the emergence of newer occupations aspiring to obtain professional status including public relations, advertising and PA.   As such, the role of competencies in the professionalisation debate is becoming increasingly topical and something which bodies such as the CIPR and APPC are looking at more intensely. This study helps to move this thinking forward.

Athough competencies are seen as providing value, their idea is not without criticism (Frank *et al.,* 2010; Iles, 2001). These broadly fall into three areas of concern - issues around their focus on past and current skills and attributes rather than those necessary for the future; the often bureaucratic nature of the process that underpins competency frameworks; and the fear that such an approach creates clones reducing creativity and difference which are important to stimulate new and fresh approaches that challenges the norm and can lead to transformation. This paper will address these concerns and reflect on what this means in practice. One practical response by human resource professionals to some of these concerns is the slight variation in the use of strengths-based approaches as put forward by Garcea, Isherwood and Linley (2011) helping to get individuals to reflect on their competencies and where they feel their strengths lie and what they enjoy. This will also be explored as part of the knowledge and skills debate.

What does all of this mean to this study? In many respects this research explores the micro (individual self-wareness and knowledge of one's own character and motives), meso (organisational) and macro (societal) levels of PA and aspires to add conceptual and practical value, as well as theoretical depth to the subject. Toth (2006) challenges researchers to test various theoretical views of PA, and Fleisher (2007: 285) suggests 'the task of identifying, defining, describing the characteristics and measuring competencies in nearly all PA activity areas… is one ripe for academic research'.

1.3. Research aim, objectives and detailed questions

The aim of this research is to investigate the evolving nature of PA in order to establish the contemporary knowledge, skills and competencies for effective PA practice.

There are three key objectives for this research that are supported by five specific research questions (RQs).

- To understand the PA Body of Knowledge (BoK) necessary for effective PA practice *(supported by RQ1, RQ2)*

- To capture the competencies required for effective PA practice *(supported by RQ1, RQ3, RQ4)*

- To devise a competency framework to help deliver PA effectiveness and professionalism *(supported by RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)*

RQ1: What is the shape of current PA practice and how if at all has it changed?

RQ2: What is the knowledge that underpins practice?

RQ3: What do PA practitioners do and what are the skills necessary?

RQ4: How should PA practitioners behave?

RQ5: What does a contemporary competency framework look like for PA?

In support of this, the thesis addresses areas around what body of knowledge underpins practice both from a conceptual and practical perspective and the notion of explicit and tacit knowledge. It looks at the relationship between knowledge and professionalism and how this relates to whether PA can define

itself as a profession. It explores PA effectiveness and how this can be codified, evaluated and measured. It attempts to identify the behaviours and technical skills necessary to practice PA in a changing and evolving policy environment and endeavours to draw these together in a workable and granular framework that can pull out the benefits and mitigate the weaknesses presented by competency approaches. Finally, it seeks to find out how practitioners understand their role and expectations of it.

1.4. Overview of research methods and analysis

The study is guided by a critical realist worldview drawing on the work of Bhaskar (1989) who suggests there are three domains of reality. The first is experienced (empirical); aspects that occur but are not necessarily experienced (actual); and finally, the deep structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena. In other words, the world is complex and due consideration must be given to the structures and processes that underpin reality. This is important to the field of PA where the discipline is at the centre of a wide variety of processes, structures and relationships both within the organisation, and between organisations and the policy environment which itself is a complex web of connections between all those inputting into the decision-making process. Here there are overt and covert relationships and power dynamics that shape a range of social interactions.

Consequently, there is a need to understand PA from a broad set of perspectives not all of which are readily experienced or observed. As a result, the study takes a mixed methods approach integrating both qualitative

and quantitative techniques supporting the views of Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) who feel that integrating methods can be helpful if they provide better opportunities to address specific research questions.

The study consists of four strands. Initially a systematic literature review contributes primarily inductively to help identify emerging themes and concepts in the domain of PA and the separate field of competency scholarship. There are elements of deductive enquiry in that the literature is extensive and as argued by Reichertz (2010) previous developed knowledge cannot be ignored. It falls, therefore, more into the abductive tradition.

This enables the study to take a theory building approach but it is not used to formally test a specific hypothesis emerging from the literature. This enables a theory driven but not a theory testing investigation to take place in the second strand of the study through in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach is supported by a quantitative survey that helps to elucidate concepts and ideas. The study also explores competency frameworks of four professional bodies to add additional insight and reflects on a PA specific framework developed by one PA agency. Such a theory building approach falls more firmly into the critical realist stance and draws on ideas around tendencies rather than empirical generalisations (Lawson, 2003). Data analysis is guided by the principles of Gioia (2004, 2012) that seeks to provide rigour to inductive research and is supported by statistical analysis using basic SPSS to help provide additional insight and help illuminate relationships between PA practice, knowledge and competencies.

1.5. Scope of study

The study addresses the UK PA function that by its nature has a Western perspective, but given the complexity of governance there is an international dimension. Although data relates primarily to the Westminster and Whitehall structures, those operating in the devolved institutions have been included but this is a general study looking at UK PA holistically rather than a detailed analysis of one particular institution.

1.6. Importance of the study

This research is relevant from four perspectives. Firstly, it is important to the reputation of PA practice. The discipline engenders extremes of views as to whether it is moral, ethical and healthy for democracy, or whether it hinders and corrupts the democratic process. The research builds on the views of scholars such as Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2006) and Berg (2012) that advocacy plays a valuable role. Individuals with better self-awareness understand how their behaviours contribute to the reputation of practice.

Secondly, it addresses the need for a better understanding of practice and the environment in which it operates stimulating greater intellectual depth. In this respect, it continues the work of Schepers (2010) and McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) who call for an improved PA knowledge base. It also connects to the ideas around self-efficacy that describe the way people see the world and behave and explores what role this plays in this new breed of practitioner and their understanding of their place in public policy making.

Thirdly, there have been concerns amplified by the UK media surrounding financial misconduct of MPs and poor behaviour of PA practitioners. In order to address these the government tightened up the regulatory framework under which MPs operate and introduced a new lobbying regulation. A practice that better understands itself and its responsibilities is more likely to evoke confidence and contribute to shaping a regulatory environment that is workable rather than have poorly thought out restrictions imposed on it.

Finally, the study addresses a gap in the PA body of knowledge by synthesising scholarship from complementary fields of study to provide fresh conceptual and practical contributions.

1.7. Structure of thesis

This thesis starts by exploring the literature around the domain of PA, knowledge and competencies with Chapter Two providing an overview of the scholarship. Chapter Three then outlines the detailed research philosophy, methodological choices and their justification, together with an overview of the data analysis processes and wider issues to do with reliability, validity and ethical issues associated with the study. These early chapters set the context for the study.

Next the thesis moves into research findings. Chapter Four provides insight from relevant competency frameworks to inform thinking and illustrate possible options for competency structures. Chapter Five allows for in-depth

analysis from the qualitative component of this study – the in-depth interviews - helping to draw out key concepts and themes. Chapter Six adds additional statistical and quantitative input from the practitioner survey.

From here the study moves into a detailed discussion and reflection of these findings in Chapter Seven that synthesises information from the literature with various data sources to capture the nature of contemporary PA practice. Then Chapter Eight concludes by demonstrating how this study has addressed the original aim, objectives and research questions. It explicitly identifies three specific conceptual contributions to the field and one practical contribution in the form of an illustrative competency framework for practice. It also looks at the implications of the study on the theory and practice of PA and the value a critical realist approach offers to the field.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

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2.1. Introduction to the chapter

This review connects literature from the fields of PA, knowledge and competencies and touches on complementary areas around professionalism, professional identity and careers. It initially explores PA before drilling down to investigate relevant knowledge traditions and specific underlying theories that it is argued support practice drawing on political science, culture and society, communications, organisational studies and economics. This enables an initial exploration of the suggested body of knowledge (BoK) that supports PA practice before allowing a greater analysis of the relationship between knowledge and professionalism. Notions of professionalism are also then reviewed alongside some of the previous work on PA competencies.

This chapter then explores the ideas that underpin the notion of knowledge including tacit and explicit knowledge and the concepts of theory and meta-theory that allow greater insights into what is meant by knowledge. The review then moves on to take a closer look at HRM scholarship and the role of competencies in enhancing individual and organisational performance. It looks at typologies and the segmentation of different forms of competencies to help illuminate the subject allowing greater reflection against PA.

It concludes by drawing out themes relevant to this study that cross the various fields of scholarship and provides context to the explicit research questions under exploration. The review follows the approach recommended

by Huff (2009) and Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003). Details of this approach can be found in Appendix A, and further discussion on how the literature informed and shaped the study can be found in Chapter Three on the methodology.

2.2. Understanding Public Affairs

2.2.1. Defining and exploring PA and its environment

Many scholars (Fleisher, 2002, 2007; Hillman, 2002; Paluszek, 1995; Schuler, 2002; Toth, 2006) have tried to define PA, but common to all is the understanding that PA is about building relationships with those who shape public policy. Though, as Toth (2006) points out, public policy itself is poorly defined. Buchholtz suggests PA is: 'a specific course of action taken collectively by society or by a legitimate representative of society, addressing a specific problem of public concern that reflects the interests of society or particular segment of society' (1988: 53). Practically speaking the researcher suggests that in today's modern world public policy shapes and affects all aspects of our lives and involves the laws, regulations and conventions that govern our existence. It is heavily entwined with the political systems, democratic values and markets in which it operates and as such is shaped by a range of institutional factors, as argued by Bauer (2015).

An additional complication is the inter-changeability of the terms PA, lobbying and corporate political activity (CPA) in scholarship and practice. As Anastasiadis (2006) argues, lobbying struggles with terminological confusion, and Harris and Moss (2001) suggest that PA as a field is misunderstood. One

of the earliest and easiest definitions of lobbying is by Milbraith (1963:8) who states: 'lobbying is the stimulation and transmission of a communication, by someone other than a citizen acting on his own behalf, directed to a governmental decision maker with the hope of influencing his decision'. This has parallels to Buchholtz's (1988) later definition. On one-level it is simple. Lobbying is about advocacy primarily involving direct contact. Yet Harris and Moss (2001) argue that PA is not just about advocacy but rather it is about interfacing with a wide set of stakeholders and uses a range relationship tools. As such it is part of Public Relations (PR) – the discipline that builds relationships between an organisation and its publics, though the connection between the two is not always clear-cut. Its close association as being part of PR tends to have more of its heritage in the US than the UK (Somerville and Aroussi, 2016) and according to Moloney (2000) many UK lobbyists are concerned with their inclusion in PR. Though, when looking at the UK Lobbying Register, it explicitly states that: 'Lobbying is a discipline within public relations where the general intention is to inform and influence public policy and law. Lobbyists are practitioners who execute planned and sustained efforts to deliver specific objectives within this broad profile of activity' (n.d.).

To aide clarity this paper uses the concept of PA as an umbrella term that embraces the concept of lobbying, as well as wider relationship building activities with those who shape policy. It does not include aspects of CPA in respect of political donations and fundraising or direct political party endorsement.

Scholars such as Berger (2001) put forward elitist worldviews in that it is corporate interest groups who mainly influence policy through their economic power. This plays into the negative view of PA. Others like Grunig and Jaatiinen (1998) suggest that in reality most political systems fall between pluralism and corporatism. With pluralism, there is pure advocacy and private interest competing for access and government resources and with corporatism there is pure collaboration and a sense of the collective. They suggest the concept of societal corporatism that incorporates pressure politics, negotiation and collaborative interests. Such a worldview seems to be more in keeping with the complexity of modern governance. Any study of PA, therefore, needs to factor in the macro environment in which it operates, in particular the expectations and values of the society in which it is situated.

The importance of the macro environment to PA is mirrored by the evolving nature of PA research. Griffin (2005) reflecting on US PA empirical studies and scholarship between 1965 and 2004 found there to have been three overlapping thematic research approaches (or waves). Studies initially looked at understanding the foundations of PA, then moved on to address some of the managerial challenges of PA practice. Latterly it addresses the blurred boundaries of modern-day PA that go beyond government relations to incorporate ideas around the firm and its network of stakeholders and how this impacts on the political arena.

To note is the significant North American bias in Griffin's analysis, in part reflecting the greater volume of PA scholarship that has taken place in the

USA and Canada. Nonetheless the concept of blurred boundaries is relevant. More recent research and commentary has continued to explore this issue (Boddewyn, 2012; Oberman, 2008; Toth, 2006) and is looked at in detail in section 2.2.3. of this review. It could also be argued that some commentators such as McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) have taken this further by suggesting that PA is now one of co-creation of policy that leads to a blurring of not just organisation-stakeholder boundaries but organisation-government boundaries.

The table below summarises the different conceptualisations of PA by building on the analysis of McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) to incorporate additional scholars and brings it up to date to include the work of Boddewyn (2012).

Authors	Date	Key Descriptor/metaphor	Implied core role for PA	Descriptor of the role
Post	1982	Window-out and window-in	Political boundary spanner	PA ensure management have an understanding of political realities (window-in) and equally that their views are known amongst key political figures (window-out)
Meznar and Nigh	1995	Buffer or Bridge	Interfacing role Boundary spanner	PA helps cushion the organisation from outside attack and reach out to key stakeholder groups
Hillman and Hitt	1999	Relational v transactional	Political exchange activity v political relationship building	PA can either engage in short term political engagement, lobbying or longer term relationship building with government
Harrison	2000	Tri-partite usage: Marketing v Public Relations v	Tri-partite role: Sales v Reputation v	PA can be involved in loud (promotional) or

		Information	Lobbying	quiet (discreet) activities. As marketing, PA can drive sales. As PR, it can lead to enhanced reputation and as information it can mitigate the impact of legislation.
Toth	2006	PA is PR	Relationships with non-economic stakeholders	Building public policy relationships
Oberman	2008	Catalyst	Driving competitive advantage	PA turns socio-political resources into operational ones
Van Schendelen Fleisher	2010 1998	Political alignment	Aligning corporate and public policy	PA focuses on facilitating and building relationships and interaction with actors in the political and social environment so as to align corporate and public policies.
McGrath, Moss and Harris	2010	Public issues lifecycle	Identification and prioritization of issues that impact on the sustainability of the firm	PA focuses on issues management and bridging organisation, society and government
Boddewyn	2012	Embeddedness	Management of non-market relationships embedded in society	PA is the management of the firm's relationships with the institutions and organisations (political, social and cultural) operating in the non-market environment

Table 2.1. Summary of PA definitions and conceptualisation ©Roberts-Bowman (2017) incorporating the work of McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010: 339)

What this table reveals, is that the discipline is not without a research base and it takes us to the question of a PA body of knowledge (PA-BoK).

2.2.2. A body of knowledge and its link to professionalism

Research into defining and understanding PA exists but there is little consensus regarding a definitive PA-BoK necessary for professional PA practice (Fleisher, 2007). A BoK can be defined as the collection of processes and knowledge areas that underpin the professional domain. The concept of a professional and professionalism is a field of research in itself, but it is necessary to reflect on some of the key thinking as the concept of knowledge appears to be integral to the ideas of what constitutes a profession, the concept of professionalism and professional practice. Although this paper is not explicitly addressing the question of whether PA is a profession, it is looking at the competencies for professional practice, so aspects of what a profession looks like needs investigation.

Friedson (1970) argues a profession is a field of work that has a dominant position in the division of labour so that it has control over most of its actions. This is a helpful starting point as according to Downie (1990), one of the leading scholars in this area, there are significant problems in trying to come up with a definition of a profession given the range of contexts in which the word professional is used. He references ideas such as professional footballers (as opposed to amateurs) or a professional job (for one well done). He argues that although the concept of a profession suggests it is a full-time occupation and an individual earns his living by a body of knowledge and skills, there are occupations that satisfy this but are not normally considered to be professions such as farmers or printers. For Downie (1990) the ideal characteristics of a profession are outlined in the table overleaf.

1	The professional has skills or expertise which proceed from a broad knowledge base
2	He or she provides a service to clients by means of a special relationship that consists of an attitude (a desire to help plus a sense of integrity) and a bond (constituted by the role relationship which he or she has with the client). The relationship is authorised by an institutional body and legitimised by public esteem.
3	To the extent that the public does recognise the authority of the professional he or she has the social function of speaking out on broad matters of public policy and justice, going beyond duties to specific clients.
4	In order to discharge these functions, he or she must be independent of the influence of the state of commerce
5	He or she must also be educated as distinct from merely trained in a narrow sense
6	In so far as criteria 1-5 are satisfied a profession is morally and legally legitimate

Table 2.2. Summary of characteristics of a profession by Downie. Source: Downie (1990: 54)

This takes a very philosophical perspective on the concept of a profession looking more towards an evaluative process whereby a profession performs a specific socially valuable function.

Based on the sociology of professions, a sub-field of sociology, other perspectives have been developed. Some early scholars (Hughes, 1958; Millerson, 1964; Vollmer and Mills,1966) explored the idea of 'traits' with professions having characteristics such as a specialised skill or service, intellectual and practical training, professional autonomy, collective responsibility or ethics. A key sociological perspective in the professionalism debate is the concept of jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). This enables the control of tasks that are defined by a specific system of knowledge that enable a boundary to be erected through accreditation, qualifications and codes of conduct. Pieczka and L'Etang (2001) suggest that this concept is vital to PR (and by implication PA). These occupations have traditionally found it difficult to define their knowledge base and therefore are unable to control entry to the occupation as it is not controlled by qualification or membership of a professional body.

Of relevance is the concept of corporate professionalism explored by Kipping, Fitzpatrick and Muzio (2006) in which they outlined the growth of knowledge-based occupations (such as management consultancy and strategic advisors of which one could argue PA is one). As Drucker (1989) suggests, knowledge workers are workers whose critical work resource within their essential value-creating tasks is knowledge. Kipping, Fitzpatrick and Muzio (2006) assert that what is needed is a new corporate form of professionalism that recognises the traditional pattern of collective organisation (formal credentials and accreditation) may not always be sustainable and other mechanisms of quality assurance may need to be developed and perhaps soft regulation. In this context, it is the reputation of the corporate entity that becomes important to the idea of professionalism and the type of in-house training and development that it offers to its employees and what this conveys to external stakeholders.

A variation on the concept of knowledge worker as it relates to PR (and PA) has been conceptualized by L'Etang (2004) who calls PR professionals 'discourse workers'. That is workers who communicate on behalf of organisations using rhetorical strategies. This has its origins in the idea of discourse theory and the work of Foucault (1972) who argues 'the world is made up of a 'cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices which provide ways of talking about forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society' (Hall, 1997:6). Scholars such as Roper (2012) argue control of discourse can be associated with ideological control and power. It can be argued, therefore, that issues around professional conduct and ethical behaviours become even

more critical. These are areas that will be explored more fully shortly but for now it is important to grasp the importance of understanding professionalism against this backdrop of a rise of different forms of work practices.

The idea of new forms of professionalism and what constitutes a profession is one that is becoming topical across many fields. Furbey, Reid and Cole (2001) looked at changes in housing management and suggested that in order to professionalise practitioners needed enhanced personal attributes (such as empathy) and shared occupational knowledge. They argued the occupation was a fragile domain against the criteria of professional status as outlined by Downie (1990). They reflect on the move away from professional domains that give rise to legitimacy claims to embrace concepts such as professional networks and communities that may be better suited to diverse fields. This does not necessarily mean these networks ignore distinctive qualities and competencies, but these are placed within organisational contexts that require higher degrees of plasticity or adaptability recognising that different types of organisations may require different types of housing roles and individuals to perform them. This has relevant parallels to PA practice.

The work of Noordegraff (2016) also sheds some light here. He argues that what constitutes professional work is changing because organisational contexts are changing. Professional work is now embedded within cost and customer service orientations and is becoming increasingly scrutinised. Work is changing in terms of composition and social structures that are causing

more stratification as fields respond to the complexity of the market. Professional careers are also becoming increasingly adapted and internationalised due to the impact of technology and global forces. He argues that new forms of public professionalism are being established with previously protected autonomies questioned and replaced by professionals exhibiting not stable but ephemeral identities. As such professionalism is becoming more connective. This perhaps links to the previous ideas around networks and communities.

If one takes Windsor's (2005) view of PA as not being unified, then ideas around networks, community and plasticity may have merit. A refreshed view of what constitutes a profession is also being explored within traditional fields such as public health, law and education (Ackroyd, Kirkpatrick and Walker 2007). With such profession's increasingly the focus of political intervention and market forces, then the role of the organisation in which they work and how it responds to these interventions becomes increasingly dominant. This starts to question some of the traditional notions of what constitutes a profession such as autonomy and public perception.

Another aspect concerning professionalism is the idea of professional identity and how individuals view themselves as part of a particular field. This relates to having a distinct set of skills as suggested by Downie (1990) or perhaps having some form of common traits as put forward by sociologists. Ibarra (1999), building on Schein (1978), defined professional identity as 'the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values,

motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role' (1999:764-765).

Here it is professional identity that is a signifier to others that an individual has special and unique abilities (Van Maanenn and Barley, 1984). As Pratt, Rockman and Kaufmann (2006) point out professionals are defined by what they do rather than the organisation they work for and career success is often dependent on successful professional identity construction (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle 1999; Hall, Zhu and Yan 2002). This seems to throw up some tension when reflecting on the idea of corporate professionalism as outlined earlier (Kipping, Kirkpatrick and Muzio, 2006). Irrespective of the role of the organisation, it is the concept of professional identity that is important for contemporary careers given the increasing complexity of work, technological change, globalisation and other social and cultural influences. Indeed, career scholars such as Baruch (2004) suggest that careers are no longer linear but rather are spiral and multi-dimensional. This is an area that will be further explored in this review.

Professional identity can be formed in a number of ways. Slay and Smith (2011) argue that professional identity is linked to personal identity. This is shaped in three ways. Firstly, through the result of socialisation processes and discourse regarding the meaning associated with a profession (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987). Secondly, identity is modified and adapted during career transitions (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984) and finally life itself shapes who we are and influences our professional self (Schein, 1978). It is professional

socialisation that helps to develop the skills and acquire the knowledge associated with being a member of a profession and it helps stimulate associated norms and behaviours. This process transcends different organisational contexts (Lankau and Scandura, 2007).

The idea of professionalism and professional identity are potentially complex issues for PA. Windsor (2005) argues that PA comprises neither a unified discipline nor a profession as it takes many forms depending on the political environment, the type of organisation and industry sector in which it operates. It could, therefore, be suggested that establishing some form of professional identity could be challenging.

Also, PA has reputational issues. In 2015 lobbyists ranked bottom of the Gallup Annual Survey that looked at perceptions about the honesty and ethics of various professions. Only 7% rated lobbyists as high or very high for ethical standards compared to 85% for nurses. There are also issues to do with accreditation to a professional body and qualifications, as neither are currently required to operate as a PA practitioner in the UK and there is continued debate about whether lobbying can be taught (Goldman, 2012). Scholars such as McGrath (2005, 2015) suggest that it can and this will be explored shortly when the areas that underpin a possible PA body of knowledge are considered.

Taken together defining PA as a strict profession under the definition of Downie (1990) could be problematic, especially in the context of the necessity

for education and training and the esteem in which the field is held.   If, however, one takes more of a sociological position then perhaps PA does display certain traits and characteristics of a profession with perhaps common skills and a growing sense of its own worth, irrespective of Windsor's (2005) concerns. There are also new concepts of professionalism that open up fresh opportunities for reflection.   As Noordegraff (2016:803) points out 'new images of professionalism are difficult to clarify, as professional fields will undoubtedly become more varied and heterogeneous'. This changing backdrop provides a timely opportunity to reassess PA and the concept or professionalism as there is a growing critical mass of those who operate in PA to warrant it being explored more fully.

Against this backdrop of professionalism, Fleisher (2007) specifically outlines the need to develop a PA-BoK that, he argues, is a key milestone towards professionalisation of any discipline.   He suggests a profession or professional requires demonstrating a collective service orientation whereby the benefits of the roles are readily visible to the public, respectable position of the occupation in the labour market, specialised knowledge, generalised knowledge of other complementary fields and active participation in membership societies. These are slightly looser characteristics than those purported by Downie (1990) and fall more within the sociological viewpoint.

Whether from a sociological, philosophical or newer perspective, the words professional and professionalism imply efficiency, effectiveness and responsibility.   The key is effectiveness.   As Drucker (2006) suggests

effectiveness can be learned and should focus on doing the right things, whereas efficiency relates to doing things right. To achieve this, some form of system of knowledge appears necessary to deliver these aspirations.

2.2.3. Exploring and defining a PA Body of Knowledge

Research suggests that there are two broad views the shape a PA-BoK should take. Schuler (2002) suggests the need for a 'grand unification theory' (GUT) to underpin practice. The idea of a GUT originates in physics and relates to a theory, model or concept that unifies all other ideas into one single force. Others like Hillman (2002) argues that PA requires a 'multi-eclectic method of inquiry' and a pluralistic approach to theory building. It is unrealistic to search for one single unifying concept that underpins PA as the discipline is too complex, requiring it instead to be viewed from many different perspectives with a diverse theoretical base.

This debate connects to recent developments in the growing research field of meta-theory looked at in section on knowledge in 2.3.2. of this review. Wallis (2010) argues that meta theory can be helpful in trying to understand the underlying assumptions and structures that underpin forms of theory, often making implicit assumptions explicit as argued by Dervin (1999). Alternatively, there are those who take the view that it is about integrating multiple theories (Anchin, 2008; Ritzer, 1988). In either approach, it is ultimately about creating a theory of theories and this may be one useful way to draw together the different conceptual areas of PA.

Getz (2001) was the first to reflect on the literature surrounding political involvement and why firms engage in the political arena. She highlights theories from political science, economics, sociology and management that help to understand and shape political action by organisations. She draws on various threads running through these knowledge areas including what motivates an organisation to participate in the political process, the strategies and tactics used and the capacity organisations have for rational action.

The shape that PA takes links to the ideas suggested by Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) that PA is about building a firm's issue-specific lobbying strategy which requires effective planning, management and communication skills against an understanding of the political environment. They suggest that government is an additional industry force. Building on the idea of Michael Porter's Five forces (1980), Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) suggest that government can often dominate and impact on the other forces of industry competitors, threat of substitutes, potential entrants and the power of suppliers and buyers. A commercial understanding in this wider policy context is essential.

A useful way of reflecting on the role of PA and its relationship to commercial aspirations was undertaken by Harrison (2000) who explored the tri-partite nature of PA practice and why firms engage in PA. She suggested there were three types of lobbying activity. Lobbying as marketing in which the main objectives are to increase sales, differentiate the company and improve customer loyalty. These campaigns tend to be loud using media exposure.

Then there is lobbying as PR with the aim to increase reputation, re-position the organisation and increase awareness with the view to target very specific publics including the community and consumers. Then there is lobbying as information that focuses on issues management, the avoidance of regulation and influencing legislation. The audiences are narrow, addressing very specific opinion formers, decision makers and interest groups. Often these types of campaigns can be quiet with numerous face-to-face meetings.

Indeed, there has been work done on the mechanics of what makes effective PA practice. Dahan (2009) talks of the 4 P's of PA which include identifying the problem; clarifying the procedures necessary to address the problem; having policy awareness to understand how to tackle the problem; and knowing the players – those critical to resolving the issue and those that influence them. This builds on the earlier work of Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) that proposed a five-point inter-connected process that looks at the types of argument alternatives necessary (use of facts, science); target alternatives (which decision makers and influencers); venue alternatives (where in the governance system does the ultimate decision reside); delivery alternatives (such as direct lobbying) and finally, the level and type of inclusivity alternatives (is it just the firm, a strategic grouping, industry-wide or other forms of coalition). So, work involving practical delivery into PA exists but what of deeper reflection?

One of the few scholars to start to address this is Windsor (2005), who building on the work of Getz (2001) conducted one of the first summaries of

what constitutes theories of PA rather than the day-to-day mechanical delivery. He looked across previous studies and connected to literature from issues and stakeholder management drawing on scholars such as Carroll (1991); Donaldson and Preston (1995); Freeman, (1984) and Frooman (1999). Windsor (2005) reinforces the view of Shaffer and Hillman (2000) that PA sits at the interface of multiple activities within an organisation and intellectually at the interface of multiple disciplines that draw on a variety of theoretical roots. He continues by suggesting that some of these theories and ideas compete whilst others are complementary, but nowhere is there an integrated framework. He suggests seven key discipline areas are drawn upon for delivery of PA: businesses in society and business ethics, communications and PR, ecological systems, economics, organisational sociology, political science and strategic management.

Toth (2006) argues that although there is little direct PA theory, there are theories that relate to PR and communication that support the PA discipline. These include the situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1994), Excellence theory (Grunig, 1992; Dozier and Grunig, 1995), communitarianism (Culbertson and Chen,1997; Leeper 1996, 2000), social capital theory (Hazleton and Kennon, 2000), as well as ideas from political studies in terms of understanding different political systems. This perspective firmly positions PA as part of the communication tradition in terms of knowledge roots.

Fleisher (2007), however, clearly argues that a PA-BoK must reflect the specialised knowledge that is unique to PA. It cannot be an inventory of

everything PA practitioners should know, but it should identify what is core. He argues it is up to professional bodies and others to define what PA practitioners must know outside PA. This could be challenging, given the multi-faceted nature of the discipline argued by some of those above, but one necessary to reflect upon if a PA-BoK is to be relevant.

Bringing the debate back to the organisation, Oberman (2008) takes a resource-based view of PA. Building on the idea that competitive advantage is based on the application of the valuable tangible and intangible assets at a firms' disposal, then PA is about helping to turn the latent socio-political resources into operational value. Rather than leaving its operating environment as it finds it, the firm actively shapes this through lobbying and relationship management, turning relationships into a powerful resource for the firm. He models various PA interactions around access (relational approaches) and legitimacy (living up to the social contract between business and society) against a backdrop of complexity which help capture the dynamic nature of how PA operates, rather than providing a list of activities of what PA people do.

According to McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010), the scope of the discipline has evolved substantially over the last 10 years with a particular focus on managing the public issues life cycle. Boddewyn (2012) suggests the concept of issue identification is a rightful focus, but the profession should also look into the role of PA through resource-dependency theory (RDT). Here she builds on the work of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) who came up with the

original idea of RDT that characterises an organisation as an open system, dependent on contingencies in the external environment. It is argued that RDT recognises the influence of external factors on an organisation and that managers can act to reduce environmental uncertainty and dependence. Here the idea of power is central as organisations often attempt to reduce others' power over them and also try to increase their power over others. Here the role of PA fits into trying to reduce the power of the environment and government decision making over them.

Also, scholars like van Schendelen (2012) look at how trends in the European Union are impacting on PA delivery. This potentially connects back to ideas around RDT. With more policy decisions now taking place in Brussels, the power that these institutions hold over the operating environment of organisations is growing, along with an increasing number of interest groups that are also making their voice heard at a European level. Irrespective of the BREXIT decision, the importance of operating within a global context and working with supra-national institutions such as the UN or World Bank will continue, as indeed perhaps working with a number of EU-based decision-making bodies.

Returning to Boddewyn (2012), she also explores the idea of a social responsibility element of PA, with a role for business in particular fulfilling the producer-interest role in society linking to early work of Drucker (1980). With most developed countries operating in a pluralist political system in many ways central government has become less influential, with civil society

organisations becoming carriers of social purpose and therefore politicised. Businesses themselves must also become political activists who take initiative and create their own vision identifying societal concerns and solutions and contribute to the common good. They are most importantly the only voice of the producer in society and as such have a right to voice opinion and be corporately responsible.

Moving from these practical theoretical insights, conceptually the work of de Lange and Linders (2006) suggests that at its heart PA is reality construction is a relevant notion. They cite the work of Berger and Luckmann (1975) who argue that there is a meaningless world and reality is created by sense-giving observers. Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge and is based on the idea that subjective meaning is created though individuals collaborating and interacting to create shared understanding. PA through discourse and narrative creates reality and meaning. Although de Lange and Linders (2006) do not claim that constructionist theory can equate to Schuler's (2002) grand unification theory, they suggest it could make a useful contribution to the study of PA and enables practitioners to deepen their understanding of their role. Here Moloney (2000) is relevant, given his reflection on the political public sphere drawing on social theory from Habermas (1984) for deeper understanding of the PR discipline more generally.

Yet despite this lack of agreement and consensus, PA scholars discussed above reference similar knowledge roots, and more scholars also appear to

be emerging as greater reflection and research is undertaken in this area, and as PA practice responds to the changing socio-political environment. Taken together, it is suggested these roots can be broadly categorised within five main strands – political science, culture, economics, communication and the organisation

2.2.4. PA knowledge roots: A closer examination

The table overleaf summarises the theories and ideas emerging from these five main strands explored by PA scholars above. The researcher has also incorporated related concepts that have been developed more recently. These are looked at in this section.

Knowledge Roots	Conceptual components *Although it is worth noting that some ideas cut across areas and some have more of a practical application and some more conceptual – which illustrates part of the PA BoK challenge*
Political Science	• Interest Group Theory • Political systems • Policy formation and evaluation
Culture and Society	• Social constructivism • Public Sphere • Media Theory and mediaisation of politics • Social media and the socio-political arena
Communications	• Situational Theory of Publics • Excellence Theory in PR • Issues Management Theories • Stakeholder and Relationship Theories • Social Capital Theory • Persuasion Theories • Communitarianism • Linear Model of Communications • Framing • Semiotics
Organisation	• Systems Theory • Corporate Social Responsibility • Business ethics • Resource Dependency Theory • Competitive positioning and theories of the market
Economics	• Collective Action Theory • Public Choice Theory • Transaction cost economics

Table 2.3: Summary of knowledge fields relevant to PA ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman (2017)

Concepts from political science

The theories that look at the process of governing help position PA in the wider political context of influence. Interest group theory (Dahl,1961; Lowi 1969; Schattschneider, 1960) suggests that the democratic public policy process is based on competing ideas from different groups with a view to

reaching a compromise. Also, scholars (Baron, 2001; Lowi and Gray,1998: Schattschneider,1960) suggest that governing bodies are inclined to the status quo as change is often costly so interest group theory explains why organisations are motivated towards engagement to reduce the possibility of unfavourable policies (Getz, 2001).

Recently, Louw (2010) has commented on the media radically transforming governance. He talks of 'elite' politics focusing on delivery of policy outputs and 'mass' politics or 'hype' that is about image and myth making consumed by voters. For PA, this suggests the need to be active in 'elite', politics but understanding the drivers on the political process stemming from 'mass' politics and how both need to be used. The idea of the PA practitioner as an insider or semi-insider in the political process is useful and connects to ideas relating to PA as a cultural and societal function.

Additionally, scholarship on policy formation is relevant as PA given its involvement in policy creation and development. Scholars such as Lasswell (1956, 1971) explore aspects of policy evaluation and improvement and more recently McConnell (2010) has come up with a process to review policy success and failure, and work also exists on policy design and management (Schneider and Ingram, 1997) and public engagement in the policy process (Gutman and Thompson, 2004).

Concepts from society and culture

As argued, social theory too has a lot to offer PA through constructivism (de Lange and Linders, 2006). Berger and Luckmann (1975) introduced the idea of social constructivism to social science building on Berger's earlier work (1966). By coming together and interacting, people construct the human environment and establish social structures that is a constantly evolving process. As such reality is constructed by the interaction of different actors and the arguments and discourses proffered. Critically those who have more power have a greater chance of determining the nature of reality. It is suggested that PA is a discipline that directly proffers viewpoints into the social world would benefit from a greater understanding of this theoretical backdrop. This links to the view of PR (and PA) practitioners being 'discourse workers' as introduced earlier in this chapter. In particular, control of discourse raises ethical questions especially if these are being driven by unethical intentions and motivations such as organizational profit alone without due care to wider society. Here the work of Bourdieu (1977) is relevant as he suggests discourse control resides with symbolic elites of which one could argue PA is one given its semi-insider status as argued by Louw (2010). Moloney (2005) raises control of discourse as a key concern for PR practice generally. These ideas will be picked up again later in this review.

This links to the concept of the public sphere. Habermas (1989) puts forward the idea of the public sphere which 'comes into existence when citizens communicate, either face to face or through letters, journals and newspapers

and other mass media in order to express their opinions about matters of general interest, and to subject these opinions to rational discussions' (Edgar, 2005: 31). He talks specifically of a political public sphere that connects society and state and creates a space for rational debate. Often, however, other actors – the media and others such as PR and PA practitioners– can distort this space for their own ends. His work has been much acknowledged, but also criticised as being too simplistic and an approximation (Crossley and Roberts, 2004). Yet it places the idea of PA firmly in a societal context as actors in this space and also reinforces the view about the importance perhaps of PA practitioners recognising how their behaviours and discourses impact in this public sphere.

Habermas (1984, 1987) also explores the actual human communication process in The Theory of Communicative Action and how it functions. He suggests that any successful communication must fulfill four validity claims – intelligibility (correct use of grammar and language); truth (subject of the communication is accepted to exist by both parties); truthfulness (being honest and not misleading); and legitimacy (acting in accordance with mutually accepted values and norms). Very rarely do all validity aspects exist, so discourse is needed as a repair mechanism. Here this connects the idea of communication as a process of understanding. Drawing on this PA can be seen as a discipline that strives to achieve understanding. Although Habermas drew the distinction between understanding and influence, a number of scholars (Burkhart, 2004; Greve, 2003; Skjei, 1985, Tugendhat, 1992, Zimmnermann, 1985) suggest his is a misleading differentiation as it

suggests consensus is not deemed successful or that in fact influence leads to consensus. Here there is inspiration for PA practitioners reflecting on the components necessary to achieve agreement and appropriate policy outputs.

Concepts from communication

Toth (2006) suggests that there are several theories of PR that could be starting points for PA. At its heart is Grunig and Hunt's (1984) concept of the situational theory of publics whereby PR practitioners can define publics based on communication behaviour. Behaviour is dependent on three variables: problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement against a particular issue/problem or situation. Out of this publics can be segmented ranging from all-issue publics, those that are active on all problems, to hot-issue publics whereby publics are active on an issue that involves nearly all of the population and that has received wide media coverage. The key for PA is that communication behaviour is both situation and stakeholder dependent and it is situations that may prompt or not an organisation to enter the public policy process.

It is often specific situations and publics that form the basis of key issues and groups that organisations need to address.   These publics may be political decision makers or they may be groups that can put pressure on decision makers. So, issues management is a strategic management function that helps organisations identify, possibly pre-empt and respond appropriately to issues as they arise. As Heath (1997) suggests, issues are often caused by gaps in expectations between the organisation and its publics.   In this

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context, one can easily see how PA is an issues management function seeking to identify and pre-empt issues emanating from the policy arena.

This connects to stakeholder and relationship theory (Falconi *et al.* 2014; Ledingham, 2003) and the importance of an organisation managing the variety of relationships necessarily for it to remain viable. This certainly ties in to the earlier point by Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) who saw the political environment as being a sixth and powerful force on the organisation. Here PR scholars, such as those above, build on the work of Hon and Grunig (1999) who put forward six criteria on which to judge relationships. A successful relationship must have some form of shared control, trust, satisfaction, commitment, a form of exchange in terms of one party giving benefit because the other has provided benefits in the past and may do so in the future and finally, communal in the sense that both parties in a relationship provide to each other because they are concerned for the welfare of others.

Perhaps on the surface not all of these seem relevant to PA, but the theme of trust – and that of openness and the importance of communal relationships is fundamental to organisational-government co-creation of solutions. Ledingham (2003) in particular proposes a relationship concept of PR as the fundamental principle underpinning the practice.

The ideas of issues, stakeholders and relationships links to systems theory which itself connects to a resource-based view of PA. Systems theory encompasses a wide range of research fields (Senge,1990), but its

application to management and marketing focuses on the vision of an organisation as a system or eco-system composed of various relationships and connections with its environment.

Relationships are established in order for communication to take place between the organisation and individuals or groups of individuals. This has a natural links to Habermas' concept of the Theory of Communicative Action (1984). Yet communication scholars tend to focus primarily on the work of Shannon and Weaver (1949) and the subsequent developments of this approach in terms of the linear model of communication. Here messages are transmitted from the sender (the organisation) via channels (media, print, social media, world of mouth) to the receiver (various stakeholders) and the influences the wider socio-cultural environment has on this process and the distortions and confusions that can often arise.   An understanding of this process has value to PA practitioners, as PA does not take place in a vacuum and is often influenced by the complexity of messages being communicated by organisations and individuals involved in the policy process. So, message construction and the concept of framing is a significant one for PA practitioners since those they are seeking to influence, policy makers, are themselves influenced by the messages and framing of arguments presented by others.

According to Bateson (1972), framing is necessary to help individuals understand the communication and its context, helping to organise meaning and understanding. Dan and Ihlen (2011) use the metaphor of a cropping

frame around a picture – the border holds together aspects of reality while marking off competing, distracting or contradictory elements. Therefore 'to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (Entman,1993:52). This takes us back to social constructivism, with reality being created through communication rather than being expressed by it. Framing expertise, then, is seen as critical to successful communication (Dan and Ihlen, 2011) and the key is the language used and story choice.

There is a natural connection here as messaging and framing needs to be incorporated into various form of written, verbal and visual communication that are integral to both persuasion and in building relationships. An interesting way to view this is through the work of Grunig and Hunt (1984) and their four models of PR that is now widely known as Excellence Theory. This was based on extensive qualitative research to determine what made for excellent practices of PR but it too took the idea of systems theory with its view of an organisation as part a wider societal eco-system in which communication was critical between the actors in that eco-system.

A key requirement for excellent communication is the focus on two-way symmetrical communications, in other words relationships and the importance of determining effectiveness over the long rather short term. Excellence Theory states that excellent communication resides only in the two-way

symmetrical model and is ultimately the only way for the organisation to survive. A simplified grid below identifies the four models. Indeed, much of the subsequent work around relationship theories falls out of this original concept.

Propaganda/Press Agentry	Public Information	Two-way asymmetrical	Two-way symmetrical
One-way dialogue	One-way dialogue	Two-way dialogue	Two-way dialogue
Only one view purported; truth not important	Only one-way; truth fundamental; information accurate, specific	Rooted in persuasion; aimed to generate agreement by bringing around to organisational thinking	Rooted in mutual understanding; leads to changes in both the organisation and publics; relationships important

Table 2.4. Simplified model of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) Four Models of PR

Yet there is much criticism of excellence in terms of its simplicity and idealism on the grounds that it does not truly reflect vested interests (Cheney and Christensen, 2001; L'Etang 1996). L'Etang (1996) argues that the two-way symmetrical model is inherently partisan as power traditionally resides with the organisation and there can never really be mutual relationships. Grunig himself recognised some limitations and working with Dozier (1995, 2002) built the idea of a mixed-motive symmetrical model drawing on ideas from Game Theory whereby the organisation tries to use symmetrical practices to find an acceptable win-win zone between the interests of the organisation (pure asymmetry) and that of its publics (pure co-operation). This mixed-motive model is perhaps a helpful one in the arena of public policy when finding a position around which to garner as much support as possible is often a necessity.

Also, scholars such as L'Etang (2008) suggest that it is not always a less excellent form of communication to try and persuade. The idea of persuasion has haunted PR scholars, given its historical connection to propaganda with its connotations of coercion and untruthfulness. Recently persuasion has undergone somewhat of a transformation, with many scholars such as Perloff (2010) arguing that persuasion can be ethical and indeed of critical importance. A greater exploration of ethical theory as it relates to advocacy will be addressed shortly, but for now it is important to look at the importance of persuasion theory to policy formation and PA. Garsten (2009) passionately argues for a rehabilitation of the concept of persuasion and rhetoric, seeing these not as superficial manipulations, but essential to democratic politics to help engage citizens and help policy makers draw out good judgment. Though as pointed out earlier, the issue of persuasion if defined as a form of discourse does pose issues if one argues it is the only the elite that controls and have access to those discourses.

Scholars (Bettinghaus and Cody, 1994; Borchers, 2002; Hazel, 1998; Johnston, 1994; O'Keefe, 2002; Perloff, 1993; Gass and Seiter, 2011) agree that persuasion revolves around the notion of influencing a change in people and communities. Perloff (1993: 15) states 'we use the term persuasion to refer to any instance in which an active attempt is made to change a person's mind'. Importantly the concept of free choice is embedded into this definition – it is about convincing people to change their attitudes and behaviours not coercing them. So, persuasion is integral to any debate around PA.

Over the last 50 years, there has been a substantial amount of work undertaken by scholars exploring the techniques of persuasion and attitudinal and behaviour change. These include Petty and Cacioppo, (1986) and the development of the Elaboration Likelihood Model; Fishbein and Ajzen, (1975) and the Theory of Reasoned Action that was later evolved by Ajzen (1985) into the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Yet persuasion itself has its roots in Ancient Greece and the work of Aristotle. Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) suggest that it was Aristotle who first developed methods by which persuasion takes place drawing on four key concepts of pathos (appeal to human emotion), ethos (character of speaker), logos (appeal to reason) and Kairos (timeliness). Much of this thinking still permeates the theories above in terms of the type of messaging necessary to bring about attitudinal and behaviour change and the structures and processes necessary for persuasion to be most effective as explored by Leith (2012) and Lilleker (2006).

Central to persuasion is how an individual rationalises arguments presented to them, underpinned by concepts such as messaging, framing and stories. This has a natural connection to semiotics or the study of signs that fall out of the work of Saussure (1857-1913) and Pierce (1839-1914). Here signs simply mean anything from which meanings may be generated (such as words, images, sounds, gestures and objects).

Where these ideas come together against a backdrop of PA is in the work of Heugens (2002) who explores a narrative approach to PA. He used the genetically modified food debate to investigate the stories used by competing

parties (those for and those against GM) and how these were used to gain the support of regulators and the wider public. The use of stories is seen as a device for sense-making and from an organisational perspective their role in terms of building understanding has been further explored by Mathews and Wacker (2008), so the concept of stories, semiotics and framing are all relevant to PA.

When one looks at the work of PA practitioners it could be argued that it is at times both a persuasive (lobbying on a particular issue) and a relationship (building trusting, open dialogue) discipline. Though the two are inter-related as it could be suggested that persuasion is more likely to happen if it sits within mutual relationships. Moreover, given the changing socio-political-economic environment, perhaps PA is evolving to become less of persuasive discipline to more of a relationship one if the policy landscape is evolving into more of a co-creational one. A better understanding of both may be necessary for effective PA practice.

Integral to relationships is social capital theory as a way of explaining the value of PR generally to the organisation (Hazleton and Kennan, 2000), but it is of particular relevance to PA. Social capital does not have a single definition (Dolfsma and Dannreuther, 2003), in part because the main notions have been developed independently by two different theorists. That is the work of Bourdieu (1984) and that of Coleman (1988). Indeed, the work of Bourdieu (1984) will be picked up in detail again in section 2.2.8. when this chapter returns to the concept of professionalism but for now social capital will

be explored generally. In both the work of Bourdieu (1984) and Coleman (1988) there are common threads around the value of social relationships between people. According to Dekker and Uslaner (2001), social capital is about the value of social networks (this does not mean social from a digital perspective), bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with some form of reciprocity. With social capital theory, the focus is on relationships that people create by their involvement in groups and networks and the subsequent value this can generate.

These relationships are based on communication and information exchanges that enable social relationships. These relationships take place at both an individual and organisational level and can lead to tangible value, for example external relationships that can help the individual or organisation solve operational problems or help mitigate the effect of poorly informed legislation. Internal relationships that help employees feel engaged assist in driving organisational effectiveness. There is also intangible (expectation) value based on knowing that relationships can be used in the future. PA practitioners are at the juxtaposition of critical organisational relationships – identifying and building relationship with actors that shape the environment in which the organisation operates and at the same time brokering and persuading actors inside the organisation of the importance of connecting with these relevant external contacts. Hence the importance placed on social capital by Toth (2006).

Communitarianism (Culbertson and Chen, 1997; K A Leeper, 1996; R Leeper, 2000) is also seen as worthy of exploration. This looks to balance individual rights with community responsibilities and suggests 'the situating of the self, entails participatory interaction with a public arena that produces common ends and agreed-on-basic values' (R. Leeper, 2000: 18).   Although communitarianism again has its origins in ancient Greece, contemporary debate emerged in the 1990s in response to classical liberalism and the importance given to individual rights. Scholars such as Etzioni (1993) held the view that the value of community was being devalued and there was a lack of recognition of the power of individuals coming together to change values, habits and public policy.

The literature around communitarianism provides a useful lens to think about the role of PR generally and PA specifically.   Often change can only be brought about by organisations demonstrating weight of voice by working with other organisations. This gives a sense of community in terms of securing policy change that benefits a particular sector rather than individual organisational self-interest.   This has resonance with Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) when determining the type of PA strategy to adopt and the levels of inclusivity (that is working with others in the industry or sector) that one wishes to nurture. The greater the inclusivity the more likely it is that policy makers will listen. Building community to put pressure on policy makers, including galvanising media activity to encourage public support, has direct links to the communitarian idea. Also, it encourages the consideration of PA as integral to healthy democracies – groups voicing their views directly

to those in power and encouraging advocacy to take place at the grassroots level.

Concepts from the organisation

Many of the theories above are tied to aspects of organisational theory, especially the idea of systems. The term was originally developed by Bertalanffy (1934) when reflecting on the natural world and its inter-connectedness. The concept was developed by Katz and Kahn (1966) and applied to the organisation suggesting these are social systems that turn inputs into outputs and are linked to their external environments and are affected by these environments. A critical component here, as suggested by Grunig and Hunt (1984), is the need for communication inside the organisational system and between the organisation and the wider system in which it sits. The organisation cannot be divorced from the system in which it operates.

Here then it is suggested that ideas such as business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and citizenship reside. Carroll (1991) talks of the importance of economic, legal and ethical responsibilities building to wider philanthropic responsibilities, but the CSR debate itself has moved forward, with scholars and organisations talking of corporate social performance (Wood, 1991) and the social impacts of business. Recently, Porter and Kramer (2011) talked of creating shared value (CSV), with organisations, society and governments working more closely together and delivering value in its broadest possible sense across multiple stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder management then is closely linked to the idea of corporate responsibility as it is stakeholders who influence the behaviour of the organisation – here a stakeholder is anybody who can affect the running of the organisation - and often stakeholders may place conflicting demands on the organisation, so stakeholder relationships become critical. This then takes us back to issues management. Chase (1976) and Heath (1997) suggest that the environmental scanning and management of issues is a critical strategic management process.

Many PA scholars such as Heugens (2006) suggests that at its heart PA is about issues management, dealing with some of the most impactful issues on the organisation – those coming from policy makers and others involved in the policy world, including activists and pressure groups. This links to the analysis of McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) who argues that the identification and handling of issues is one of the essential tasks of PA as does Post (1978) with the concept of the public issues lifecycle. This has four stages: changing public expectations (as society changes so do people's views); political controversy (when social expectations reach a tipping point the issue becomes politicised and political actors become engaged); development of legislation (reflecting society's expectations and subjecting organisations to new rules); government litigation (implementation and clarity of new rules). Many of the issues that encourage policy makers to take action often come from poor organisational governance, so issues, corporate responsibility and stakeholders are all entwined within the PA discipline.

PA, therefore, is an organisational buffer against or bridge to the environment (Meznar and Nigh, 1995). Windsor (2005, citing Bacharach, 1989) builds on this suggesting that the organisation resists, adapts or manipulates the external environment. Bacharach references RDT (Kotler, 1979; Pfeffer and Slancik, 1978) who argue organisations are dependent on gaining resources in an uncertain environment and want to reduce uncertainty by engaging in the policy process. He talks of Institutional theory that looks at choices made in response to the institutional environment (Bluedorn *et al.* 1994). This institutional environment is affected by pressures from government, professions, interest groups and public opinion (Oliver, 1991). Compliance with expectations of this environment or needing to change these expectations may explain why organisations become politically active.

This takes us to ideas such as the behaviour theory of the firm in terms of how it takes decisions. In essence, the structure of the organisation connects it to the wider environment and according to Simon (1957 cited by Getz 2001), firms tend to seek acceptable rather than optimal decisions, a process known as satisficing. This has been picked up by Schuler and Rehbein (1997) who suggest, based on the firm's history, structure and experience, that it will filter and interpret the external environment and take a view on political engagement.

Much of the organisational roots coalesce around the concept of strategic management and business strategy. Here ideas such as competitive positioning (Porter, 1980, 1985) and internal attributes and competencies

(Baron, 1995) become part of the wider debate about an organisations interaction with its environment. This also relates to the idea that organisations are affected by other similar organisations because they all focus on and extract similar resources – known as population ecology theory (Hannan and Carroll 1992; Hannan and Freeman, 1989). From a PA perspective, one can see some merit in this when organisations may need to make their case against other organisations or come together to make a collective point as suggested by interest group theory explored earlier.

Concepts from economics

When exploring organisations one cannot ignore the economic imperative of organisational existence. Collective action theory (Olson, 1965), relates to the provision of collective goods by private actors. Here there is a view that costs get reduced when organisations work together, but in any situation, there are always some who lead, some who follow and some who free-ride. With collective action, you can see large firms in bigger industry sectors are the ones most likely to engage in the political process.

Turning to the concept of markets, public choice theory suggests that the political process is like a market or an exchange between public officials and private actors, all of whom are self-interested (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962; Downs 1957 cited by Getz, 2001). Here supply and demand are important concepts within this market relating to goods and services, public policies and public opinion (Fligstein, 1996; Mahon, Wartick and Fleisher, 2002).

Ultimately economics is about managing costs and transaction cost economics suggested by Williamson (1985) looks at how the organisation reduces these. A transaction relates to all interactions and interdependencies of the firm as there is a belief that transactions between two or more parties always involve some cost. An understanding of these costs prompts an organisation to engage in the political process either independently or in collaboration.

2.2.5. An emergent PA Body of Knowledge

The above discussion provides indicators of what a PA-BoK might contain and individual concepts have been well rehearsed by scholars. Yet Fleisher (2007) believes that a BoK must reflect the specific knowledge unique to PA. It cannot ever contain everything PA practitioners must know, but it should identify what is fundamental. Given the complexity and breadth of concepts explored, PA is clearly multidisciplinary (Windsor, 2005), although Windsor (2005) alludes to the differences between theoretical roots (the conceptualisation of PA) and practical theory (that support the day-to-day delivery of PA practice). This blurring between the two concepts is seen in the earlier grid. The distinction between the two, however, is relevant and is supported by Meznar (2002) who suggests that there is a large and unstructured literature on PA and the political arena that lacks coherence and agreement. This is a view has also been supported more recently by Davidson (2015) based on his analysis of how PA has been theorised and researched within PR scholarship, suggesting that there has been insufficient work done to establish a mature body of theory and knowledge.

It can be argued, however, that it is possible to develop an integrated PA schema that connects the theoretical basis of the discipline to the practical theories and skills that drive effectiveness. In part, this would start to provide coherence and a framework to better understand and professionalise PA practice.

The concept of a multidisciplinary perspective is relevant. According to Holley (2009) multidisciplinary suggests scholarship from more than one discipline that is often juxtaposed with little synthesis and connection. This may indeed reflect the current state of PA knowledge roots and clearly demonstrated by the plethora of ideas outlined earlier in this paper. However, moving forward the idea of PA being interdisciplinary would be helpful as it suggests greater integrative synthesis. This reflects the work of Lattuca (2003) and Aram (2004) both of whom conceptualised interdisciplinary frameworks in Higher Education to help improve innovation by integrating knowledge from different fields of study. There is clear scope for this approach in PA scholarship.

2.2.6. Ethics and a PA Body of Knowledge

Ethics is an extensive and complex body of knowledge in its own right and although this section is unable to do full justice to the breadth and depth of scholarship in this area, it is relevant to touch on it here. In part, given the controversy over whether persuasion – a suggested key component of PA – is ethical but also whether the practice itself is ethical. It is also important in the context of concerns over the control of discourse by symbolic elites (Bourdieu,

1977) and the power that is exercised in society by discourse (Foucault, 1972). Both of these concepts perhaps underpin why some hold PA is such poor regard. So, the ethical dimension of lobbying cannot be ignored, but it is not as well developed as other aspects of PA scholarship (Berg, 2012). Berg argues that political scientists have reflected on lobbying's legitimate use as part of the democratic process but little attention has been paid to it by PR (and PA) scholarship.

Put simply ethics relates to a framework of decision-making that enables right and wrong to be reasoned allowing for consistent behavior (Trevino and Nelson, 2004). There are broadly three approaches to understanding ethics. Firstly, the cognitivist approach where there is a belief that there exists actual and objective moral truths and absolutes. Conversely, non-cognitivists such as Burke (1969) and PR scholars such as Heath (2004) argue truth emerges from a process of dialogue and is subjective. Falling out of cognitivism, there are two schools of thought. There is consequentialism that focuses on the consequences of acts and results of behaviour. Then there is deontology that looks at the rules about the acts themselves and the belief that there are actual moral truths and absolutes. It is 'duty-based' focusing on obligation, principles and rights. The leading scholar here is Josephson (1993) who identified 10 universal principles that form the basis of ethical life and these include honesty, integrity, promise keeping, fidelity, fairness, caring for other, respect for others, responsible citizenship, pursuit of excellence and accountability.

Secondly, there is virtue ethics that focuses on an individual's character and motivations that draws on an Aristotelian perspective. MacIntyre (1984), a leading exponent of virtue ethics in organisations and practice, suggests that ethics is not so much about following rules that provide a minimum level of behaviour guidance and can themselves be ignored, but are learned and embedded in an individual through habit and feeling pleasure at taking virtuous actions. At its core is the concept of caring – caring from some form of practice or person as we care for ourselves. Of relevance to PA is MacIntyre (1984) reflections on practice which he argues is a well-defined human activity and suggests that it is within practice areas that virtues are defined, developed and exhibited. Practice areas should strive for standards of excellence underpinned by justice (recognising skills and knowledge of others and to learn from those with greater experience); courage (push to the limits of our capabilities and to challenge when necessary); and finally, honesty (to accept criticism and learn from mistakes).

Lastly, there is situational ethics as suggested by Pratt (1993) who argues that no universal law is absolute and often the situation alters the rules so part of an individual's responsibility is to put aside the rule and draw on a range of ethical theories and approaches dependent on the situation in which they find themselves.

Many scholars have explored these ethical ideas against the concept of persuasion (Baker and Martinson, 2002; Edgett, 2002; Fawkes, 2007) all of whom ultimately suggest persuasion is ethical providing certain criteria are

applied, in particular around aspects of honesty, fairness and respect of others. As Perloff (2010) argues persuasion evokes extremes of viewpoint. Some see persuasion as always unethical as the communicator through messaging is often asking somebody to do something that is not necessarily in the interest or indeed wanted by the individual concerned. Others say it is moral suggesting that individuals can accept or reject messages. Perloff (2010) argues for a third-way that is perhaps closer to reality. Persuasion can be used for good or bad purposes with ethical and unethical intentions perhaps mirroring the subjective nature of the concept as suggested by Heath (2001).

Ethical persuaders advance arguments forcefully but do not coerce, encourage debates and the dignity of those involved, individuals are free and autonomous so that people can take the most thoughtful decisions possible. Here various ethical theories can be seen to be at play. As suggested by Gregory (2009), virtue ethics draws on the character of the communicator and that character tends to be shaped by the community in which that practitioner inhabits (both professional and personal). Deontology perhaps provides an insight into getting practitioners to reflect on what is right or wrong and the importance of dialogue in helping to establish agreement on this. Finally, consequentialism perhaps encourages practitioners to think more holistically about the consequences of their actions, not that consequences can always be predicted accurately.

Edgett (2002) taking the view that persuasion can be ethical and drawing on the traits of legal advocacy in the US, has drawn up ten criteria for ethically desirable advocacy in PA focusing on areas such as evaluation and whether PA services are warranted, the centrality of the client and their consent in decision making. It embeds ideas of sensitivity, confidentiality and wider responsibilities. It also includes the importance of respect to those involved in the debate, clear visibility and validity of communication. This mirrors some of the work of Baker and Martinson (2002) who suggest five principles of advocacy which they called the TARES test. This covers truthfulness, authenticity, respect, equity and social responsibility. Both these approaches focus on the personality or character of the communicator and asks them to reflect on their motives and behaviours. Additionally, as Fawkes (2007) argues it also concentrates on the communication itself with the act of persuasion seen as having an ethical component.

So, scholarship on ethical persuasion and advocacy does suggest a form of constraint and a reflection on how decisions impact others and the importance of inclusive debate. If this is the backdrop in which persuasion happens then it does address some of the concerns surrounding power and control of discourse. In fact, it could be argued that Dahan (2009) and Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) suggest ethical persuasion principles are embedded in what makes for effective PA practice in the first place. Consequently, the character of the PA practitioner does appear to be at the heart of ethical and effective practice. It does, therefore, suggest a more prominent role for embedding the concept virtue ethics more fully into PA practice.

Of relevance is the work of Dobson (2004) who suggests that there are two ways of integrating ethics into business generally: the action-based approach that focuses on developing rules to constrain management normally in the form of corporate codes of conduct or ethics. Then there is the agent-based approach which draws on the fundamental character and motivations of the individual. In this approach, behaviour is not limited to adherence to a rule but involves the individual rationally pursing moral excellence as a goal in and of itself. Such agent-based approaches draw explicitly from virtue-ethics theory.

The concept of virtue theory is not unknown to wider PR practice. Harrison and Galloway (2005) explored the concept suggesting that virtue ethics and the agent-based approach could help move on the field from its focus on ideal-practitioner types and codes of conduct which in their view are limiting. In particular, they suggest a return to the work of MacIntyre (1984) could help PR (and by implication PA) better understand the underlying meaning of its work and to make justice, courage and honesty a PR 'habit'. Indeed, Gotsis and Grimani (2015) argue that virtue theory as it relates to organisational behaviour itself has seen considerable growth and is one that opens up new ways for organisations to embed ethical approaches by encouraging individuals to take decisions that are consistent with the pursuit of excellence guided by courage, wisdom, fairness, integrity and consistency. Other practice areas too are looking at the virtue theory. Gardiner (2003), reflecting on the medical profession, suggests it helps practitioners better understand their motivations, allows rules to be adapted enabling flexibility and creativity

in problem-solving rather than following strict codes. This perhaps could provide useful insights into how PA practice needs to evolve.

Returning to Dobson (2004), he suggests that although the concept of virtue theory may appear to be esoteric to apply to business, it does in fact dovetail well into the drive for more responsibility in business and management. To embed such an approach requires four components. The encouragement of certain traits or 'the virtues' to deliver excellence in the workplace involving understanding motivations to stimulate sound judgement. Here the importance is placed on 'internal goods' as argued by MacIntrye (1984:191) where the focus is on the outcome of decisions that has benefit for the whole community who participate in the practice. Here a central feature is the concept of professional development which is regarded as a moral process. This links to the importance of community. For virtue ethics to flourish a conducive infrastructure is needed as MacIntrye (1988) subsequently suggested it is only by participating in a rational practice-based community that one becomes rational. Here the firm or professional organisation has to be more active, nurturing and intrusive to stimulate a sense of community and shared goals. Then there is encouraging sound moral judgement rather than rule-based approaches that are shaped and informed by the concept of 'internal goods'. Finally, it is important to encourage moral exemplars. Ethics is something that is learned through observation and understanding what excellence looks like so that it becomes integral to the individual. To sum up, Dobson (2004) suggests that such an approach in business and practice

allows ethics to be embedded deeper than mere codes of conduct and an aspiration echoed by Harrison and Galloway (2005).

Competencies, and PA competency framework, that explores behaviours and motivations, and establishes a greater sense of PA identity and community (rather that strict rules) could be a way of creating a space for a virtue approach to be developed and habits formed helping PA practice to improve self-awareness.

.2.2.7. A PA Body of Knowledge: competencies and the concept of creole

Competency scholarship will be explored in detail in section 2.4. of this review but for the purposes of exploring the work around PA-BoK and skills it is suggested that the terminology as defined by Garavan and McGuire (2001) be used. That is competence relates to a skill in a functional area and competency focuses on behaviours.

Fleisher (2007) suggests a range of competencies and knowledge for effective PA practice and a PA BoK which provides a starting point for debate. His ideas are drawn from the US experience, focusing primarily on competence (functional skills) and unconnected to the competency scholarship that might allow for wider perspectives to be gained as will be shown.

The topicality of PA competencies is also emerging in practice. The Changing Face of Public Affairs report produced by Watson Helsby (2012) – a UK-based recruitment agency - investigated contemporary PA practice by interviewing over 30 senior practitioners and policy-makers. Although the study failed to connect to both PA and competency scholars, it illustrates the growing complexity and evolutionary nature of PA, as suggested by McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010). The report suggested the need for PA practitioners to understand corporate strategy, stakeholder proliferation and connectivity, impact of globalisation, issues and crisis management techniques and the ability to respond to a more informed, challenging and vocal consumer/electorate.

More recently (2012), ComRes on behalf of VMA, a communications recruitment agency, surveyed 393 PA practitioners online looking at roles and responsibilities. Again, the study failed to connect to competency and PA scholarship, but it did show that the top three important attributes identified by practitioners was the ability to communicate effectively the organisation or client message, solve problems and network. Of note is the lower importance placed on having influential contacts that perhaps relates to the idea of Schepers (2010) who states there are now new ways of business-government cooperation and new skills are needed to operate in this new environment. As suggested by Spencer (2011: 72), reflecting on PA practice, the 'world we live in now is about managing unknown unknowns'.

The table below summarises the work on skills by the three sources here. What is clear is that there is no standard use of the words competencies, skills, attributes and knowledge. All of which are used almost interchangeably. As a result, what emerges are lists – which in themselves are of interest – but perhaps lack depth, conceptualisation and does not connect to how practice can use this research and insight to improve effectiveness.

	Type of Study	Knowledge Areas	Skills
Fleisher (2007)	Commentary US-focused	- Development of intercultural competence - Impact of societal factors on PA - State-to-state relations - Nature of social networks - Level of economic development - Political ideologies - Nature of social chan ge - The overall business-government relationship - Nature of activism of organised interest groups - Legal system and structure - Nature of the media and public communication channels - Nature of regulatory mechanisms - View of the natural environment and geographical factors - Understanding local pbulic policy institutions - Nation-state specific applications of PA functions - Language skills - Understanding ethics in a global/international context - Managing international consultants, alliances and issue partners	
Watson Helsby (2012)	Qualitiative UK-focused 30 senior practitioners		***Top 6 core competencies of growing importance*** - Real understanding of how the business works - Leadership and management skills

		- Campaigning skills - Issues radar and management - Political sophistication - Influencing upwards ***Top 10 most important skills/attributes*** - Ability to effectively communicateorganisation's/client message - Problem solving abilities - Networking ability - Knowleledge of legislative framework - Campaigning skills - Commercial nous - Passion for politics - Experience of other communication sectors eg PR - Social media and awareness skills
VMA (2012)	Quantitative UK-focused 393 practitioners from a variety of levels	

Table 2.5: Summary of competency research based on Fleisher, Watson Helsby and VMA © Sarah Roberts-Bowman (2017)

Picking up on the idea of personal attributes, McGrath (2006) conducted a major qualitative study looking at lobbyists in Washington, London and Brussels. This study identified the importance of listening, observation and relationship building, as well as courtesy, honesty, integrity and credibility. In fact, the study suggested that women made better PA practitioners because of these traits. This study focused on lobbyists talking about themselves so perhaps it could be seen as biased, but what is important is the view that certain personal traits and qualities are integral to the delivery of effective PA.

What is clear is that PA is an evolving and complex discipline. This complexity links to the idea of creolisation. The term creole is related to the

Latin 'creare' which means to create and was originally used to refer to the intermingling and mixing of different ethnic groups in colonised societies. Form an organisational perspective, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002), reflecting on the confluence space between cultures and language, took the concept and related it to management. They described management knowledge as drawing on various domains with blurred boundaries that created its own confluence space. Abbott, Zheng and Du (2014), building on this idea, talk of creolisation frameworks inside organisations, especially those operating globally. They talk of four inter-connected processes: network expansion (relationships and structures of the organisation in order to deliver globally); mutual sense-making (which relates to how people share and understand knowledge, construct meaning and co-create value for the organisation); cultural hybridity (cultural amalgamation and integration of multiple cultures into the organisation); and finally identity multiplicity (here individuals have to navigate multiple perspectives, knowledge repertories and norms).

Here the idea of cultural hybridity and identity multiplicity is a relevant one for PA. Often PA practitioners are grounded in the society and culture in which they operate, whilst at the same time draw on knowledge from a wide variety of sources. L'Etang (2008) argues that PR (and by implication PA) fits within the concept of creole and has its roots in anthropology, psychology, organisational sociology and cultural theory, reinforcing the view of its pluralistic and creole nature. This links to the third wave of PA research

(Griffin, 2005) exploring blurred boundaries of PA. It may be helpful to any PA

BoK and competencies to reflect this creole thinking.

2.2.8. Theory into Practice – a return to the idea of professionalism

It has been argued that little academic thinking transcends into PA practice.

Edwards (2011) points to the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to

explain the lack of diversity in PR (and by implication PA) but the researcher

suggests it could be used to explain both the academic-professional divide

and why PA has often been resistant to aspects of codification.

Here the framework of fields, capital and habitus as developed by Bourdieu,

(1984) is helpful. He argues the social world is structured in terms of fields

with one overarching field that is dominated by power such as income,

education and broader cultural and social knowledge. Other fields exist, for

example the field of PR as an occupation and the field of PA within it. Each

field is defined by a particular practice and doxa (which is a set of beliefs that

shape practice within the field). Fields are bounded. Status in the field and

access to it is determined by assets called capital. These consist of economic

(financial), social (networks) and cultural (understanding the social norms). In

this respect, it is easy to see why those without access to such forms of

capital find it difficult to enter a field or feel uncomfortable within it. For PA,

social capital as explored earlier is important, the ability to build networks that

create intellectual capital and insight is a necessity.

Also, Bourdieu goes on to talk of habitus, the durable dispositions that develop over time based on family, education, professional life that shape understanding of the social world and our role within it. It can be argued this can have a positive and negative effect. Those with different life experiences – a different habitus because of class, gender, ethnicity, income for example – may feel they are excluded from the field.

Professions like PA form their own 'field' and tend to recruit in their own image and have a natural appeal to those with similar dispositions. This field creates a boundary. Here knowledge may stick as suggested by Ferlie *et al.* (2005) in the context of knowledge transfer (see section 2.3. below), but it too could explain why knowledge is often resisted. An understanding of the PA field will be necessary to the formation of any PA-BoK and competency framework is to have meaning and use and perhaps to be seen as supporting the field, whilst at the same time asking the field to possibly change its view of itself and reflect more holistically in terms of professionalisation.

In this context, this review has looked at PA as both knowledge and discourse workers and both seem relevant in terms of understanding the practice, but so too is the idea of lobbyists as 'promotional intermediaries' alongside occupations such as advertising, branding consultants, PR and market researchers. Davis (2013) talks of a growing promotional orientation in society with promotional activities becoming a distinct socio-cultural force which impacts on citizens, consumers, companies, political parties, government departments and the types of interactions between them. He takes the view that these promotional intermediaries are employed to either

fulfil state or corporate objectives that do not always connect with the interests of citizens and consumers.   This questions the type of arguments put forward by Quelch and Jocz (2007) that promotional practices and professions are useful servants of the free market and pluralist democracies.   Though Davis (2013) does also see merit in the use of such promotional activities for organisations that are seen as more worthy such as NGOs, charities and other campaigners.

In many respects, this idea provides a variation to Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural intermediaries, the term he used to refer to the new professions such as advertising and PR that helped reduce class distinctions by enhancing the consumption of legitimate culture by the masses.   In other words, these cultural intermediaries are often thought of as arbiters of taste. Certainly, the concept of cultural intermediaries has been well rehearsed within PR scholarship (Curtain and Gaither, 2005; Hodges, 2006) and by implication PA. Not only because the practice of PR itself has its own culture (or habitus) that help guide behaviours, but also the wider social and cultural influence it has.   This influence again perhaps links to the issue around the control of specific discourses (L'Etang, 2004).

So, the practice of PA it is suggested can be viewed from a normative knowledge worker perspective, or more critically as discourse, cultural or promotional intermediaries.   It is clearly a multi-dimensional occupation which makes the concept of it being a profession and understanding what professionalism means to it increasingly complex.

Grunig and Hunt (1984), reflecting on how to define a profession more fully in order to relate this to PR (and it is argued by implication PA), suggest that the key elements include a set of common values, a powerful membership body, adherence to a set of norms, an intellectual tradition and BoK and technical skills through training. This follows in a similar fashion perhaps to some of the sociological perspectives on defining a profession. As McGrath (2015) points out, other professions have tackled the issue of qualifications and training but PR and PA lags behind, with academia and practice continuing to debate the value of academic knowledge and instinct based on experience.

Fleisher (2002, 2007) has made numerous contributions to what a PA- BoK should contain and the type of skills PA practitioners should exhibit, as explored earlier. Holyoke, Brown and LaPira (2015) usefully draw out what they believe can and cannot be taught. In terms of what can be taught, they focus on the three core areas. Knowledge that they classify as a process (how policies are made and the structures involved); policy insight (the detail and expertise in the subject area on which they are lobbying); and analytical (applied analysis). Communication and messaging skills (that address areas of framing, persuasion, writing). Relationship building (which they argue some aspects of which can be taught in terms of their value, identification and maintenance, but the application to practice perhaps comes with experience). This does not lessen the importance of learning on the job by applying these skills, deepening instincts and understanding the idiosyncrasies of people, but

that is part of any profession. Their view is that work placements are critical to any education programme in order to help build these insights.

This mirrors the view of Griffin and Thurber (2015) who argue for combining academic knowledge and professional wisdom. A slight word of caution needs to be given here as these papers cited above appeared in a Special Edition of Interest Groups and Advocacy that reflected on issues surrounding education and training of lobbyists, so perhaps a more positive view has been exhibited. It is worth noting, however, that studies have suggested tangible areas that could form the basis of a knowledge base.

2.3. Understanding Knowledge

2.3.1. Tacit and explicit knowledge

This paper has talked much of knowledge, but greater clarity is needed on what we mean by knowledge. There are two types of knowledge: explicit and tacit (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Polanyi, 1983). Explicit knowledge is objective and codified, whereas tacit is subjective, experiential and difficult to formalise. According to Greenhalgh *et al.* (2004) tacit knowledge does not exist in written form, but is based on the expertise of the individual and the meaning of knowledge is dependent on its context and ability to share. In terms of PA, as we have seen little explicit knowledge is codified – there are no grand rule books, training syllabi and qualifications.

The researcher suggests that often the PA profession argues that it is tacit knowledge that leads to individual and organisational advantage – the years

of experience that enable practitioners to know how policy is made and what works and the players involved in the decision making process – the widsom as referenced by Griffin and Thurber (2015). The VMA (2012) survey reinforces this view, suggesting that key areas of expertise were passion for politics, networking, knowledge of legislative framework and influential contacts. It also links to the idea that it is experience and instinct that counts in PA (Goldman, 2012).

Yet Cowan, David and Foray (2000) state that too much knowledge is defined as tacit where in fact it can be codified. Although their study looked at the economic benefits of scientific knowledge, there are some interesting parrallels that could be explored, in particular creating a new typology of knowledge activities for PA.

Importantly, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) also outlined a key theory to knowledge creation and transfer known as the SECI model and is based on how tacit and explicit knowledge work togerher. This proposes four ways that knowledge types can be combined and converted, showing how knowledge is shared and created from an organisational perspective. The researcher suggests that this is also applicable to a profession. Socialisation (this relates to tacit to tacit movement and it is how knowledge is passed on through practice, guidance, imitation and observation). Externalisation (this relates to tacit to explicit movement and is considered difficult to achieve but is a critical conversation process involving codification into documents that can be spread and used). There is much debate about the extent that this conversion

mechanism can occur but as suggested earlier by Cowan, David and Foray (2000) perhaps we underestimate the process. Combination (this relates to explicit to explicit and is the simplest form of movement, for example pre-existing codified knowledge in documents are merged to create new knowledge). Internalisation (this relates to explicit to tacit movement whereby as explicit sources are used and learned, the knowledge is internalised, modiyfing the users' existing tacit knowledge).

More recently, Nonaka, Toyama and Hirata (2008) suggests that knowledge creation is an on-going process that perpetually updates. Interestingly it is suggested that knowledge is created by the relationship between thought and action, in particular through interactions not just within the organisation but beyond. Given that scholars suggest there is movement between different types of knowledge, a view reinforced by more recent studies (Lievre and Tang, 2015), then then this starts to open up new ways to look at how the knowledge necessary for PA practice can be created and shared. Indeed, some studies on the professions are using the SECI model to better understand how social media can be used to support the tacit sharing of kowledge, such as those working in the medical profession where knowledge sharing is seen as critical for improving patient care (Panahi, Watson and Patridge, 2015). In particular, areas around socialisation (tacit to tacit by sharing experiences including observation), and externalisation (tacit to explicit by enountering case studies and stories, new thinking and theory) emerge as important for the medical arena. Competencies could provide a

way to encourage different types of knowledge movement across the PA by encouraging socialisation and externalisation.

If one returns to the VMA (2012) survey and to the work of scholars such as Holyoke, Brown and LaPira (2015), Griffin and Thurber (2015) and Marlowe (2015), and to some of the areas emerging in the knowledge roots discussion especially around applied communication skills, then perhaps more of what is considered tacit can be taught. For example, knowledge of the legislative system and how it works can be taught, as can how to construct powerful messages and how to identify the key contacts on specific subject areas. Given the discussion on the theoretical roots and models of PA, the discipline does not lack possible areas of codification and explicit knowledge areas, if anything the challenge is identifying what is unique and core, as suggested earlier by Fleisher (2007) and the acceptance by practice that more of what it does is explicit rather than tacit knowledge-based.

Building on this debate, knowledge scholars argue that explicit knowledge is transferred and tacit knowledge is shared. Any PA schema will need to incorporate aspects of both if a competency framework is to be fully developed that looks at how the four knowledge movements can be integrated and encouraged by practice. In other words, encouraging the use of professional networks for socialisation; breaking down fear of codification and using a competency approach to establish better externalisation that could over time lead to combination and internationalisation movements of

knowledge as the profession grows and matures. A more sophisticated view of knowledge opens up news ways for PA to be analysed.

Another aspect here is the idea of 'absorptive capacity', as raised by Cohen and Levinthal (1990). In other words, individuals, professions and organisations need to understand the value of new information and apply it. Given the earlier debate on fields and habitus, the lack of absorptive capacity possibly could be an issue for PA. It is not clear whether PA practice would value a PA-BoK and individual organisations who communciate with policy makers may not believe it will improve effectiveness.

2.3.2. Deconstructing knowledge and theory

On a more practical level, Bogo *et al.*, (2013), when reflecting and deconstructing the knowledge that underpins social work, talk of a three-fold conceptualisation of knowledge. There are explanatory theories that support the practice, interventionist knowledge that underpins the reality of the job and practice principles that inform and shape the daily approach to everyday work. In many respects this helps to clarify the different types of discussions involving the blurring of knowledge between the conceptual and the more practical as explored earlier and outlined in Table 2.3 (summary of knowledge fields relevant to PA), whilst also allowing scope for incorporating the routines and indeed experiences of how particular professions operate. Therefore there are a number of ways that the concept of knowledge can be unpicked and explored that may could bring more clarity to PA.

The ability to deconstruct the concept of knowledge and the theories and practice that support knowledge has significant merit. According to scholars such as Wallis (2010), the idea of theory needs to be better understood in order to identify the role meta-theory can play in critiqing the process of theorising (Zhao, 1991), the use of theory (Bonsu, 1998) and the view that meta-theorizng can produce theories that are open to subsequent testing (Sklair, 1998). Importantly, meta-theory is focused on the analysis of theories and this seems pertinent when exploring the diverse range of theories and knowledge that appear to support PA practice. Meta-theory can be integrative where multiple theories are combined or it can be deconstructive when theories are put into their constituent components for analysis and recombined (Wallis, 2010). The overall objective is to try and establish greater insight into how theories combine and are held together. Modernist approaches to meta-theory strive for objective knowledge or truth, but postmodernist approaches take the view that knowledge is much more contextual and that knowledge is often disordered, as argued by Law (2010). This does not mean that knowledge cannot be better understood, but it is rcognised that there may be mulitple ways of knowing. Not least the concept of workability is fundamental – the usefulness of the theory must be at the heart of any discussion (Chia, 2005) and theories must be grounded in practice (Law, 2010).

A postmodernist approach to understanding knowledge and theory as suggested by Wallis (2010) seems well suited to try and encourage conversations about the knowledge that supports a particular practice such as

PA. It allows the creation of possible structures whilst allowing fluidity, change and adaptability.

2.4. Understanding competence and competencies

2.4.1. Terms of reference

As established, there has been talk about PA competencies (Fleisher, 2007; Toth, 2006), yet there has been little connection to scholarly work in this area. This has been mirrored by recent studies that have looked at general PR and communication competencies (Goodman, 2006; Gregory, 2008; Sha, 2011) which, although are based on gathering primary data from practitioners in both the US and UK, have resulted in lists of activities (and skills) which, although helpful, do not link in depth to competency scholarship or address issues around tacit and codified knowledge, or indeed other types of classifications.

According to Garavan and McGuire (2001), defining competence has vexed scholars but broadly competence relates to a skill in a functional area and competency focuses on associated behaviours. They also suggest there is a different competency traditions between the UK (focus on the functional and outcome-driven) and the US (focus on behavioura and skills or more input-drivel). Though some scholars, such as Rankin (2006, 2008), suggest the latter is more widely used in the UK and the distinctionis less clear-cut.

According to Nordhaug (1998), competencies operate at an organisational and individual level and equate to capabilities or distinctive strengths. At an

organisational level, these are traditionally known as 'core' as suggested by Hamel and Prahalad (1994) and give an organisation strategic competitive advantage. At an individual level these relate to concepts such as attributes, knowledge, skills, attitudes, traits and motives (Boyatzis, 1982; Klemp, 2001; Higgs, 2003; Guo and Anderson, 2005).

2.4.2. Typologies and frameworks

Over recent years a number of typologies and frameworks have been suggested (Boyatzis, 1982; Cheetham and Cheevers, 1998; Kuijpers, 2001; Nordhaug, 1998; Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994: Delamare Le Deist and Winterton, 2005). What appears to emerge from these models is the importance of linking individual transferable generic skills, the unique firm-specific (core) and then those required by a specific job or profession. HRM scholarship has tended to focus on the generic and job specific, whilst organisations have focused on the firm-specific.

Additionally, scholars (Drejer, 2001; New, 1996; Rowe, 1995; as cited by Soderquist *et al.,* 2010) suggest that competencies can be viewed from three perspectives. Generic v organisation-specific competencies (competencies that relate to a specific job that is common to all individuals but which also may have specific requirements given the organisation in which the job takes place); managerial v operational (competencies relating to the managerial such as planning or operational referring to how a specific task is carried out); competencies as skills v competencies as behaviours. Soderquist *et al.*

(2010) takes this idea further suggesting that based on these three couples of competencies an eight-fold typology can be devised that allows a more c comprehensive model that is more helpful in moving organisations from a task orientation to a competency-based approach. The idea of competencies 1-4 is a helpful one as it divorces the firm-specific concept allowing a focus on the actual role that is useful when focusing on job specific.
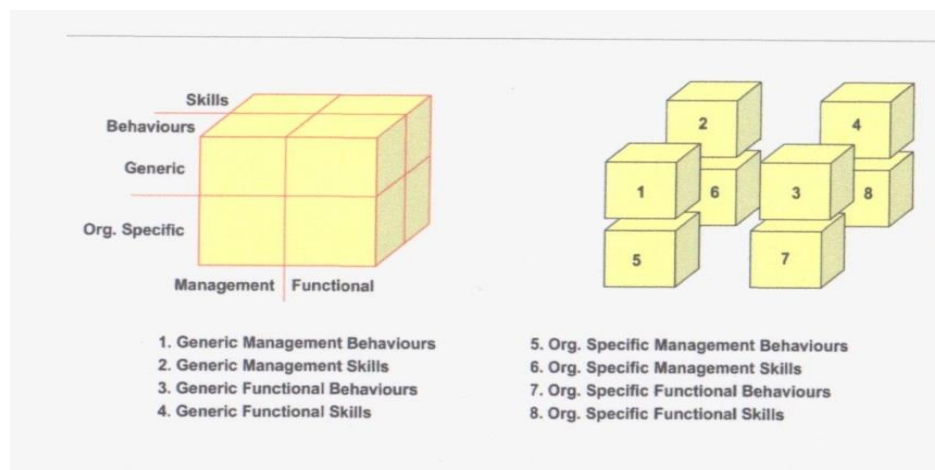
Figure 2.1 Typology comprising eight different types of competencies. Source: Soderquist *et al.,* 2010: 333)

Competency frameworks exist to help individuals and organisations improve performance by providing guidance and clarity as to the skills or outcomes required (Boyatzis, 1982; Conger and Ready, 2004; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002; Hay Group, 2003, as cited by Mitchell and Boak, 2009). However, as Boak (2001) argues, the effectiveness of a framework depends on its quality, that is accuracy (including the descriptors used), acceptability, accessibility and the manner in which it is implemented.

This is relevant for PA. Any competency model for PA will need to focus firmly on the individual generic skills and the professional in order to improve

effectiveness, but be flexible enough to allow this to be integrated into existing organisational and firm-specific frameworks that may exist. It also needs to be acceptable by the PA profession itself.

A key challenge identified by Soderquist *et al.* (2010) is blending both competence and competencies into a holistic framework. Earlier work by Hodkinson and Issitt (1995:149 cited by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton, 2005) suggest approaches that integrate knowledge, understanding, values and skills that 'reside within the person who is the practitioner'. This has appeal when looking at professional practice and disciplines such as PA as the focus is on the individual rather than the organisation. Cheetham and Chivers (1998) purport to have done this by looking at five dimensions that look at cognitive (explicit and tacit knowledge), functional (skills), personal (behaviour), ethical (values) and meta (dealing with uncertainty, learning, reflection). This provides an interesting and significantly broad framework that could help address the evolving nature of the PA profession and its socio-cultural inter-connectedness.

Building on this multi-dimensional approach Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) draw on competency developments in France, Germany and Austria and suggest a four-dimensional approach, as outlined below. Here it is suggested that cognitive, functional and social competence are fairly universal and consistent. They argue that knowledge (and understanding) is captured by cognitive competence; skills relate to the functional competence; and competencies (behaviour and attitudinal) are tied to social competence. They argue that meta competence is different to the other three as it is

concerning with supporting the acquisition of the other competencies in the sense that this connects to the ideas around learning to learn and responding to change.

	Occupational	Personal
Conceptual	Cognitive competence	Meta competence
Operational	Functional competence	Social competence

Table 2.6: Typology of competence (Delamare Le Deist and Winterton, 2005: 39)

They argue the model is perhaps better visualised as a tetrahedron, reflecting the unity of competence and also the difficulties in separating cognitive, function and social competence. Here meta-competence is presented as the over-arching input. This is illustrated below at Figure 2.2. It is the idea of meta that also links firmly to the Chivers and Cheetham (1998) view of competencies discussed earlier.
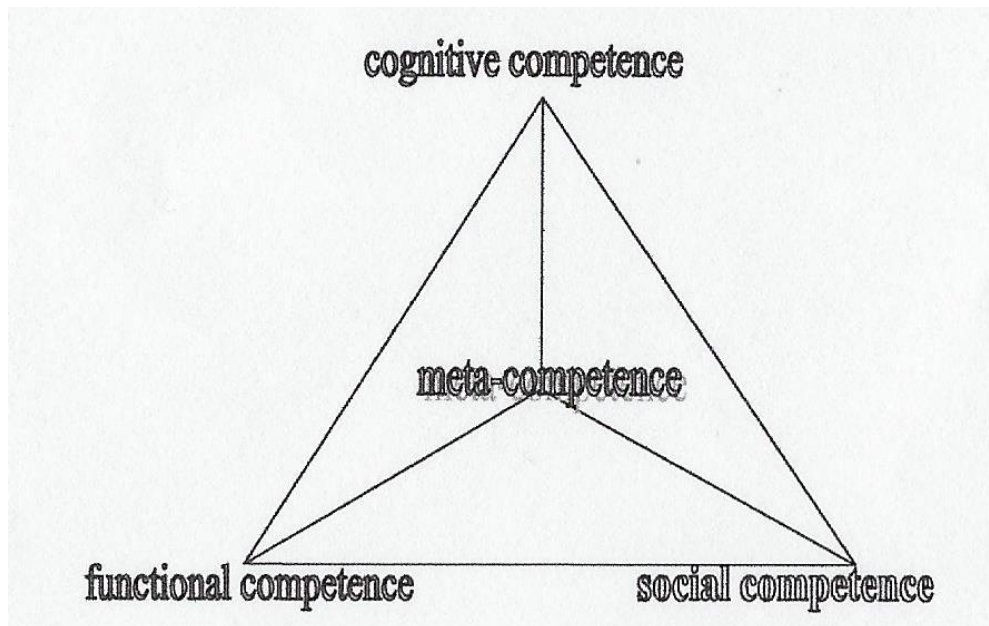
Figure 2.2. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Holistic Model of competence (2005:40)

This model seems well-suited for development against the backdrop of PA, allowing for knowledge to be constantly updated and refreshed as the policy world evolves and for focus to be placed on social and meta competences that are of particular relevance given the complexity of the social world. It also enables connections to be made to current scholarly work on Emotional Intelligence and social effectiveness (Abraham, 2004; Carmeili and Josman, 2006; Cote and Miners, 2006; Kunnanatt, 2008). At its heart PA is a social discipline rooted in stakeholder engagement and empathy to the wider policy environment and societal trends.

One of the criticisms of competency approaches is that they focus on current or past behaviours (Iles, 2001). Any competency approach for PA, as suggested earlier, needs to be forward thinking and flexible enough to evolve as the policy environment around it evolves in order to keep it contemporary

and appropriate. Work on looking at how to explore future competency requirements has been conducted by Robinson, *et al.* (2007). They categorised competencies into core, emerging (those that may or may not become core) and maturing. It is suggested that by formally connecting these ideas to that of Delamare Le Deist and Winterton could have merit potentially filling a conceptual gap in framework modelling.

At the same time, there have been criticisms of the competency movement for creating endless lists of skills and behaviours (Frank *et al.,* 2010) that fall out of the positivist, behaviouralist and managerial traditions. They can be mechanistic, without context, forgetting what the profession is trying to achieve and failing to capture the qualities of professionalism necessary for working in an increasingly complex environment. One way around this suggested by Bogo *et al.*, (2013) is a more holistic approach to competencies by focusing on two key dimensions. They propose incorporating the idea of meta-competence (higher order abilities of a conceptual, interpersonal and professional nature) and procedural competence (relating to the ability to use procedures effectively including collaborative relationships). Both are interconnected as they incorporate adaptive and creative capabilities that are needed to work in contemporary practice environments (Fraser and Greenhalgh, 2001). They also embed ideas around reflection and reflective professional practice. As Schon (1983, 1987) stresses, most professionals work with complexity and they must reflect-in and reflect-on action, actively use critical thinking and to use tacit knowledge to find creative solutions and to learn from mistakes.

Although the use of meta-competence is based on studies involving those professionals working in health and social care, the idea is not new as Cheetham and Chivers (1998) incorporated this idea into their five-fold typology explored earlier. Brown and McCartney (1995) also suggest that areas around dealing with uncertainty, learning, reflection are the abilities under which all other competencies shelter in line with the thinking put forward by Bogo *et al.*, (2013). It embraces the higher order abilities around learning, adapting, anticipating and creating and which are necessary for capacities such as judgment, intuition and acumen upon which all other competences are based.

Additionally, the concept of meta-competencies has parallels to the work of Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) and the growing importance as argued by bodies such as the OECD (2005) of generic twenty-first century competencies. They argue there has been a long-term shift in occupational structures with the rise of knowledge work and service occupations. Also, the world of work is being impacted by globalisation and technological change, therefore the future requires individuals with a broad set of generic competencies and not just single field skills. Having researched the literature, they point to 15 competency areas organised into five broad categories. These are outlined below but what is relevant is the importance placed on capacity for change as one of the five specific categories. This incorporates ideas around creativity, innovation, adaptive learning, learning to learn which have direct connections to concepts around reflection.

Analytic Skills	Interpersonal Skills	Ability to Execute	Information Processing	Capacity for Change
Critical Thinking	Communication	Initiative and self-direction	Information literacy	Creativity and Innovation
Problem Solving	Collaboration	Productivity	Media literacy	Adaptive learning/learning to learn
Decision making	Leadership and Responsibility		Digital Citizenship	Flexibility
Research and Inquiry			ICT operations and concepts	

Table 2.7: List of twenty-first century competencies. Source: Finegold and Notabartolo (2010: 7)

Therefore, competency scholarship is evolving in part due to the changes impacting on the workplace. Lo Presti (2009) argues that global changes have influenced work-life and career. As a result of globalisation, societal complexity, digital disruption and flexibility, careers are no longer linear and predictable. This change is summed up by Beck (1999) who talks of reflexive globalisation involving ideas around work losing its physical and spatial dimension and global integration. Other scholars, too, have talked about wider social and cultural changes that have affected the organisation and work (Richardson, 2002). Consequently, careers are becoming more boundary-less (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996), more protean (Hall, 1996) that embeds ideas around individual values and self-direction in career choices. This links to the growing importance of individual agency, with people needing to take much more control over their careers, as argued by

Betz and Hackett, 1987. As part of this career scholars point to the need for greater adaptability (Savickas, 2005) and employability (Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004).

Inkson (2004) suggests that in the past there were nine different metaphors to view careers – careers as inheritance, construction, cycle, fit, journey, relationship, role, resource and story. Now a new metaphor is being used – careers as board games where players must be more active, have strategies and build and use resources wisely. So, careers appear to be moving from linear to spiral development, with career paths now multidirectional, dynamic and fluid (Baruch, 2004). Others argue careers have become transitional, flexible and even the idea of what a successful career looks like is changing, with some scholars such as Pryer and Bright (2007) talking about a chaos theory of careers. No longer do people go through major career transitions over the lifespan (Super, 1980) but rather they experience mini-stages (Hall and Mirvis, 1995). These are short-cycle learning stages of exploration, trial, mastery then exit. Agency plays a key role and this necessitates the importance of career meta-competences (Hall and Mirvis, 1995) in a postmodern work environment.

In this context, careers now require two meta-competences. One involves identity growth. Not only should individuals understand their own professional identity but should also be prepared to develop sub-identities incorporating more skills, improving self-awareness and recognising individual strengths. The other meta-competence is increased adaptability, with readiness to embrace career and personal development. In many respects, these

concepts have parallels to the ideas of Bogo *et al.* (2013) and ideas that perhaps underpin some of the work investigating twenty-first century competences.

The growing debate around meta-competencies has encouraged strengths-based approaches. This reflects some of the concerns around competencies being generic. The strengths-based concept also puts personal agency into the career discussion. It is suggested that when competencies are being developed the detailed people perspective gets lost (Shippmann *et.al.*, 2000). The majority of this thinking has emerged from HR consultancies and has not yet engendered detailed scholarship and investigation. That said, Garcea, Isherwood and Linley (2011) and Garcea, Harrison and Linley (2014) suggest that strengths-based assessment is useful as a way of tackling the problem perceived by some organisations that competencies are a vehicle to create the well-rounded employee or professional, rather than accelerating talent and excellence. This too was a concern expressed by Garavan and McGuire (2001). The suggestion is that by factoring in strengths criticisms of competencies can be addressed. Some caution is required as Garcea and her co-authors work for Capp Consultancy and the case studies used are based on companies they have worked for, so there is a vested interest in the strengths-based approach being recognised.

That said, the notion of identifying individual strengths could be complementary to assisting competency approaches. Garcea, Isherwood and Linley (2011) and Garcea, Harrison and Linley (2014) argue individuals need to reflect on four areas. Realised strengths that are typically recognised

and used but sometimes individuals use them so much that they go unrecognised. Unrealised strengths are those that may be lying dormant as individuals have never had an opportunity to use them. Learned behaviours are those that you have learned to do and that you perform well but can be draining or de-motivating. Weaknesses are those things that weaken you and you perform badly and are rained doing them. It is argued it is weaknesses that are too often addressed by competencies.

For PA, there is relevancy. Competencies can be used to identify and help raise standards amongst practitioners and encourage more professionalisation, but a framework that also helps individuals understand their personal strengths and how these can be applied is important. This is about encouraging individuals to be more self-aware and how their behaviours can impact others. It is also useful perhaps as different strengths may be required in different organisational and cultural settings, reflecting the multiple identities that PA practitioners often hold. It potentially links to the idea of PA practitioners as knowledge workers. Here different practitioners bring different strengths to tackle a variety of different organisational issues. In other words, PA practitioners may need to have a core set of standard skills and behaviours, but it may be right that they have different strengths, this difference may be necessary given the variety of issues that are being asked to tackle. Also, the idea of postmodern careers and meta-competencies is also relevant in terms of professional identity and how PA practitioners see themselves developing and the career pathways available to them.

2.4.3. Organisational v professional competence and competencies

Much competency literature has focused on the organisation in terms of core competencies and there are numerous organisational specific studies that link to generic and job roles. Examples include the work Mitchell and Boak (2009) which look at competency frameworks in UK healthcare and Horton (2000) which look at competency management across the British civil service. The researcher has ruled out exploring in detail much of this literature as the focus of this paper is on devising a competency framework for a profession which can stand independently from the organisation in which that professional practice takes place (though at times it may need to be integrated into an organisational wide framework). Some ideas, however, discussed within this body of literature are worthy of exploring, in particular areas around best practice which can inform this enquiry.

Campion *et al.,* (2011) suggest 20 best practice requirements to competency modelling or frameworks. This is based on their academic expertise and review of other scholarship, as well managerial experiences working in Human Resource Management. The paper would have more weight if evidenced by additional primary data or validity testing, it does provide an insightful overview despite being US-centric.

	Analysing competency information (identifying competencies)
1	Considering organisational context
2	Linking competency models to organisational goals and objectives
3	Start at the top
4	Using rigorous job analysis methods to develop competencies
5	Considering future-orientated job requirements
6	Using additional unique methods
	Organising and presenting competency information
7	Defining the anatomy of a competency (the language of competency)
8	Defining levels of proficiency on competencies

9	Using organisational language
10	Including both fundamental (cross-job) and technical (job-specific) competencies
11	Using competency libraries
12	Achieving the proper level of granularity (number of competencies and amount of detail)
13	Using diagrams, pictures and heuristics to communicate competency models to employees
	Using competency information
14	Using organisational development techniques to ensure competency modelling acceptance and use
15	Using competencies to develop HR systems (hiring, appraisal, promotion, compensation)
16	Using competencies to align the HR system
17	Using competencies to develop a practical "theory" of effective job performance tailored to the organization
18	Using information technology to enhance the usability of competency models
19	Maintaining the currency of competencies over time
20	Using competency modelling for legal defensibility (eg test validation)

Table 2.8: Best Practices in Competency Modelling, Campion *et al.* (2009:230)

The division of analysing, organising and using competency information provides helpful guidance. It also links to the work of Soderquist *et al.* (2010) referenced earlier which also identified the critical role of job analysis and cross referencing this against actual job descriptions and the gaps this often reveals. Above all, the focus is on the usability of competencies.

The British Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) reinforces this best practice approach. It outlines the importance of detail balancing the need for guidance without the process becoming bureaucratic. In advice to members in its Competency Guidelines (July 2012:2) it suggests that competency frameworks must have measureable components, restrict

number and complexity of competencies, typically aiming for no more than 12 for any particular role, and arranging them into clusters to make the framework accessible. The framework should also contain clear definitions and examples for each competency.

Scholarly peer reviewed papers looking at devising competencies for professions appear to be more limited. Davies, Naughton and Rothwell (2004) outlined how the US Association of Training and Development (ASTD) established their competency framework that mirrors many of the best practice approaches suggested by Campion *et al.* (2011) in particular on the importance of keeping frameworks usable. Of relevance is the idea of layering with foundational competencies; building to areas of professional expertise and roles to reflect the diversity of practice.

Against this discussion of competencies, the work of scholars (Oughton, 2004: Gregory,2008; Sha, 2011; Jeffrey and Brunton, 2011) that address PR skills generally (and not PA specifically) appear limited, as suggested at the start of this section. This does not mean that their work is not of value as it helps explore what communication practitioners do and has transformed the debate around professionalism.

Oughton (2004) was one of the first UK scholars to use the term competencies in the context of PR by investigating the skills of local government communicators. At the time, he called for a national competency framework which could contribute to raising standards. Interestingly, Gregory

(2008) used the Universal Competency Framework model developed by UK consultants SHL that consists of eight competency factors, underneath which sit 20 competency dimensions, under which sit 112 components. She then used this framework to analyse communication practitioners in the UK's public and private sectors. What was produced was a list of suggested competencies with subtle differences of emphasis between the two sectors, rather than an overarching framework or model unpicking competence, competencies and linking these to a systematic body of knowledge.

Subsequent studies have followed in a similar manner. In his study based on the Corporate Communications Institute trends survey, Goodman (2006) identified 23 skills. Sha (2011) focused on the need for communicators to have skills in three areas – business, media and those relating to theoretical knowledge. So, reflections on general communication skills are not lacking in terms of available literature, but it is suggested that this work is repetitious and fails to add further insights that can add value to practice.

Of more help is the work of Jeffrey and Brunton (2011) who, working with academics and practitioners in New Zealand, identified competencies necessary to achieve the two main goals of communication practitioners - managing the communication process and managing relationships. In particular, their study also focused on personal attributes, with four types of characteristics perceived to be important – these are adaptability (covering empathy, common sense, flexibility); leadership (linked to strategic thinking); integrity (honesty, ethics) and ambition (confidence and drive). They argue

that these are distinct from competencies as they determine how well a competency can be performed and while competencies can be taught, these are fostered.

They also suggest that competencies have two dimensions: domain content and cognitive processing capacity. The cognitive abilities can be further sub-divided into domain specific abilities (those whose articulation define a particular occupation) and generic abilities (those that underpin all work-related activities regardless of occupation). This sub-division of competencies also mirrors the thinking of Cernicova, Dragmoir and Palea (2011). They talk of professional competencies (those competencies that are specific to a professional activity in order to successfully solve problem situations related to the respective profession), and transversal competencies (those that transcend a certain field of work). Given the growing importance of those competencies that are deemed important for twenty-first century work then this idea of sub-dividing competencies in this way may have merit in order to help identify what is core to the domain and what is necessary for successful careers generally. This has started to move PR scholarship into thinking about a better way to understand PR competencies and although different language is being used, it does start to provide greater connectivity to some of the competency scholarship. For example, Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) talk of social and meta-competencies that have a direct relationship to some of the behaviours identified.

What is reinforced again by these studies into PR is the lack of clarity in the terminology with knowledge, skills, personal attributes or characteristics and behaviours all used differently. Flynn (2014) states, the biggest discrepancy in PR scholarship is whether there is a difference between a skill and a competency, though it can be argued that this permeates the entire competency debate. Some scholars such as Chappell *et al. (*2003) suggest that in today's complex world the difference between skill and competency is shrinking and indeed Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) use the words skill and competency interchangeably. Yet the OECD (2005) study does distinguish, suggesting that competency is much bigger than skills.

This is why a return to Garavan and McGuire (2001) is useful at this stage and helps to simplify the matter and provides the terms of reference for this paper moving forward. A competence relates to a skill in a functional area that can be either domain specific or generic, so the term can be used interchangably. A competency focuses on associated behaviours and attitudes.   So together they provide a holistic view of individual capability. Knowledge – in all its forms - is used to support both competence and competency.

Despite some of these later studies connecting more to competency scholarship than others, there is still a sense that there is a generation of lists (see Appendix B for examples). At the same time, there has been little implicit work on the PA discipline as a subset of PR as a whole. These have been

general studies. Also, no study has explored more fully the idea of a framework that takes a more integrated approach.

Of note, however, is a more promising study by the European Communication Professional Skills and Innovation Programme (ECOPSI) that aims to map and evaluate current and future communication management skills of practitioners across Europe. Its May 2013 interim report draws on some competency scholarship and brings thoughts on PR skill-set based on fresh primary research in a useful summary (see overleaf). The eventual outcome of this study in terms of devising a useful diagnostic tool and more insightful perspective into communication competencies will make a valuable contribution to the debate. The focus, however, is on competencies for social media, internal and crisis communications and those of communication directors. PA is omitted enabling this study to benefit from its findings, as well as contribute to wider thinking.

Skills	Knowledge	Personal characteristics
Writing/oral communication	Business knowledge/literacy	Handling pressure
Project planning and management	Current awareness	Leadership
Critical thinking	Theoretical knowledge	Integrity/honesty/ethical
Problem solving	Knowledge of PR history	Objectivity
Media Skills	Knowledge of other cultures	Listening
Persuasion	Knowledge of communication models	Confidence/ambition
Strategic thinking	Knowledge of how to apply PR theory	Team player
Mentoring and coaching		Energy/motivation
Advanced communication skills		Discipline
IT skills (including new media channels)		Intelligence

Crisis management	Ability to get on with others/interpersonal skills
Research	Wide interests
Reading comprehension	Intellectual curiosity
Community relations	Creativity
Consumer relations	Flexibility
Employee relations	Judgement and decision making
Professional service skills	Time management
Social responsibility	Respect for hierarchy
PR ethics	Follows organisational rules
	Honesty
	Adaptability
	Integrity
	Ambition
	Reliable attendance
	Willingness to accept assignments
	Completes work on time

Table 2.9: ECOPSI Research Report Competency Summary (2013: 15-17)
Source: Based on the work of Pieczka (2002), Oughton (2004), Brown and Fall (2005), DPRG (2005), Goodman (2006), McCleneghan (2006), Schumann (2007), Gregory (2008), Schick and Mickeleit (2010), Jeffrey and Brunton (2011) and Sha (2011)

From a practical perspective, of relevance is the Government Communication

Professional Competency Framework (April 2013). This considers

communications in the context of the UK civil service, it does draw out specific

functional and behaviour competencies necessary for effective

communication practice. Here the competency framework is structured

around four stages of a strategic communication planning process: Insight,

Ideas, Implementation and Impact providing clarity. However, this framework

fails to connect fully to underpinning bodies of knowledge and to integrate the

more sophisticated thinking that has emerged around the competency work of

scholars such as Soderquist *et al*. (2010) and Delamare Le Deist and

Winterton (2005), nor does it reference the work of PR scholars such as Gregory (2008).

Moving away from communication specifically, a number of professional bodies have implemented competency frameworks. As part of the methodology for this research in addition to the Government Communications Professional Framework, three further frameworks from contrasting professional disciplines (Institute of Civil Engineers, Royal Pharmaceutical Society and ACCA) were reviewed against Campion *et al.*'s (2011) best practice approach and competency scholarship in order to gain further insights into practical application. The results will be reported in Chapter Four.

The key challenge is therefore ensuring a PA framework that is usable, connects to a clearly articulated body of knowledge, is granular with appropriate detail, reflects the diversity of practice and which is holistic grounded in the latest competency scholarship. In particular, that any framework must address issues around meta-competencies and the latest thinking around effectiveness in the twenty-first century workplace.

2.4.4. Epistemological tensions

Behind the different approaches to competencies lay underlying philosophical assumptions (Garavan and McGuire, 2001). Early work tended to take a positivistic perspective, free from context, focusing on function and job analysis. More recently work has tended to reflect on characteristics of individuals and the social context of work and the way individuals experience

work being integral to competence. This takes more of a postmodernist stance, incorporating complexity, uncertainity and other contextual factors. This approach connects more fully to the study of PA, given its role in the wider social world.

2.5. Concluding themes and reflections against research questions

There is clear scope to bring fresh insights. There is an opportunity to synthesise scholarship to elucidate new concepts and ideas – a gap in the literature exists. There is also the potential for competencies to provide a practical and tangible mechanism to embed self-awareness and reflective behaviours into practice. Atlhough work on PA competencies exists it can be argued that it lacks granularity. Also, competencies can be seen as a critical component in establishing professional identity and driving professionalism and effectiveness. Additionally, there is scope to reflect on some of the current thinking around careers and how this may have link to the identity of PA. Taken together, this has the potential to tackle the reputational issues suffered by practice.

There is also a possibility that a PA schema can be created that reflects the core and interdisciplinary nature of practice linking conceptual and practical knowledge. There are a variety of theories and ideas that can be integrated. There is clear evidence that a competency framework for PA can have detail by engaging with the richness of competency scholarship and best practice approaches. The challenge is ensuring this is dynamic, able to reflect the changes in the social world in which it operates and also one that addresses

the criticisms of competency approaches. Other challenges include the integration of short-term (lobbying) and longer-term (relationship building) activities.

Secondary sources have helped to inform the research questions in a number of ways. In respect of RQ1, looking at the shape of PA practice literature suggests the field is becoming more interdisciplinary with variety of roles and is also being influenced by the co-creational nature of public policy. For RQ2, the knowledge that underpins practice is extensive, well-researched and again reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the role, but what it lacks is clear structure. Little work exists that draws on scholarship from those looking at what constitutes knowledge itself, yet there is considerable insights to be gained from this that help shed light on the work of PA. For RQ3 and RQ4 that look at the skills and behaviours of PA, there are studies that look at these but these tend to lack substance and do not draw on the deeper insights from HRM scholarship that could add greater depth. Finally, in terms of RQ5 the literature has not revealed a specific competency framework but competency scholarship has revealed some relevant models and concepts that could be adapted and developed by PA. Taken together, the literature has revealed a number of lines of enquiry that can be expanded and developed by undertaking additional primary research in this field.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

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3.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological approach of this study. It firstly discusses the epistemological position taken outlining the overall research philosophy and justification for the stance of a critical realist. It then goes on to look at the overall research strategy as shaped by critical realism. The next section provides insight into the methodological choices for the primary data collection techniques and the way these techniques complimented each other in terms of addressing aspects of the overall aim, objectives and research questions. It then goes on to look in detail at how the data has been analysed. Finally, the chapter concludes by looking at the validity, reliability, ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

3.2. Research Philosophy: Epistemological Context

Research is personal and cannot be divorced from the way an individual researcher views the world. Saunders and Tosey (2013) argue, this idea relates to the researchers' understanding of what is considered acceptable knowledge and the process by which it is developed. Conducting research therefore requires rigour and a systematic approach. The use of an agreed paradigm – or worldview - as suggested by Houghton, Hunter and Maskell (2012) is a way of expressing the researchers understanding of knowledge creation and provides a bridge between the aims of the study and the methods used to achieve that aim.

In this context, Houghton, Hunter and Maskell (2012) suggest that a paradigm is made up of ontology (beliefs about reality); epistemology (the relationship between the researcher and what can be known – the creation of knowledge) and methodology (how to carry out the research). It is important that these three concepts are integrated, providing a frame of reference for any research study. It is also worth noting the importance of axiology (the researcher's view of the role of values in research) and how far the researcher feels that his or her personal values play a role in knowledge creation. These ideas will be explored in more detail now to help contextualise the overall approach to this study and how the detailed methodology has been determined.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) suggest that there are four broad philosophical approaches to research and although there are variations within these they generally capture the overall nature of research itself. It is argued that that those who are interested in predicting outcomes and creating law-like generalisations follow the tradition of the laboratory scientist focusing on cause and effect. This reflects the philosophy of positivism and builds on the work of Auguste Comte (1798-1857). This scientific method proposes and test theories in a highly measured and structured way. It needs to be values free so that it can be as objective as possible. Here deductive techniques predominate involving quantitative methods using mass samples often through surveys in order to test a particular proposition.

Also, associated with scientific enquiry is the idea of realism as suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). Here reality exists independent of the

mind and what the researcher's senses show her or him is the truth. There are two forms of realism. Direct realism argues that what is experienced is an accurate representation, whereas a critical realist suggests that what is initially experienced is then subjectively processed by the mind. So, for critical realists they must find out what is experienced and the structures and relationships that lie beneath it.

Where the researcher is interested in deeper insights and perhaps a more exploratory approach into subjective meaning rather than providing absolute generalisations, then the philosophical approach of interpretivism as outlined first by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is relevant. As summarised by Saunders and Tosey (2013), this relates to the study of social phenomena in their natural setting and tends to focus on people more than objects, reflecting on the social world in which people live. Here the research is value bound in the sense that what is being researched is a function of circumstances and individual perspectives. With this approach, inductive techniques predominate using smaller samples through interviews and focus groups. Finally, for researchers who adopt the approach of pragmatism, the focus is the practical consequences of the research. No single viewpoint can give the full picture and that there may be multiple realities.

In addition, associated with the qualitative approach, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest two other paradigms. Firstly, critical theory that emphasises social realities incorporating historical situated structures. Here ideas around socio-economic and political values are seen to be of critical importance and

research is highly value-dependent. The other is constructivism that takes the view that reality is socially constructed. There may be many different interpretations of a situation depending on an individual's own worldviews and experiences.

Reflecting on these paradigms, a positivistic epistemological stance was initially envisaged that aimed to develop a competency framework that could be tested, confirmed then replicated in its entirety. As suggested by Remenyi *et al.* (1998), with positivism knowledge is based only on observable phenomena and is gained from the accumulation of facts, statistics and data that form the basis of law-like generalisations. The approach is objective with the view that reality is set and is independent from social actors. It takes a deductive approach allowing the development of a conceptual and theoretical structure prior to testing. Quantitative methods predominate with statistical and numerical measurement.

This approach mirrors the early work of competency scholars with the focus on job roles and function free from the context in which work operates. The researcher felt that the creation of a competency framework with an agreed set of skills, behaviours and knowledge could be established and applied in its entirety. The critical review of the literature revealed key theoretical ideas and concepts that could be tested using primary data from the research. Here the literature review plays a deductive role.

As the study progressed, a number of areas for reflection emerged. Firstly, the systematic literature review also revealed a complexity of themes and concepts that the researcher felt would not lend themselves to easy statistical examination, in particular areas around multiple identities, cultural hybridity and the evolving nature of the public policy environment. This suggested the need to reflect more deeply on the social environment in which PA operates. Secondly, the epistemological tensions within the field of competency studies also became apparent with a move to more interpretivist approaches (Garavan and McGuire, 2001) as a way of more accurately reflecting the complexity of work and the social and cultural setting in which work takes place. Thirdly, many of the typologies and frameworks that originated from the positivist tradition have received growing criticism as being too narrow and a PA framework will potentially require greater flexibility. So, there is a need to take on board the criticism of competency approaches and possibly some of the early (though as yet untested) ideas around strengths.

Consequently, the researcher moved away from the positivistic stance as being too constraining and impractical and felt that perhaps interpretivism provided a better overarching epistemological position. With this approach, it is suggested that the world is far too complex to create definitive laws and generalisations and a true understanding requires greater insights into human interaction. Given the reality of what is being observed is highly complex – that of PA practice and policy formation – then positivism feels too narrow. The contemporary political environment in which this research sits is looking as much at people and institutions as it does at competencies and skills and

requires a richness of information and insight from a range of social actors involved in the process. Interpretivism suggests the need to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors and that the study of people and institutions do not lend themselves to the approach of the natural scientist.

Here an inductive approach dominates whereby patterns are established from data in order to devise theory and conceptual frameworks. Research may evolve, emerge and develop as it progresses in order to seek meaning and understanding. Induction allows the data to guide the research with observation leading to explanation and theories. Here the researcher is part of the research instrument itself. Induction allows for qualitative methods such as open-ended, dynamic and flexible questioning through interviews and focus groups, as well as observation. This enables a depth of understanding, penetrating rational or superficial responses and engenders a richer source of ideas through the use of language as opposed to statistics. Here the literature plays more of an inductive role with the view that helps to provide context and themes in which the study sits but does not necessarily provide predetermined theories or conceptual frameworks that are being tested.

Again, although the researcher felt this epistemological stance was a better choice there were still constraints. Some ideas from the literature, such as Campion *et al.'s* (2011) best modelling approach, lent itself to wider testing and the ability to add detail to the broad nature of the competency work in the field of PA clearly existed. The study also lent itself to test whether PA

practice would welcome a competency approach as part of its growing professionalism. This remains within the deductive tradition.

Consequently, the researcher felt multiple methods would be appropriate. As suggested by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) multiple methods can be helpful if they provide better opportunities to answer the research questions and to better evaluate whether the findings are robust and can be trusted. This is a view supported by Hyde (2000) who argues qualitative and quantitative methods can be used with any research philosophy. He goes as far to say this approach is post-positivist.

Post-positivists believe that knowledge must be subjected to wide critical examination to help expose the reality as closely as possible (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Here research questions can be approached using both qualitative and quantitative approaches and from different perspectives. Often sequential exploratory mixed methods research design is used. Firstly, an exploratory qualitative study involving interviews or focus groups with stakeholders which then moves on to a wider quantitative phase. This is a form of methodological pluralism as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2000). Nonetheless, the debate between whether quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined has been a source of controversy between the competing standpoints. There are those that take an absolutionist and purist view that the underlying assumptions between the two approaches are so different that they cannot be combined (Petter and Gallivan, 2004). Yet there are those that take a more pragmatic approach such as Tashakkori and

Teddlie (1998) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who suggest that researchers should use whatever works even if this means switching between the different paradigms. The key is that techniques should complement each other as outlined by Creswell, Fetters and Ivankova (2004) and the underlying tensions between the two approaches recognised when analysing data.

3.3. Critical Realism – A way forward

From a post-positivist position, Houston (2001) and McEvoy and Richards (2003) suggest the concept of critical realism has value as an alternative to the traditional positivist and interpretivist conflict. Here the work of Bhaskar (1989) is of relevance as it focuses on the social world of human interaction. As suggested by Kilduff, Mehra and Dunn (2011), there are unobservable forces and structures at work that exist independently of the mind but are real and are best investigated through observation rather than by quantitative methods. Often these structures encompass aspects of power and the new knowledge produced often challenges existing power structures in society, industry and government. This study is in the heart of power structures of influence and advocacy perhaps challenging aspects of contemporary PA practice.

The concept of critical realism and the post-positivist stance is in keeping the growing interest of viewing PR and the strategic nature of communications from a postmodernist lens. Scholars such as Holtzhausen (2000) argue that a postmodern analysis of PR offers a new critical approach to PR theory and practice enabling discussions around PR practitioners as organisational

activists often reflecting the increasing lack of certainty in the environment in which organisations operate. Lack of certainty in the environment is one that has been developed by Bauman (2000) coming up with the term liquid modernity to define the increased plasticity of the structures and systems of today's world.

Indeed, Ihlen and Verhoeven (2009, 2014) suggest the growing importance of a critical realist framework through which to analysis PR practice and this includes the disciplines within the PR family such as PA. They argue it offers a solution for going beyond the deadlock between positivists (or realists) and social constructionists in the social sciences. It acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and also the existence of a reality independent of our interpretations. Here strategic communication (and this includes PA) can be explained and analysed as a social-phenomena and should not be constrained by certain methodological approaches and should use different levels of analyses. In this respect, this study builds on this emerging field of analysis in strategic communication.

Identifying an overall research paradigm is important. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) suggest three reasons why this is vital. This helps to inform the research design in terms of both the evidence to be gathered and the processes of analysis. It enables the researcher to think about what will or will not work for the questions being explored, for example why something is happening rather than describing what is happening. Finally, the different research traditions allow the researcher to adapt to various constraints. The

section below now goes into the research strategy in more detail drawing on the paradigm of critical realism.

3.4. Research Strategy: Critical Realism and Mixed Methods

Critical realism is in the tradition of those who have challenged the qualitative versus quantitative debate (Bryman, 1992; Bryman and Bell, 2003; Hammersley, 1992; Layder, 1993; Roberts, 2002). These scholars have taken what is known as an anti-conflationist view by stating that the differences between qualitative and quantitative research is not as suggested by McEvoy and Richards (2006) an all-embracing dichotomy and are not as extreme as often thought. Supporting the view of Creswell, Fetters and Ivankova (2004) these anti-conflationist scholars argue that the key is to distinguish the logic and justification for the specific methods being deployed and unlike pragmatists they argue that combining approaches must be principled and have a common ontological and epistemological position.

From a critical realist perspective, it is not possible to comprehend the full nature of reality unless there is due consideration to the processes and structures that underpin it. This is important in the field of PA which is a discipline that is at the centre of a wide variety of processes and structures both within organisations, and between organisations and the policy environment which itself is a complex web of connections between all those inputting into the decision-making process.

According to Bhaskar (1978, 1989), there are three ontological domains or modes of reality. This has been summarised by McEvoy and Richards (2006) as: the empirical (those aspects of reality that can be experienced either directly or indirectly); the actual (those aspects of reality that occur, but may not necessarily be experienced); and the real or deep structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena. It is suggested that these causal mechanisms cannot necessarily be understood directly by observation, but are inferred through a combination of empirical investigation and theory construction. Taken together these modes of reality help provide a deep level of explanation and understanding.

Such an approach deals with the researcher's concern with positivism. That the study could not just focus on observable events and facts as these are often influenced by hidden factors. PA is a maturing discipline with a complex set of tensions embedded in the heart of the policy process. It is not a neatly enclosed environment. Secondly, positivism explores relationships between elements of a social system in isolation in a closed system away from external influences. A study of PA needs to take into account the interactions between mechanisms and the contexts in which they occur. A view suggested by Collier (1994) arguing that critical realists believe that the real world operates on lots of different levels and is multi-dimensional. With this approach in mind, critical realists suggest the idea of tendencies rather than empirical generalisations (Lawson, 2003). The concept of tendencies is an interesting one as it argues for an inclination towards a particular characteristic or behaviour and allows for a more fluid stance. This may be significant in any

establishment of a competency framework that allows some degree of flexibility and incorporates the idea of being forward rather than backward thinking.

Additionally, the critical realist stance addresses the concerns of interpretivism. Although critical realists believe in the value of discourse, human perception and motivation and other human reasons all of which can provide causal explanations for events (Bhaskar, 1989), this does need to be related to underlying social structures which may enable or constrain the actions of individuals or to the social networks in which social actors are embedded (Granovetter, 1985; Williams, 2003). This helps to provide context to a study of PA that is deeply rooted in organisational and public policy structures and that perceptions may well be grounded in the structure in which individuals operate. Here power is of interest as the relationship between the decision maker and the lobbyist is often seen as one of power and who has ultimate influence over the other. This will vary depending on the issue under discussion and where knowledge of the subject under discussion resides.

According to McEvoy and Richards (2006), the logic that underpins critical realism is retroduction. This means moving from the level of observations and lived experience to talk about the structures and mechanisms that account for the phenomena being explored. For critical theorists, triangulation has relevance here to ensure that the subject is fully explored. Triangulation means using more than one method or sources of data (Bryman and Bell, 2003). According to Risjord, Moloney and Dunbar (2002), triangulation is

used for three reasons: confirmation, completeness and abductive inspiration. The end of this methodological chapter explores the idea of triangulation and these three concepts in more detail in terms of its relevance for this study and how the critical realist lens impacts on the concepts of validity and reliability. It is, however, the concept of abductive inspiration that is important for the critical realist who is trying to go much deeper into the subject matter under examination and is closer to the idea of retroduction or logical inference. Here the focus is on trying to find the best explanations to observed phenomena.

Domain Level

| Real | Actual | Empirical |

Entity Level

| Structures and mechanisms with enduring properties that have the potential to generate actual phenoomena | Phenomena that actually occur | Phenomena that are experienced |

This Study
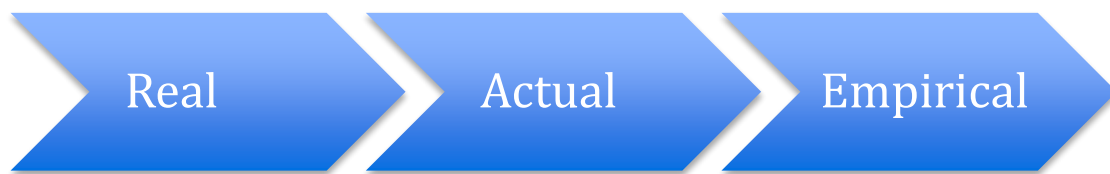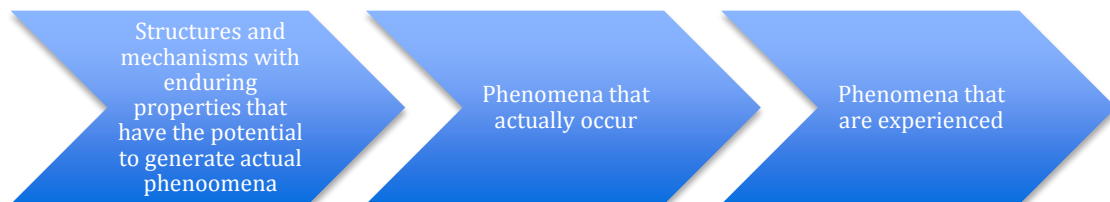
| Literature Review Interviews Content Analysis | Interviews Survey | Interviews Survey |

Figure 3.1.   The three ontological domains based on Bhaskar (1978) and related to this study

Each of the methodological approaches will be explored in the detail shortly, but an overview is outlined here to aid understanding. The role of the systematic literature review can be associated with both inductive and deductive techniques. The literature review helped to identify emerging themes and concepts that underpin the study. It performed both an exploratory and explanatory role helping to understand the context of the practice.

Content analysis explored the competency frameworks of four professional bodies against Campion *et al.* (2011) best practice approach. This provided insight into the type of frameworks currently used enabling benchmarks of what might be possible and allowing practical insights to be gained.

Building on the inductive tradition, the researcher believed the study lent itself to exploring the meaning and content of knowledge and skills in the domain of PA through use of semi-structured interviews. This enabled a broad perspective and rich data to be gathered and falls firmly into the interpretivist tradition.

Then to help look at the spread and level of knowledge and competencies across the domain, a survey of PA practitioners was used to help complement the data emerging from the interviews. The researcher did undertake serious reflection on to the role the survey would play in exploring the relationships between knowledge, competencies and practice. Original thinking was that the survey would in part help to validate the data coming out of the qualitative

work by testing out various hypotheses. This would follow the traditional approach suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and falls firmly in the deductive tradition. It was clear, however, when the survey was being devised that such a traditional approach would not be possible given the complexity of themes emerging when may not lend themselves to simplistic answers, concerns about statistical robustness and size of samples and the timescales of the PhD study itself. Instead, the survey was designed to be complementary in nature, ascertaining the level of interest and appetite for a competency-based approach in practice and to illuminate PA practitioners existing understanding of the knowledge and competencies necessary for effective practice.

Taken together, these primary and secondary data gathering techniques can help elucidate different facets of the overall PhD aim, objectives and detailed questions. The following section looks at each of these detailed techniques in turn and their contribution to this study.

3.5. Research Methods: Primary Data Gathering

The data gathering process has three distinct parts leading first on an interpretive approach to shape and inform the study. Prior to this a detailed review of competency frameworks in other professional domains will take place in order to benchmark and map the current state of frameworks against practice and scholarship. A diagram outlining the research process is summarised overleaf.
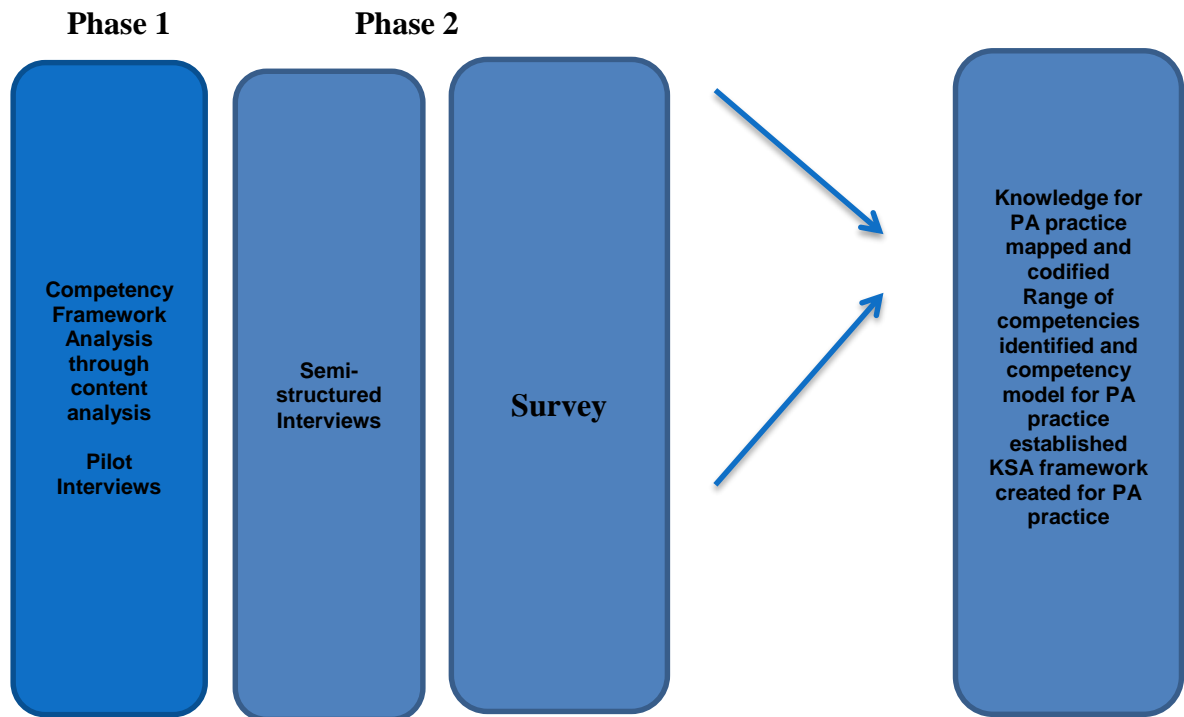
Figure 3.2. A summary of the Research Process ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

To re-cap, these data gathering processes were structured around investigating the evolving nature of PA in order to establish the contemporary knowledge, skills and competencies for effective PA practice.

There are three key objectives for this research that are supported by five specific research questions (RQs).

- To understand the PA BoK necessary for effective PA practice *(supported by RQ1, RQ2)*

- To capture the competencies required for effective PA practice *(supported by RQ1, RQ3, RQ4)*

- To devise a competency framework to help deliver PA effectiveness and professionalism *(supported by RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)*

RQ1: What is the shape of current PA practice and how if at all has it changed?

RQ2: What is the knowledge that underpins practice?

RQ3: What do PA practitioners do and the skills necessary?

RQ4: How should PA practitioners behave?

RQ5: What does a contemporary competency framework look like for PA?

These phases are looked at in detail now and their contribution to addressing these questions outlined.

3.5.1. Phase One (Pilot)

Mapping Competency Frameworks

There exist a number of practical insights that can be gained from analysing existing competency frameworks from other disciplines. Of relevance is the Government Communication Professional Competency Framework (GCPCF, April 2013). This places communications in the context of the UK civil service and draws out specific functional and behaviour competencies necessary for effective communication practice. Here the competency framework is structured around four stages of a strategic communication planning process: Insight, Ideas, Implementation and Impact providing clarity.

Moving away from communication specifically, a number of professional bodies have implemented frameworks. As part of the methodology for this research as well as the GCPCF above, three other frameworks from

contrasting professional disciplines (Institute of Civil Engineers; Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the ACCA) were reviewed against Campion *et al.* (2011) best practice approach in order to gain further insights into practical application. These frameworks were chosen randomly to reflect three completely different professional domains to see what could be learned from other approaches in understanding competencies.

Campion *et al.* (2011) suggest a highly structured approach to competency development and implementation. At the same time, none of those interviewed mentioned competency frameworks, however, one PA agency had in place a PA specific framework and this has been included for analysis. An analysis of these frameworks can be found in Chapter Four and this has directly contributed to RQ5. Extracts from these frameworks can be found in Appendix C.

Pilot interviews

Six pilot interviews were undertaken in order to ascertain whether there was an appetite for an improved understanding of PA. It also enabled the researcher to test interview questions to ensure the information garnered would help to address the overall research aim. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate. According to King (2004) this type of interview falls firmly into the qualitative approach. Here the researcher has themes and questions but these may vary from time to time given different individual and organisational contexts and the order may vary depending on the way the interviewee responds.

A non-standardised approach to interviews was deemed appropriate to allow for rich data to be collected enabling respondent insights to be gathered. Non-standardised interviews, although based on predetermined questions, permit some degree of variation from interview to interview to allow for organisational context and the nature of discussion (Healey, 1991; Healey and Rawlinson, 1993, 1994). In this case the researcher needed to have some flexibility to take into account the variation of respondents for example, PA practitioners working in agency and those in-house have different work experiences. Moving forward the variation would be required for those on the receiving end of lobbying, namely politicians. The grid below provides context to those interviewed.

Interviewee 1	In-house: trade association
Interviewee 2	In-house: private sector: health
Interviewee 3	Agency
Interviewee 4	Agency
Interviewee 5	Freelance
Interviewee 6	Senior Recruitment Consultant

Table 3.1: Summary of pilot interviewees

A key change made after the pilot interviews were the number of questions asked. It became clear that in an approximately one hour interview the questions had to go straight to the heart of the subject and wider information could be obtained by allowing individuals to talk more freely around knowledge, skills and behaviours. What became apparent was the idea of capturing skills and behaviours and the role of a body of knowledge

engendered interest and gave the researcher confidence to progress the study and acted as a source of validation. The data from the pilot interviews are integrated into the qualitative findings in Chapter Five and contribute to all five RQs as outlined in more detail below.

Although in business research it is recommended not to include pilot study material in the main study (Peat *et al.*, 2002), there are other scholars (Thabane *et al.*, 2010) who argue that data from pilot studies can be included when the same methodology has been followed and that there has been no fundamental change to the instrument being used to gather the data. Concerns about using pilot data tend to be associated with quantitative studies when there is a higher possibility of data being contaminated due to the research tool being modified post pilot study. Contamination is less of a concern in qualitative studies as data collection tends to be progressive, in that second and subsequent interviews in a series should be better than the previous ones as the interviewer gains insights from previous interviews as argued by Holloway (1997). When reflecting on the pilot study methods and sample these are fully aligned to those of the full qualitative study and as such the researcher believed it important to use the rich data gathered to strengthen the findings of the main study.

3.5.2. Phase Two (Part A) - Inductive enquiry through semi-structured interviews

This phase of the study fell firmly into an exploratory approach trying to find out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess

phenomena in a new light' (Robson, 2002:59). It was intended to help clarify the state of PA practice and key issues affecting the domain, to provide rich insights into the role and level of knowledge within PA practice and garner insights into how the value of competencies is being integrated and used in practice. It falls into an interpretive tradition in respect of trying to understand and investigate the social world.

Semi-structured interviews with PA consultancies, practitioners, organisations using PA and those involved in policy formation, for example civil servants and politicians. As emerged from the pilot interviews, a semi-structured approach allows topics to be covered through questioning whilst at the same time allow some variation to take into account the flow of conversation and themes or ideas that emerge. This allows for a wider perspective to develop on the social world under study and more insight to be gathered about how the social actors in this world operate and the skills and knowledge required. Both structured and unstructured interviews could potentially allow themes and ideas to be lost by either their too narrow or too broad approach.

The researcher ruled out focus groups as it was felt PA practitioners are part of a 'closed' knowledge network and do not like sharing insights openly with each other fearing they will lose personal and organisational competitive advantage. Individual interviews allow for confidentiality and anonymity.

Qualitative studies are, however, subjective and can lead to bias. Reflexivity helps allowing for deep reflection and Hegelund (2005) argues objectivity can

be improved by testing the accuracy of data, ensuring the stated methodological foundation has been rigorously applied and through evaluation including whether the findings are useful telling the reader something new. He also suggests that triangulation or crystallization is adopted using two or more independent sources of data are used to check the data is telling you what you think the data is telling you.

This does not necessarily mean integrating quantitative methods, but by incorporating a number of qualitative data sources. The researcher had intended to integrate some element of ethnography into the study but this was not possible given the timescales of the project. This would have enabled qualitative concerns to be partially addressed by adopting an additional qualitative method in the study in line with Hegelund (2005). Consequently, the researcher adopted a rigorous approach to transparency when analysing data obtained through semi-structured interviews to minimise bias by adopting a grounded approach as outlined in the data analysis section.

In addition to the six pilot interviews, a further 25 interviews were conducted bringing the total to 31 (29 individuals with direct involvement in PA, and two individuals that could bring grater insights into competency development). A summary can be found here and a detailed breakdown of the respondent profile can be found in Appendix D.

Agency	Freelance	In-house	Decision maker	Other
8	5	10	4	4

Table 3.2: Summary of respondents

As an overview, the eight agency respondents consisted of those working for both large and medium-sized London-based PA agencies, all of whom worked for a range of public, private and not-for-profit clients; the five freelancers all had experience of holding in-house and agency roles; the ten in-house individuals were split with six from the private sector (pharmaceuticals, financial services, motor industry, higher education, media, and training), and four from the public and not-for-profit sector (agriculture, medical, charity and oil/gas). So, there is a slight agency bias though the freelancers were able to talk about their experiences of doing PA in-house to slightly re-balance the sample. Decision makers represented including a member of the House of Lords, a member of the Welsh Assembly, a civil servant and special advisor. Others interviewed because of their insight included an academic involved in the CIPR Public Affairs Diploma, a consultant specialising in internal communication competencies and Nick Helsby, a senior PA recruitment consultant and responsible for the Watson Helsby Public Affairs Report. Taken together, it was felt the insights gained from speaking to these individuals would provide useful insights into the theory and practice of PA and the changing political landscape. Care was also taken to ensure that between the agency and freelance respondents some individuals had experience of working in the devolved institutions.

Sampling techniques broadly fall into two categories probability or representative sampling or non-probability or judgmental sampling. Given the qualitative nature Phase Two, a non-probability or non-random approach was

used. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) suggest the issue of sampling size for non-probability approaches is ambiguous therefore being clear on the relationship between the sample and purpose of the research is important. The researcher needs to be guided by what is being investigated. Patton (2002) argues in particular the researcher needs to reflect on what will have credibility and the resources available to gather and interpret the data. For this study, the researcher was guided by the concept of data saturation – that is keep going until the new data gathered fails to bring fresh insights. Turning to Creswell (2007) he argues undertaking 25-30 interviews for a general study is normally acceptable and this was adopted as a guide for this research.

A blend of convenience and snowball sampling was used. The researcher knows a number of PA practitioners through her early career as a Public Affairs Manager for BT (1989-95) and this was the starting point for the interview process. These individuals then subsequently recommended others who they felt would contribute to the study. This technique is prone to bias as in this case the initial chosen individuals may have similar views to the researcher or may be familiar with the views held. That said, care was taken to ensure a broad mix of individual from the researcher's network and with the additional snowball sampling individuals unknown to the researcher were obtained. Again, there is an issue of bias as argued by Lee (1993) as often respondents themselves recommend people like themselves and inevitably the sample becomes homogeneous and not as representative as it could be. Reflexivity and including a quantitative approach aimed to address this issue.

Overall, twenty-two interviews were face-to-face with nine conducted by telephone. Traditionally face-to-face interviews have been considered the most effective way of gathering deep insights. As argued by Holstein and Guibrium (2003: 3) qualitative interviews are 'a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives' and in the context of this study their work life and experiences. Although the use of telephones for collecting quantitative data is common practice and well discussed in the literature using telephones in a qualitative context is less well developed and tend to focus on the negative suggesting that the data collected is less rich (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury, 2013; Novick, 2008). For this study, diary commitments of both the researcher and interviewees made it difficult for the researcher to visit all those willing to be interviewed, especially those working with devolved institutions in Wales and Scotland.

In these circumstances, scholars such as Cachia and Millward (2011) suggest that telephone interviews provide greater flexibility and enable enhanced access to geographically dispersed interviewees and should be considered as a viable alternative. Some scholars (Cachia and Millward, 2011; Lechuga, 2012) suggest that there are methodological strengths of conducting qualitative interviews by telephone such as reinforcing anonymity and privacy. Drabble *et al.* (2016) in an extensive comparable study suggested that telephone interviews can be as viable as face to face in collecting rich narrative data. As such, the researcher felt confident that the data gathered via the telephone would be valuable and contribute fully to the overall study.

In order to increase reliability, in most cases the interviews were audio recorded and supported by hand written notes. In three cases, there were technical issues with the equipment, and in two cases it was not deemed appropriate as the respondents wanted to be interviewed in a public place and the use of a recorder would have sparked too much interest. For these five cases, the researcher had to rely on hand written notes only.

There are advantages and disadvantages of audio recording (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002). The main benefit is it allows the interviewer to concentrate on the respondent, ask probing questions and an accurate and unbiased record exists. It also means direct quotes can be obtained. It does, however, sometimes inhibit respondents and there is the time required to transcribe the recording. On balance, the researcher felt the use of an audio-recorder would support rather than hinder the interview process but felt it was also important to take extensive notes in part in case of technical failure but also to maintain focus as indicated by Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005).

All interviews used open questions designed to encourage respondents to be extensive and unconstrained in their answers.   It also allows for probing to help draw out more information of interest. This style of questioning also enables the clarification of any misunderstanding by rephrasing the original questions (Torrington, 1991). This was one of the considerations prior to affirming the semi-structured and open-ended approach.   During the pilot phase the researcher needed to clarify on occasion differences between behaviours and skill, as well as provide more explanation to probe on the

theories, ideas and concepts that support what PA does. At the same time, such as approach enabled more of the complexity of work to be captured as suggested by Garavan and McQuire (2001).

Mikecz (2012) argues interviewing 'elites' is challenging given issues around gaining access, time pressures as interviewees can often be impatient, commercial confidentiality, privilege and power making the interviewer feel as if the interviewee is doing them a 'favour'. Although interviewing professionals is less well researched there are some parallels in terms of time pressure, access and commercial confidentiality. In part, this is why the number of questions was reduced from the pilot phase. This allowed participants to take the interview in their own direction that still allowed rich data to be collected, and also if the interview had to be kept short then key information could still be captured. The issue of consent also became incredibly important to reassure participants that commercial information would not be shared. At the same time, participants were communicators and the researcher was conscious of needing to encourage participants to talk about their work in their own words, and not that of someone used to shaping messages. To do this, the researcher tried to put each participant at ease by explaining why the subject was of interest given her own background in the field thus making the participants feel they were talking to one of their own.

As indicated above, a consent form was obtained for each interview to reassure participants of their anonymity and for obtaining permission for the interview to be recorded. This falls firmly into the guidelines of an ethical

approach to data gathering. A fuller discussion on research ethics will follow later in this chapter but at all stages the rights of the participants were fully considered.

A grid below provides a summary of the interview questions and how these relate to the five RQs. The pilot interviews had demonstrated the need for brevity in questioning to allow PA practitioners time to talk generally and engage in conversation about the discipline. A specific question on competency frameworks was ruled out after the pilot interviews as this tended to require too much explanation defining competencies and individuals getting confused as to functional and behaviours. The researcher felt it was best to allow individuals to talk about what they did using any terminology.

Interview Questions (core)	Supporting RQs
Tell me your thoughts on the state of PA practice in the UK today? *Probe: How is it evolving if at all?*	RQ1
How would you sum up what PA practitioners do? *Probe: What sort of skills are necessary?*	RQ3
What sort of issues do you think affect PA practice?	RQ1
What are your feelings about PA as a profession and the concept of professionalism?	RQ1,2,3,4,5
What makes PA effective and what do you think effectiveness means to PA? *Probe: How does transparency fit into this?*	RQ1,2,3,4,5
What sort of things do you feel a PA practitioner needs to know? *Probe: Where do you feel a PA practitioner gets their knowledge from? Day to day knowledge (practical) and the knowledge that explains the what and why of PA.* *Probe: How is some of this shared or taught?*	RQ2,3

How should PA people behave?   RQ4

Probe: What about trying to bring together some of the behaviours, skills and knowledge?

Table 3.3: Table of Interview Questions

3.5.3. Phase Two (Part B) - Survey

Survey

Initially following the guidelines outlined by Oppenheim (1992), a survey was developed to help elucidate the spread and level of knowledge and competencies across the domain of PA. The survey is more usually associated with the deductive approach and is frequently used to provide answers to questions around how many, how much.

As Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) argue mixed methods can be useful in helping to provide greater insights and improve the trustworthiness of the data gathered and interferences made. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) argue that mixed methods are useful when they help to elucidate different aspects of the research question. This is relevant to this study as at this point it moves into an explanatory phase trying to understand and explain the different relationships between the variables of knowledge and competency.

A further reason why mixed-methods has been adopted for this study is that it enables triangulation. As Smith (1975) argues both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques have different strengths and weaknesses. By using a variety of methods greater confidence can be

placed in the conclusion. It also reflects the critical realist philosophical stance of wishing to explore the subject from a variety of perspectives.

A summary of Oppenheim's (1992:8) 14-step approach to survey design is outlined here in summary and typifies the standard approach to initially using qualitative work to inform quantitative research.

1	Decide the aims of the study and possible theories to be investigated
2	Review the relevant literature, discussions with informants and interested organisations
3	Preliminary conceputalisation of the study, followed by in-depth exploratory interviews; revised conceptualisation and research objectives
4	Deciding the study design – feasibility, limitations, cost etc
5	Decide which hypotheses will be investigated; making these specific to the situation
6	Designing the necessary research instruments – type of questions
7	Doing the pilot work to try out the instruments and make revisions if appropriate
8	Designing the sample
9	Drawing the sample
10	Doing the field work and gathering the data
11	Processing the data
12	Doing the statistical analysis
13	Assembling the results and testing the hypotheses
14	Writing the research report

Table 3.4: A summary of Oppenheim (1992:8) 14-step survey design process

As the researcher approached steps four and five above, the first consideration to the survey design was the sampling frame. Given the population under study, a non-probability method was used as the use of probability techniques were ruled out as there is no database or list of PA practitioners against which these could be used. Such a non-probability

approach mirrored that used for the semi-structured interviews but in this instance a self-selection convenience approach was adopted.

The researcher had the agreement of the three professional bodies - the CIPR, PRCA and the APPC – that they would distribute the survey to their members. The PR Academy which run the CIPR Public Affairs Diploma also agreed to send the survey to current and past students. The use of non-probability and self-selection does impact on generalisability. With self-selection, the survey is publicised and the researcher collects data from those who respond and it may be only those with very firm views on the subject are interested enough to do so which may lead to bias. This causes issues around representation.

When conducting a survey an understanding of the sample size as it relates to confidence levels is important. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), researchers normally work to 95% confidence level of certainty. The concept of confidence is a critical component in research as the investigator needs to draw conclusions from the statistical analysis undertaken. The process of coming up with conclusions from the population under study is known as statistical inference and allows the researcher to calculate how probable it is that the results, given the sample size, could have been obtained by chance.

Obtaining a high confidence level was always going to be challenging given the nature of PA practice, in particular when there is no benefit in it for the

practitioner in terms of spending time filling in the survey. With a population size of around 4000 individuals, it is suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) that around 340 responses would give a margin error of 5%. The researcher felt this figure was never going to be achievable due to pressures of time and lack of relevance with which that many practitioners would view the survey. The support of the professional bodies it was felt would help encourage participation but without additional incentives obtaining high response rates was potentially a challenge. With a 393 response for the VMA Survey in 2012 (as discussed in the literature) did remarkably well but this was a survey conducted by recruitment consultants that had the added incentive of offering job advice and opportunities.

There was also a timing issue as the quantitative work fell in a general election year and also at the same time that PA practitioners were responding to the various consultation documents issued by the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists. After consulting the APPC, it was agreed the best time for responses would be during purdah when all lobbying stops between the calling of the general election and polling day. After this date, with a new government in place PA practitioners would be tied up with understanding the complexity, challenges and opportunities of the new government.

In addition to concerns about response rates, it was also during steps four and five that the researcher started to question the role the survey would play. Initial analysis from the semi-structured interviews demonstrated an appetite to understand more about PA practice amongst practitioners, and a number of

key behaviours and skills were highlighted. At the same time, there appeared to be curiosity about the theories that might underpin the practice.   It was the issue of determining which hypotheses to investigate that vexed the researcher and how these hypotheses would add value to the research especially if number of responses were low.

The concern focused on four broad areas. Firstly, how to construct research questions that would enable statistical analysis through simplification and still remain meaningful, and secondly, how to construct a question relating to theoretical underpinning for example ideas around social constructivism or resource dependency theory without requiring extensive explanation. At the same time, a whole range of different ideas around competencies emerged including those that are core and those that are more generic. Finally, the idea of exploring three research subjects of behaviours, skills and knowledge in one survey without it becoming too time consuming for respondents concerned the researcher.

In order to address this issue, the researcher explored scholarship that looked at the role of reflexivity from a mixed methods perspective, and also reflected on the critical realist epistemological stance for guidance. Cheek *et al.* (2015) talk of dynamic reflexivity and its importance in enabling flexible, emergent qualitatively driven inductive mixed and multiple method research designs. Here the importance is placed on understanding as much about how things were done as what was done.   This allows for greater transparency in research design.   They argue this does not mean that the original research

design is inadequate but if approaches are too rigid and pre-determined in advance then they work against the original research objectives. They quote Maxwell (1992: 284) who states: 'a method by itself is neither valid or invalid…[v]alidity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose'. This gave the researcher confidence to revisit how the quantitative work would add value to the overall study. Cheek *at al.* (2015) go on to stress the importance of asking questions all the way through the research including the actual doing of the research itself.

The critical realist position also adopts the idea of tendencies rather than empirical generalisations (Lawson, 2003) suggesting inclinations towards particular characteristics and behaviours. This moves away from the idea of absolutes and certainty that themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews alluded towards. Although there were common patterns around certain behaviours and skills it was felt that merely getting people to answer yes or no to the importance of a particular skill was too simplistic and would be self-fulfilling.

As a result, the researcher decided to re-think the role of the survey regarding it more as a complementary instrument to the overall study rather than as a source of pure validation and theory testing. In this sense, the survey acted as a sense-checking tool against information emerging from the literature and semi-structured interviews and also for exploring greater subtleties around

how helpful and useful particular ideas would be for PA practice focusing firmly on the concept of tendencies. As such, the following was used to shape the survey:

- To check that there was an appetite for PA to get to understand itself better by understanding the knowledge that underpins it

- To check that there was a sense that PA could agree on a set of behaviours and skills and to start to identify what these were

- To understand more fully the concept of effectiveness and professionalism as it related to PA picking up on themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews

- To elucidate relationships between knowledge, behaviours and skills and what this might tell us about the state of the PA practice

With this level of clarity developing the research questions became more focused supporting the views of Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) that you should both understand how the areas you wish to research can be explored as relationships between variables and have conceptualised our own research clearly before designing your survey.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) variables fall into three types: dependent (changes in response to other variables); independent (causes changes in a dependent variable) and extraneous (might also cause changes in a dependent variable and provide an alternative explanation to the independent variable). Dillman (2007) talks of three types of data variable that can be collected: opinion (how respondents feel/think about something),

behavioural (what people/organisations do), and attribute (relates to respondent characteristics such as age, gender).

To ensure the essential data was collected variables were identified and data requirements outlined. As indicated the researcher did initially struggle with this concept trying to connect all variables to specific hypotheses and theory testing. Once liberated from this concept, determining variables became easier. A summary in the form of a data requirements table is below to demonstrate how the final survey questions were determined.

To check that there was an appetite for PA to get to understand itself better by understanding the knowledge that underpins it (supports RQ2, RQ5)

Investigative questions	Variables required	Detail in which data measured
Do PA practitioners feel that having a body of knowledge would be useful? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners on devising a body of knowledge	Feel......strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree
What types of knowledge would be helpful to practice? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners about different knowledge roots *NB: Useful to see if disconnect between the above two investigate questions. Possible confusion about what is knowledge.*	Feel…very helpful; helpful or not helpful
How representative are the responses of PA practitioners (attributes)	Age of practitioner; length in PA; location of practice; sector; gender; bulk of PA	Age categories; length of service categories; agency, in-house, freelance; % of

		time spent on work involving various institutions; different industry sectors eg not-for-profit

Table 3.5: Survey construction supporting how PA understands knowledge

To check that there was a sense that PA could agree on a set of behaviours and skills and to start to identify what these were (supports RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)

Investigative questions	Variables required	Detail in which data measured
Do PA practitioners need an agreed skill set? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners on whether an agreed skill set is necessary	Feel…strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree
How important do PA practitioners rate particular skills? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners about importance of different skills	Feel….essential/very important; desirable/important; moderately important; not important
How well do PA practitioners feel practice performs these skills? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners about how well practice performs certain skills	Feel…highly competent/perform very well; moderately competent/perform less well; not competent/perform least well
Do PA practitioners need an agreed set of behaviours? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners on whether an agreed set of behavious are necessary	Feel…strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree
How important do PA practitioners rate particular behaviours? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners about importance of different behaviours	Feel…essential/very important; desirable/important; moderately important; not important
How well do PA practitioners feel practice exhibits these behaviours? (opinion)	Opinion of PA practitioners about how well certain behaviours performed	Feel...highly competent/perform very well; competent/perform well; moderately

		competent/perform less well; not competent/perform less well
How representative are the responses of PA practitioners (attributes)	Age of practitioner; length in PA; location of practice; sector; gender; bulk of PA activity undertaken	Age categories; length of service categories; agency, in-house, freelance; % of time spent on work involving various institutions; different industry sectors eg not-for-profit

Table 3.6: Survey construction for PA behaviours and skills

To understand more fully the concept of effectiveness and professionalism as it related to PA picking up on themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews (supports RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)

Investigative questions	Variables required	Detail in which data measured
Do PA practitioners consider PA to be a profession? (opinion)	Opinion of practitioners as to whether PA is a profession	Feel…yes, no, don't know
What components make up PA being a profession? (opinion)	Opinion of practitioners as to the importance of different criteria if PA is to be considered a profession	Feel…very important; important; not important
What components are necessary for professional PA practice? (opinion)	Opinions of practitioners as to the importance of different criteria if PA is to be considered professional	Feel…very important; important; not important
What does transparency mean to PA professionalism? (opinion)	Opinions of practitioners are to the meaning of transparency	Feel…strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree

Table 3.7: Survey construction for effectiveness and professionalism

To elucidate relationships between knowledge, behaviours and skills and what this might tell us about the state of the PA practice (supports RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)

For this objective, the answers to the previous investigative questions could be cross-examined. For example,

- Do those who agree that PA needs a body of knowledge also believe it needs an agreed set of skills and behaviours?

- Do those who agree that PA needs a body of knowledge feel any of the concepts relating to theory helpful?

- Do those that state that PA needs an agreed set of behaviours also believe that there should be an agreed skill set?

- Is there consistency between the importance and performance of behaviours and skill?

- Is there consistency of views to these questions across the attribute variables of age, sector or seniority?

These relationships are developed fully in the findings section of this study. It is perhaps surprising that not more behavioural variables were included given the subject matter of competencies. The researcher did consider asking direct questions in respect of how individual practitioners rated their own skills and behaviours and what skills and behaviours they felt they needed to develop. On balance, it was felt that practitioners would provide better insights when reflecting on practice as a whole rather than dwelling on individual strengths and weaknesses.

From the data requirements, a questionnaire was designed with the focus on making it as reliable and valid as possible. Foddy (1994) suggests that issues of reliability and validity come down to simply asking whether the questions and answers make sense. He argues that most importantly the respondent must understand the question in the way the researcher intended and vice versa. This requires a four-stage process of firstly the researcher being clear about the data required and designs a question; the respondent decodes the question in the way the researcher intended; respondent answers the question; and the researcher decodes the answer in the way the respondent intended. This was particularly relevant to this study given the need to simplify PA theoretical knowledge roots in a way that would make sense to respondents rather than using language that would be unfamiliar to the respondent. The way the researcher approached this was by provided examples of what that knowledge root meant from a practical perspective. This is subjective and although the researcher tested this out on five individuals to check understanding there is always a risk in both the translating of the theory into a sentence and for that sentence then to maintain its meaning when read by the respondent.

So, the question for addressing knowledge (Q17 in the questionnaire) was wording accordingly: Which statements below do you think help us understand what PA does, how it works and its role in society?

Knowledge Root (from the literature)	Converted to this statement in the survey
Communication Theory (focus on persuasion)	How persuasion can be used to develop arguments eg facts, figures, case studies
Social and Cultural Theory (focus on social constructivism)	How people create different realities and have different takes on the same situation?
Communication Theory (focus on sense making, semiotics, framing, dialogue)	The role of debate, discussion and dialogue and how people make sense of things?
Political Theory (focus on resource dependency and governance generally)	The way resources get allocated in society
Political Theory (focus on systems of governance)	The way society creates different systems of governance and policy formation
Communication Theory (focus on issues and crisis management)	How issues and crises emerge, grow and are shaped
Communication Theory and Social and Cultural Theory	The role of media and social media in society and its impact
Organisational Strategy (focus on CSR)	The role of business and organisations generally in society
Communication Theory (focus on ethics)	An understanding of different ethical traditions and ideas
Communication Theory	How individuals and organisations build relations and ideas of stakeholder engagement

Table 3.8: Usability of knowledge root questions

Attention was paid to assessing the internal validity of the questionnaire in respect of trying to ensure that it measured what it intended to measure and represents the reality of what is being measured. Cooper and Schindler (2008) talk of three types of validity. Firstly, content validity that relates to how the measurement questions in the questionnaire help gather the information necessary for the investigative questions. The researcher

attempted to do this by seeking input from colleagues to help identify questions that were essential and non-essential and by cross checking back to the literature.

Secondly, predictive validity in terms of whether the questions can make accurate predictions. In part this relates to whether PA practitioners would actually welcome and have an appetite for some sort of competency framework. Finally, construct validity that relates to how the questions measure the presence of those constructs that are intended for measurement. This normally relates to things such as attitude scales. Thought was given to capturing variations in understanding of the constructs in order to gain insight into different perspectives.

In respect of reliability, the questionnaire was tested to ensure consistency in understanding and use to maximise its robustness. Given the role of the questionnaire, the researcher reflected on Mitchell's (1996) view on assessing reliability. They are: test re-test; internal consistency and alternative form although these are undertaken after data collection researchers need to be mindful of these at the design stage. Taken together these tend to focus on whether or not the questionnaire will produce consistent findings at different times and under different conditions. However, the researcher felt given the role of the survey as a complimentary tool, and the likely lower level of response rates, the focus on reliability needed to fit more within a qualitative paradigm. As such, the focus was on ensuring respondents interpreted

questions as intended and that the language used was that of practice rather than on statistical components of reliability.

The final questionnaire was designed by adapting some attribute questions from the VMA survey (2012) and developing specific opinion questions based on the investigative questions outlined earlier. It used primarily closed questions also known as close-ended questions (Dillman, 2007) and forced choice questions (deVaus, 2002). This enabled themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews to be explored by gaining the views of a wider sample. A range of question typologies was also adopted based on the five-fold typology outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009). List (whereby the respondent is offered a list of items any of which can be selected); Category (whereby the respondent is only allowed to select one response); Ranking (here the respondent is asked to place something in order); Rating (the respondent is asked to use a rating device) and Matrix (responses to two or more questions can be recorded on the same grid).

In addition, three open-ended questions were used to allow practitioners to make unprompted comments. Normally open-ended questions are used in semi-structured interviews but Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2008) suggests they can be useful in questionnaires if the research is exploratory, however they should be kept to a minimum as they are difficult to code. Also, they can be off putting to respondents who are pressed for time and may be of more limited value. It was decided to include these three areas that allowed for more information about skills and behaviours to be obtained.

The questionnaire was laid out using Survey Monkey software and included straight forward questions at the beginning focusing on attributes followed by more complex areas of knowledge, skills and behaviours in the middle. An introduction was included to provide context and to reinforce the support of the professional bodies to encourage response rates. A copy of the questionnaire, the typology used to underpin it and from where the questions were derived can be found in Appendix E.

3.6. Data analysis

3.6.1. Qualitative data analysis

Interviews were transcribed manually. Qualitative data is focused on generated meanings expressed through words (Dey, 1993; Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). As such data needs to be summarised, categorised and narrative created but as Kvale (1996) suggests analysing qualitative data begins at the time of collection as the data gathering process cannot be divorced from analysis as the researcher is part of the data gathering instrument.

Yin (2003) argues there are two broad approaches to analysing qualitative data. Firstly, using theory to start to analyse data by taking a deductive approach or exploring data without a predetermined theoretical framework. At the start the study adopted a broadly inductive approach although there were certain ideas and concepts emerging from the literature the study did not set out to formally test these but to try to understand and explore some of these concepts in more detail. Yet as Yin (2003) suggests pure induction in

qualitative analysis can be difficult and time consuming but importantly you still need to approach the analysis with a clear purpose. Inevitably this means incorporating some deductive elements, and in most cases, qualitative analysis combines elements of both induction and deduction. Consequently, the analysis did focus on trying to see whether there was any evidence of the skills, behaviours and knowledge in PA as suggested by the literature but to be open minded to ideas presented in the data. At the same time, the researcher was guided by some of the themes emerging around each RQ.

As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) point out there is no standardised procedure for analysing qualitative data. The researcher was drawn to two techniques that have been developed by academics to instil greater rigour and improved objectivity in qualitative studies to help address the criticism of lack of transparency and subjectivity with this type of research approach as argued by Lee and Fielding (1996). In both cases, the techniques have focused on demonstrating how the conclusion or narrative around qualitative work has been constructed.

Firstly, thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012) and Attride-Stirling (2001) had a certain appeal. Attride-Stirling is of interest in the way she builds a mechanism to show visually how key themes have emerged. She proposes that thematic analysis can be aided by and presented as thematic networks or web-like illustrations that summarise the main themes coming out of a piece of text. The approach is based on three layers of themes: basic (lowest order derived from text backed by a statement and

simple); organising (middle order that organises the basic themes into clusters of similar issues or signification when more meaning can be revealed); global (super-ordinate themes that encompass the principal metaphors in the data as a whole and illustrate a position or assertion about a given issue or reality). This is illustrated below.

Figure 3.3. Thematic Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 388)

A thematic approach starts with the basic and works towards creating global themes. These can be presented both in text and graphically. A coding framework is still required to help identify basic themes. The researcher adopts a combination of pre-established criteria (such as words) and recurrent issues in the text. Here the codes are used to dissect the text and is commonly used in qualitative analysis as outlined by Corbin and Strauss

(1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994). A summary of the overall process is below.

Analysis Stage: A - Reduction or breakdown of text		
Step 1: Code Material	A	Devise a coding framework
	B	Dissect text into text segments using the coding framework
Step 2: Identify Themes	A	Abstract themes from coded text segments
	B	Refine themes
Step 3: Construct Thematic Networks	A	Arrange themes
	B	Select Basic themes
	C	Rearrange into Organising themes
	D	Deduce Global themes
	E	Illustrate as thematic networks
	F	Verify and refine the networks
Analysis Stage: B - Exploration of text		
Step 4: Describe and Explore Thematic Networks	A	Describe the Network
	B	Explore the Network
Step 5: Summarise Thematic Networks		
Analysis Stage: C - Integration of Exploration		
Step 6: Interpret Patterns		

Table 3.9: Steps in analyses employing thematic networks (Attride-Stirling 2001: 391)

The second technique is known as the Gioia methodology developed by Gioia and Pitre (1990) and subsequently developed and refined by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) also has at its core a thematic approach but adds additional concepts worthy of exploration. Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) suggest researchers spend too much time on construct elaboration, in this case a construct being an abstract theoretical formulation about phenomena that is normally associated with a form of measurement.   In so doing, researchers fail to identify new concepts that help to explain and describe phenomena.

It is important for concepts to be explored as this contributes to theory building and underpins constructs. This opens up opportunities to explore some of the processes involved in social worlds and how these are socially constructed. Given the social nature of PA and how it works with and sits inside organisations the researcher felt this approach had merit for this study. In addition, this process allows complete transparency and enables a blending of both informant-centric terms and codes for first order of analysis before evolving to researcher-centric concepts, themes and dimensions. As Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) argue taken together, the reporting of both voices – informant and researcher – allows for a rigorous demonstration of the linkages between the data and the induction of the new concept.

So, initial analysis looks across the interviews to identify different terms and starts to categorise these. In this initial analysis, the researcher stays firmly in the informant voice mode and there may be a plethora of terms. Then the research progresses similarities and differences between the categories emerge, a process that reduces the categories to a more manageable number whilst still maintaining the informant voice. Then at this point the researcher looks deeper into the categories and start to think at both the informant level as well as the abstract starting to link to theoretical context.

Here the idea of concepts is regarded as first order data akin to Attride-Stirling's basic themes (formed from codes and issues); this contributes and builds second order data known as themes that can equate to Attride-Stirling's organising themes; then finally to third order data known as dimensions that

are similar to the idea of global themes. An example of how such a data structure can be developed can be found in Figure 3.5. below.
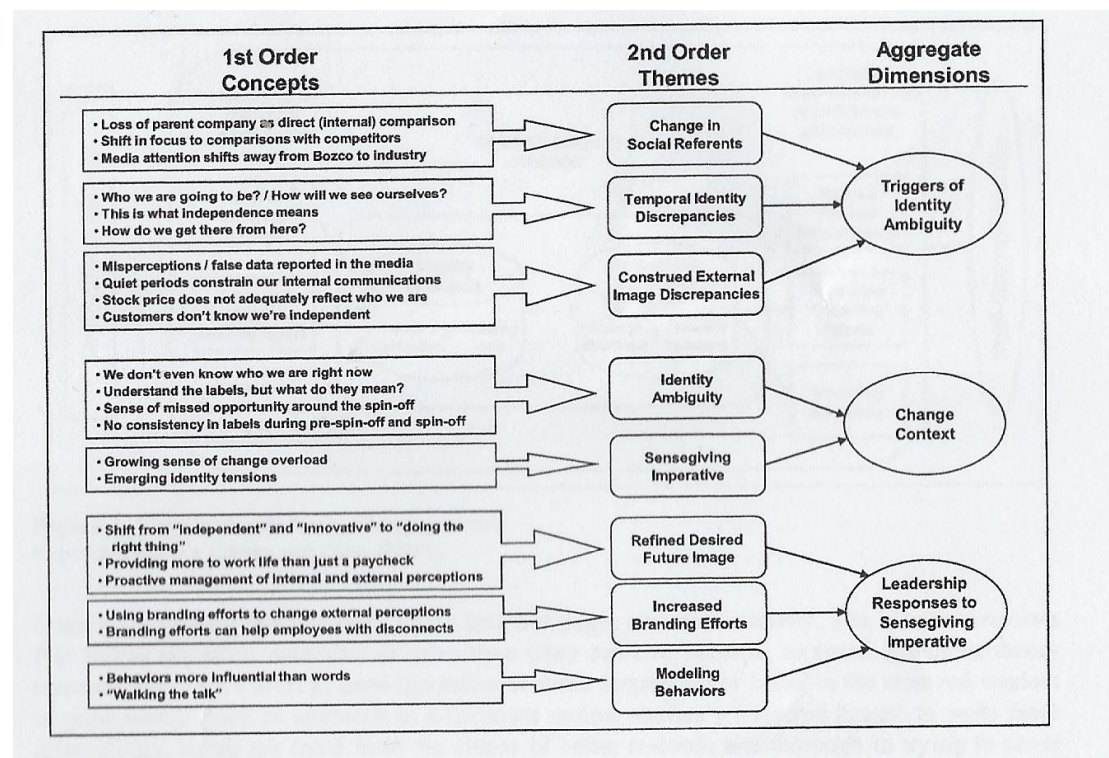
Figure 3.4. Example of a data structure reproduced in Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012:21) from Corley and Gioia (2004).

Overall, the researcher felt the Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) approach would be most appropriate for demonstrating and creating transparent data structures. It is an approach that has not been widely adopted in communication research and is more widely seen in Organisation and Management scholarship so this study provides a vehicle to show how such an approach can be used in a broader communications context. It is this approach that forms the basis of how the qualitative findings have been developed in Chapter Six. This chapter focuses on articulating the first order data from initial codes, second order themes and finally the overarching dimension that has been revealed through the interviews.

Although the Gioia, Corley and Hamilton's (2012) technique was adopted, the researcher did take more of an inductive stance allowing for the literature to help guide the data gathering and analysis. Ideally, Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) suggest taking more of a semi-ignorant approach to the literature to ensure that the researcher is not blinded too early to new concepts that can lead to confirmation bias – that is you find what you are looking for and ignore everything else. The researcher felt in this instance an understanding of the literature would be helpful to ensure focus and that no one existing theory was being tested that could blinker analysis. As such a form of transitioning from inductive to a form of abductive research, a term used by Alvesson and Karreman (2007) was used whereby the data gathered and existing theoretical concepts and ideas were considered together during the analysis process. A summary of this data analysis approach is outlined again at the start of Chapter Five in order to put the findings from interviews into greater context.

3.6.2. Quantitative data analysis

In total, there were 50 respondents to the questionnaire that were gathered between Monday 13 April and Friday 29 May 2015. A few people wished to complete the survey after the election so the survey remained opened for a few weeks after polling day on 7 May.

Each questionnaire was downloaded from Survey Monkey and stored individually. In addition, Survey Monkey automatically sorts data into Excel spread sheets and SPSS. Both of these data storage techniques were

downloaded and used as part of the data analysis approach. Scholars who specialise in quantitative analysis such as Berman-Brown and Saunders (2008) and Dancey and Reidy (2008) argue that all data needs to be prepared carefully and formatted appropriately to the software package being used to assist with the analysis.

Firstly, the researcher needs to consider the type of data under analysis. Quantitative data broadly falls into two distinct groups: categorical and numerical. Categorical relates to data whose values cannot be measured numerically but can be classified into sets or categories based on certain characteristics that explain the variable. This can be further sub-divided. There is descriptive data (also known as nominal data) that relates to counting the occurrences in each category, for example, the number of people who said that PA needs an agreed set of behaviours. Ranked (also known as ordinal data) is a more precise form of categorical data. Examples here are when respondents are asked to rate a variable such as how strongly she or he agrees with a statement, for example, when PA practitioners were asked to rank how helpful or not different statements were to PA practice.

Numerical (also known as quantifiable), however, relates to data whose values can be measured or counted numerically as quantities (Berman-Brown and Saunders, 2008). For the purposes of this study, numerical data was not gathered with the focus being on categorical data including both nominal and ordinal. Data sets to each question in the survey was prepared by Survey Monkey that included converting all categorical data (whether descriptive or

ranked) into numerical codes for use in both Excel and SPSS. This formed the basis of all subsequent analysis.

A summary of this data analysis approach together with the detailed analysis techniques is outlined at the start of Chapter Six when the findings from the survey are explored.

3.7. Limitations, credibility and ethical considerations

3.7.1. Critical Realism impacts

The critical realist philosophical stance impacts on how the findings of this study have emerged and have been subsequently debated. This will be drawn out in detail during the discussion in Chapter Seven and conclusion in Chapter Eight. It is important, however, that this is also addressed here in the methodology chapter to provide context to the issues around validity, reliability and generalisability.

Critical realists believe the social world is real and generates affects and can exist independently of its identification (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000). As outlined earlier, for critical realists there are three levels of reality: the empirical (observable); events (existing in time and space) and deep or real (powers that are often unobserved but that are real and have causal impact). As Bhaskar (1989: 36) states: 'People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce and transform, but which would not exist unless

they did so.' Consequently, there is clear relationship between structure that may or may not be observed and agency. As a result, a key critical realist principle is that no two organisations can really be the same making ideas around replication difficult. Kempster and Parry (2001) argue from a critical realist perspective that every context is different though they may share similarities and common properties.

This does not mean that research undertaken through this lens has less value. According to Kempster and Perry (2001), it is and should also be considered, good science, but the critical realist talks in terms of tendencies and traits rather than certainties to reflect the highly contextual nature of reality.

3.7.2. Reliability and Validity

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 603) validity is 'the extent to which data collection method or methods accurately measure what they were intended to measure….and the extent to which research findings are really about what they profess to be about.' The issue here is the accuracy and 'truthfulness' of data gathered through the research techniques used. Robson (2002) suggests that researchers must pay attention to issues such as internal and external events that may impact on how participants respond to questioning, drop out or limited participation in a study and to be careful of making assumptions about causal relationships.

For this study, the researcher aimed to maximise validity by using a variety of data gathering techniques and piloted both interviews and survey design to ensure the information obtained would provide insight into the research questions. In both cases, changes were made to the final interview schedule and questionnaire structure. At the same time, Cho and Trent (2006) talk of transactional and transformational validity as it relates to qualitative research. With transactional approaches, it is suggested that validity can be more credible if certain techniques are used to reduce misunderstandings between the researcher and the participants. Here the researcher ensured that accurate records were kept of interviews and when necessary clarity to replies obtained through further questioning. The transformational notion, however, takes the view that validity is convergent with the way the researcher self-reflects upon the multiple dimensions in which any study is conducted and the focus has to be on the resultant actions prompted by the research endeavour. In this sense, the study takes a pragmatic approach with a focus on trying to make sense of the daily lives of PA practitioners.

Reliability is the extent to which data collection techniques yield consistent findings. According to Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2008) reliability can be assessed by asking three questions: will the measures yield the same results on other occasions; will similar observations be reached by other observers; is there transparency in how sense was made from the original data. Here Robson (2002) is helpful as he asserts that in order to maximize reliability the researcher needs to be mindful of four threats. The first is subject or participant error. This could be caused by misunderstanding or by

timing issues when the respondent could be affected by external impacts. Care was taken throughout the study to minimize participant error ensuring interviews were conducted appropriately and clarification given when asked. The survey had been tested to ensure usability.

The second key threat to reliability is subject or participant bias. Here perhaps respondents respond in a way that they think the researcher wants or how their organisations expect. The researcher endeavoured to put respondents at ease during the semi-structured interviews and made clear that confidentiality and anonymity would be respected and that their views were important to understand the PA landscape. The survey was constructed so as not to demonstrate bias towards in-house or agency practitioners and scope was provided for additional open-ended comments. In both cases, the researcher made clear the study represented a PhD and although it had the support of the professional bodies it was not controlled by them and although the results would be shared in a general sense no individual information would be passed on.

Thirdly, there may be issues with observer error. In this case the researcher aimed to follow clear interview guidance and interviews and the survey were piloted to help reduce error to help ensure that the data gathering techniques helped to garner the information necessary to address the research questions. Finally, observer bias when the researcher may interpret findings subjectively allowing personal influences to shape how the data is interpreted. This is of particular relevant when conducting qualitative work and as already

discussed the researcher adopted a reflexive approach to maximize objectivity. At the same time, mixed methods help to triangulate data to improve reliability overall.

In this respect, the researcher made every attempt to ensure the robustness of the data gathered yet from a critical realist stance there is a view that every situation is different so it is difficult to build theory. Consequently, there is a sense that the researcher is trying to establish a practical adequacy rather than a purist form of truth as suggested by Sayer (1992). Here internal validity is about establishing plausible explanations of reality. The researcher believes the study has achieved this through a combination of mixed methods and applied rigour in the data gathering process.

3.7.3. Generalisability and Replicability

As Maxwell (1992) argues, in order for research findings to be generalisable they need to fit into different contexts. In many respects this has parallels to the idea of external validity in quantitative work. Given that the study led more on an interpretivist approach the concept of generalisability is a challenge given the inherent issues to do with a subjective approach. It also poses problems with the critical realist paradigm as outlined earlier.

One way that generalisability can be improved is to ensure transparency in methods used and any assumptions that may underpin any research approach. The researcher has been clear in the approach taken, the choices made and how meaning has been interpreted. The use of grounded theory as

applied by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) enables the developing of understanding within a particular context and constructs explanations by building up levels of abstraction as argued by Parry (1998) in an open and transparent manner. In many respects, it can be argued this study allows for inferential generalisation as suggested by Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) that is generalising from the context of the research itself into other settings and links to the ideas of practical adequacy. This supports the idea of Risjord, Moloney and Dunbar (2002) who talk of critical realism enabling abductive inspiration allowing the move from observation to logical inference in theory development. As such the findings from the study provide a plausible view of practice at the moment in time that study was undertaken.

That said, the study has clear limitations.   It is UK centric and it does not attempt to argue that that the findings can be applied to PA practice in other countries. Although a mixed methods study, the number of participants in the survey is lower than the researcher would have liked in order to have boosted reliability.   It is also a cross-sectional study and findings will need to be further tested amongst practice and perhaps longitudinal studies put in place to explore how embedding competencies into professional development impacts on practice itself.

3.7.4. Ethical considerations

Using the guidance suggested by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), ethical considerations were taken into account at all stages of the research process. Conducting research in an appropriate manner entails given thought

to issues such as privacy, voluntary nature of participation, informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, embarrassment, stress, harm, objectivity and quality of the research. This is in line with the thinking of Miles and Huberman (1994) who state that at all times research must be based on informed consent, honesty and trust, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. These ideas have been embedded in each stage of the research process. Initially in terms of formulating and clarifying the research topic it was clear the subject of PA could not be deemed personal and of a sensitive nature that could cause embarrassment and harm. At the same time, the research is not sponsored so the researcher could clearly demonstrate there was no conflict of interest and that she was not being coerced to follow a particular viewpoint. Secondly, when it came to designing the research study and gaining access, no personally sensitive information was gathered and respondent confidentiality and anonymity was respected at all times. No exchange of money or favours was employed in terms of gaining access to respondents. Although the three professional bodies allowed the researcher to promote the survey through their respective online newsletters it was clear that the research was independent of them.

During data collection, the researcher ensured that interviews were conducted in a safe environment at participant offices or in an agreed location. All participants provided informed consent and were made aware that they had a right to withdraw. The purpose of the research was made clear to all participants and that their right to confidentiality and anonymity would be respected as would the organisation they worked for. All identifying

characteristics would be removed.   It was made clear that participants' names would not be used and that information would not be shared that could reveal identity. All participation was voluntary. The survey had an introductory paragraph that outlined the purpose of the research and the confidential nature of the information gathered.

In respect of processing and storing the data, all participants were aware that the interviews would be recorded and kept until the PhD had been awarded. Then the recordings would be destroyed and only transcripts would be kept. Each participant was assigned a code and data transcription was made anonymous. All survey participants were automatically made anonymous by Survey Monkey software.

Finally, regarding analysing data and reporting findings, at all times the researcher was aware to maintain participant confidentiality and to analyse data objectivity, accurately and transparently in order to produce quality research.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the philosophical stance taken by study and the methodological choices made.   It has outlined the rigour of the research process in order to provide confidence in the data gathered. There now follows three chapters of findings from this data gathering process. Chapter Four explores insight from the analysis of competency frameworks, whilst Chapter Five outlines the findings from the qualitative study and Chapter Six

the findings from the survey.   As indicated above, at the start of each chapter,

additional data analysis information is provided.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICAL COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

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4.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter aims to help inform RQ5*: What does a contemporary competency framework look like for PA?* It does this by reflecting on the practical application of competency frameworks taken from other fields.

The literature pointed to a number of scholarly debates on competencies and the need to understand the differences between behaviour and functional competencies and the importance of social and meta-competencies as part of our wider understanding. Although PR and PA competency research was discussed as part of this review (Gregory, 2008; VMA 2012; Watson Helsby, 2012), none of these actually created competency frameworks but merely suggested the type of competencies necessary for either PA or PR. Useful as this is, it is suggested that the concept of how these fit together within a practical framework is lacking.

This chapter takes a practical view by reviewing three professional association competency frameworks, together with the Government Communication Professional Competency Framework. This analysis is supplemented by insight from two individuals involved in competency framework development – a Human Resources Director of a medium sized business, and a consultant involved in devising competency frameworks for those involved in internal communications. Taken together this provides useful groundwork to help identify the opportunities and challenges presented

by competency development and to identify whether there are useful structures developed by other professions that could be applied to PA once the data emerging from the qualitative and quantitative studies has been analysed.

It would be naive to think that other professions have not struggled with how to codify and articulate the skills and behaviours necessary for their own areas and there could be useful insights. It could also be argued that not to look beyond one's own practice area demonstrates a form of professional naivety or insularity. It is widely evidenced in the literature that many competencies, in particular those relating to soft skills, are often generic across a number of managerial areas, so to get an understanding of how these are illustrated by other fields is useful. If PA is to mature and reflect upon its own professional identity, then it must look holistically at itself and others. Returning to the concept of professional identity (Ibarra, 1999), then to understand how others have tried to capture the attributes, beliefs and values inherent in their field and to capture their own professional identity could prove valuable.

There are limitations to this review as the analysis is based on reflecting on the publicly available competency material through the websites of the professional bodies. In order to remain as unbiased as possible, it was decided not to have direct communication with the professional bodies that could help provide more in-depth thinking behind their development.   It was felt this could lead the researcher in a particular direction and would be best

undertaken post-study when issues around implementation of frameworks could also be discussed. That said, the researcher believes this is still a worthwhile exercise to improve understanding of competency frameworks.

Also during the interview stage, it emerged that one PA agency had attempted to develop a specific competency framework. This is also discussed in this chapter rather than elsewhere as it links to how frameworks are applied against best practice approaches.

4.2. General Guidance in competency development

The UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) has provided a guide to competency development. The CIPD is the professional body for human resource and people development and focuses on establishing benchmarks for excellence in people and organisational development.   It makes sense from a practical perspective to explore the advice offered by them in terms of devising and implementing competency frameworks and to reflect on these against scholarly debate.

The CIPD suggests that when devising frameworks, the focus must be on measureable components and avoidance of complexity.   The need for simplicity was reinforced by the Director of Human Resources (Int. 31): *'Danger is people over think. It needs to be well thought-out and simple to understand'*. Importantly, the CIPD suggest no more than 12 competencies for any given role. Then for these to be arranged into clusters to improve usability and understanding and to have definitions and examples of each competency,

in particular if linked to hierarchies of performance. The CIPD also stresses the necessity of ensuring that competencies are not seen as discriminatory against particular groups and should be seen as developmental.

The importance of the developmental role of competencies was again stressed by the Human Resources Director especially at the start of an individual's career. His view was that a competency approach helps to identify individual development needs. Where the use of competencies tended to falter was their use during the appraisal system. Often line managers are too busy or don't see the value. '*It is possibly the lack of [competency] understanding is why they are not used more proactively. Line managers are the ones who do it and their ability to do that developmental role is limited or too difficult for them and they struggle'.* It was agreed that often competencies are seen as a good thing, but in many cases, are not implemented in a particularly sophisticated way.

This reinforces the view of the CIPD who stress that competencies are not just about judging people now on the skills people have but how they can be developed to acquire the skills they need. Much of this general advice relates to competencies from an organisational perspective rather than from the professions but these principles can be applied universally.
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Whiddett and Hollyforde (2003), authors of the CIPD's Competences Toolkit, define a competency framework as the complete collection of clusters, competencies (with or without levels) and behaviour indicators. To note, they

do not specifically pick up on the concept of integrating the type of knowledge (either practical or conceptual) that under-pin these. They suggest frameworks can contain very detailed behaviour indicators for a specific department or purpose or they might be more generic for use across an entire organisation or business unit. Importantly, they argue the actual detail contained within the framework depends on its intended application. Again, it is suggested that competencies for a particular role should average around 12, but state that in some instances these do rise to around 20. They stress the more competencies that a framework contains the more difficult it is to implement and use.

They argue producing a competency framework requires a structured approach and must ensure that it captures the needs of a wide range of users. Involvement and communication is essential for developing co-operation in its production and use. It must be seen to be relevant to the individual and the organisation in terms of developing performance. Such advice has relevance for any competency development including those of a professional body.

The importance of capturing the needs of a wide range of users (or practitioners) was stressed by the Internal Communication Specialist (Int. 20). He argued: *'Consensus [on competencies] is difficult. People have different routes into the internal communications profession and have acquired skills along the way...different cultural perspectives all colour it'*. This is a particularly valid point as there are similar issues for PA. Relevancy to the

end user is critical. He went on to argue the importance of focusing on future skills and incorporating different communities of internal communication practitioners and skill clusters and also suggested the idea industry sector groupings. This is useful insight and supports much of the CIPD thinking.

As suggested the work of Campion *et al.* (2011) provides 20 best practice requirements to competency frameworks.   Stevens (2012), in his review of competency literature, argues that more work needs to be done on competency modelling to reflect the changes in the business landscape with its move to flatter and more roles-based structures (rather than detailed job descriptions and analysis). However, he stresses that the work of Campion *et al.* (2011) is still regarded highly in terms of its approach even though it places an emphasis on job analysis. Interestingly, this criticism of competency modelling perhaps connects to the evolutionary nature of scholarship in terms of a shift to ideas around meta-competencies that incorporate concepts of flexibility and adaptability, and strengths-based approaches. At the same time, the trend to less linear career progression perhaps too contributes to how competency modelling may be adapted for the future.

That said, Campion *et al.* (2011) best practice requirements are deemed useful in terms of providing structure in the review of professional frameworks and are outlined again overleaf for ease of reference.

	Analysing competency information (identifying competencies)		
1	Considering organisational context
2	Linking competency models to organisational goals and objectives
3	Start at the top
4	Using rigorous job analysis methods to develop competencies
5	Considering future-orientated job requirements
6	Using additional unique methods
	Organising and presenting competency information
7	Defining the anatomy of a competency (the language of competency)
8	Defining levels of proficiency on competencies
9	Using organisational language
10	Including both fundamental (cross-job) and technical (job-specific) competencies
11	Using competency libraries
12	Achieving the proper level of granularity (number of competencies and amount of detail)
13	Using diagrams, pictures and heuristics to communicate competency models to employees
	Using competency information
14	Using organisational development techniques to ensure competency modelling acceptance and use
15	Using competencies to develop HR systems (hiring, appraisal, promotion, compensation)
16	Using competencies to align the HR system
17	Using competencies to develop a practical "theory" of effective job performance tailored to the organization
18	Using information technology to enhance the usability of competency models
19	Maintaining the currency of competencies over time
20	Using competency modelling for legal defensibility (eg test validation)

Table 4.1. Best Practices in Competency Modelling, Campion *et al.* (2011: 230) which appears first as Table 2.10 in the Literature Review Chapter

The division of analysing, organising and using competency information is a useful one in terms of constructing any type of competency framework and puts the purpose of the competency framework – usability and relevance – firmly at the centre. The questioning of how job analysis fits into the development of framework is relevant as outlined earlier as it does start

perhaps to reflect on the growing fluidity and change in the workplace due to competitive pressures and how jobs evolve and are never static.

For both the CIPD and Campion *et al.* (2011) the focus is on the usability of competencies and the importance of simplicity and granularity. They also stress detail which suggests a move away from the generation of lists of attributes. This generation of lists is a criticism of previous work associated with PR and PA scholarship. A framework is different to a list and must have tangibility to support professional development.

4.3 Practical Application to the Professions

The Institute of Civil Engineers, The Association of Certified Chartered Accountants and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society were chosen for the basis of analysis due to their diverse occupational fields. It was felt this could reveal more insightful use of how competencies had been developed. Additionally, the Government Communication Professional Competency Framework was also chosen due to its focus on communication holistically. These four frameworks were reviewed against four criteria:

- Evidence of how Campion *et al.* (2011) best practice approach had been applied
- How the guidance outlined by the CIPD had been incorporated
- Evidence of any connection to competency scholarship
- Evidence of integrating a body of knowledge into such a framework

Extracts of these frameworks can be found in Appendix C.

4.3.1. Government Communication Network

This competency framework has been designed by the UK Government Communication Network and is designed for communicators in government departments up to and including the civil service Grade 6.

In respect of Campion *et al.* (2011), in terms of analysing competency information some consideration has been given of the organisational context in which the framework is to be used in that it makes clear it is to be used in conjunction with The Civil Service Competency Framework but there is little detail in terms of how this is to be done or the connection between the two frameworks. In that respect, there is some attempt to link the communication competency framework to the overall organisational goals and objectives though this could be more clearly expressed. Importantly there is an attempt to identify different types of communication job groups – campaigning and marketing, press and media, internal communications and social media and to clearly distinguish between the generic communication skills and the job specific ones. Little evidence can be found in terms of how the framework was established and how it is to be future-proofed in terms of future attributes.

For organising and presenting competency information, the framework is clearly expressed. It provides focus by identifying four key competency areas associated with communication planning: Insight, Ideas, Implementation and Impact – with detailed competencies clustered underneath these headings. This makes the framework easy to follow with a clear structure that is practically focused on outputs. It then drills down into four specific job roles

as outlined earlier. So, there are generic communication competencies that run across all four of the competency areas associated with planning, then specific job related competencies for one of the four job roles. For each competency area, there are sub-competencies to provide detail. There are three levels of seniority identified in these roles and how the competencies are evidenced.

There is use of visuals and colour coding to help understanding but this is basic. In this respect the framework shows solid evidence of using the language of competency (skills and behaviours) and also defining the levels of proficiency. In terms of organisational language it does connect to the Civil Service, the organisation in which it operates, and provides some good insight and granularity in terms of what competencies look like in action. There is a good use of cross-job and technical (job-specific) competencies.   The only area here that is difficult to see evidenced is the use of any form of competency library.

Based on simple content analysis it is difficult to ascertain how the competency information is used but from what is publicly available the stated purpose of the framework is to help with recruitment and selection, performance management, personal development and career development so on the surface the competency framework has relevancy. It also suggests that the framework must be flexible and that competencies are not exhaustive and some roles may require specialised skills so there is some recognition that any framework cannot capture everything and must be fluid. It also

states that the framework is cumulative with each higher grade demonstrating both its own competencies but also that of the lower grade that shows some recognition of pathway. Perhaps what is lacking is that it is unclear how individuals can acquire the relevant specified training or qualifications. So, on the surface there appears to be evidence of how the competencies are used within the HR system and how they are being used to develop a practical theory of effective job performance. What is not clear is how these competencies are to maintain their currency and there is no evidence of how technology is being used to help either explain the competency or create self-assessment systems.

Turning to the CIPD Guidance, more than 12 competencies are identified but these are clearly clustered around the stages of planning for ease of understanding and sub-divided between the generic communication and job-specific roles. There are also examples of how the competence is evidenced in practice at various professional levels that helps with application.

There is, however, no explicit link to any form of competency scholarship and there is no clear relationship to any form of knowledge base that underpins communication. That said, one could argue the concept of research, planning and evaluation is in itself an applied knowledge area and this goes back to issues of clarifying what is meant by both conceptual and practical (both tacit and explicit) forms of knowledge. Some specific references in the framework such as 'behaviour insights', 'develop strong relationships' and 'ensure

appropriate content, messaging, tone and consistency' all have conceptual and practical knowledge models that support them.

Overall, however, this provides a framework that does have usability and is far more detailed that a mere construction of a list of attributes.

4.3.2. The Association of Certified Chartered Accountants

The competency framework states it is about demonstrating how the skills of an ACCA qualified accountant can help the organisations in which they practice or consult. In particular, it has aspirations of linking business areas to the ACCA syllabus.

Picking up again with Campion *et al.* (2011), in the context of analysing competency information here the focus is placed firmly on job profiles and the organisational context in which the role of a professional accountant is situated. It looks at the nuances of the role in six main sectors: public practice, corporate, public services and not-for-profit, financial services, shared services and outsourcing and the advisory sector so the profession recognises the situational impact on the practice. There is also a list of 24 specific types of ACCA job profiles from group accountant to payroll. So, ideas around organisational context, role and linking competencies to organisational goals and objectives and job analysis are clearly shown. Similar to the GCN little evidence can be found in terms of how the framework was established, the methods used and how it is to be future-proofed in terms of future attributes.

For organising and presenting competency information there is a substantial amount of detail. The profession has identified ten key competency areas: leadership and management; corporate reporting; taxation; strategy and innovation; financial management; sustainable management accounting; audit and assurance; risk and control; stakeholder relationship management; and professionalism and ethics. For each competency area, there are evidences of the exams, experience, ethics, job profiles, detailed technical and behaviour competencies relevant.

It also builds in levels – Level One Fundamental (knowledge); Level Two Fundamental (skills) and Level Three Professional. Each level has an overview of the knowledge (some conceptual and some practical), skills and type of autonomy and accountability required. The explicit notion of knowledge is more evidenced than in the GCN framework and the drawing out of ideas around professionalism, ethics and accountability is of particular interest given that these are key to ideas that underpin the concept of defining a profession as raised in the literature by Downie (1990).

The framework also contains a very clear typology of 12 behaviours to support a complete financial professional. These are acting ethically and legally; communicator; credible; influence/challenge; proactive; skeptical; commercially aware; continuous improver; exercising professional judgment; organised/aware; problem solver and supporting others. Again, these are not behaviours that are only seen amongst accountants, but it does flag and

provide examples of what this behaviour competency looks like for accountancy practitioners to make them real. These behaviours also cut across all technical competencies.

The framework is online and there is a good use of visuals for navigation purposes but perhaps a greater use of models and diagrams to show how the various components of the framework come together could be useful in terms of integration and understanding. The only area that is not clearly evidenced within the organising and presenting competency information is the use of competency libraries. Areas such as using the language of competency, proficiency and granularity appear to be well articulated. In terms of using organisational language, the ACCA do use its own professional terminology, but try to connect this back to the different types of organisational structures.

In terms of using competency information, the stated purpose of the framework is to help employers, employees and training providers identify the relevant behaviours and skills necessary for effective accountancy practice. It makes explicit references to how competencies can be integrated into existing organisational HR practices and job descriptions. Importantly with this framework, it does provide information in terms of how to acquire relevant competencies through specific training and qualifications. It is the question of qualifications, as suggested in the literature by L'Etang and Pieczka (2001), the causes issues for PR (and by implication) PA practice in terms of whether it is necessary requirement for it to be called a profession. Helpfully in terms of personal development and improving self-awareness there is an online self-

assessment tool which practitioners can use to help evaluate their own performance against the different competencies, a good example, of how technology can play a positive role.   Perhaps the one area that is less clear is how these competencies are to maintain their currency.

Turning to the CIPD Guidance, there is good evidence of how to cluster competencies into 10 broad categories (in terms of skill-based competency), but then this links to broader behaviours, sectors and levels, so it could be seen to be more complex.   But helpfully there are examples of how competencies are evidenced in different sectors and levels.

There is no obvious explicit link to competency scholarship.   In terms of linking to a body of knowledge there is referencing to areas covered in the curriculum for the ACCA and to the tangible and explicit knowledge necessary to practice accountancy.

4.3.3. Institute of Civil Engineers

The ICE competency framework is intended to support ICE guidelines and good practice in civil engineering. It is aimed at helping members with the training needs and to support deeper understanding of civil engineering and professional practice. It aims to provide individuals with a clear picture of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are recognised and valued whether they are core to the profession or those that underpin work in general.   It makes it clear that the framework is focused on post-professional review rather than in educational understanding.

Following the Campion *et al.* (2011) approach in terms of analysing competency information, there is evidence that a substantial amount of work has been done in terms of level of detail regarding the work of a civil engineer. It is less clear in terms of how this relates to the different types of engineering roles in terms of job analysis.

With regard to organising and presenting competency information, ICE identifies three domains of competency: behaviour, contextual and practice. These reside above foundation competencies hence the focus is on post-professional development.   Within each domain area there are specific competencies.   For the practice domain, there are ten areas of focus: knowledge application; problem solving; decision making; organisation and planning; quality management; technology management; information and knowledge management; resource management; achievement orientation; health and safety.   For the behaviour domain, there are 13: professional attitude; self-management/time management; human resource management; leadership; communication; collaborative working; team working; adaptability; negotiation and influence; initiative; creativity; information seeking and assertiveness. Then for the contextual there are six areas: strategic thinking; organisational awareness; organisational commitment; commercial/market awareness; finance and sustainable and resilient approach.   Under each of these areas of focus there are specific indicators of that competency that provides more detail on what each area of focus means and how it is evidenced.

To note there are only two levels of proficiency identified: 'Foundation' which outlined a need for a critical understanding of the body of knowledge that supports civil engineering, and 'professional' which relates to post qualification reflecting life-long learning and which are cultivated, nurtured and honed. The emphasis is very much on life-long learning and refining and developing competencies over time.

It is detailed and at times difficult to follow, but there is a good use of colour coding. A greater use of images and models could help identify more integration between the concepts. The language of competency is clearly used and proficiency is addressed including through the use of more detailed indicators or evidences of competencies. There is also some focus on how this relates back to organisations in which civil engineers may be operating and it does reflect fundamental and specific competency areas together with some granularity. The area that is clearly missing is how any form of competency library may be used in its development.

In terms of using this competency framework the focus is on personal development and identifying personal needs rather than on specified recruitment and selection. Here the focus is less on identifying the body of knowledge that underpins the practice and more on applying it as it is assumed that the body of knowledge is contained with the qualification base of the occupation. There is an online self-assessment tool allowing practitioners to improve self-awareness of their own strengths and weakness

and developmental needs independently of any organisation in which they work. This provides a slightly different approach to the ACCA, with its focus more on developing a practical approach to effective job performance rather than the need to connect to existing HR systems.

In many respects this shows a more limited adoption of the Campion *et al.* (2011) approach by only really addressing the area of using competencies to support job performance and how technology can be integrated – in this case through self-assessment – to support civil engineers.

In terms of CIPD Guidance, there are substantially more than 12 competencies but they are clustered around three areas. All these are evidenced with indicators to provide more detail and substance. There is no explicit link to competency scholarship but there is a reference to a body of knowledge that is contained at foundational level, though it does not specify what this is.

4.3.4. Royal Pharmaceutical Society

This framework applies to all pharmacy professionals in the UK at all stages of their professional journey from the time they enter training, to a qualified practitioner and throughout their continuous professional development. Helpfully it makes very clear that there is no one route followed by pharmacy professionals so that the way they demonstrate competence and ability has to vary depending on different career pathways and level of experience and training. This is a useful variation as it picks up the need for flexibility in

career pathways and different entry points which was one of the concerns reflected in the literature around PA and other knowledge based occupations, notably by Kipping, Kirkpatrick and Muzio (2006). The framework also states that it is intended to help with the design of training curricula and development programmes; help provide insight into strengths and development areas as well as with personal development and career progression.

Starting with Campion *et al.* (2011), there is a clear focus on three broad levels of experience and the framework is also designed to be flexible in relation to particular roles allowing applications in different settings. This perhaps is looser than very rigorous job analysis. That said, there is a clear overview of who the competency framework is for in terms of pharmacy practitioner development. It puts delivering the pharmacy service at the heart of the framework. It also relates the service to the wider organisation context of the NHS and how the pharmacy service contributes. Perhaps it is less clear on future proofing the practice and the type of research methods used to establish the competency framework.

With respect to organising and presenting competency information these are situated around five competency domain areas: demonstrating personal qualities; working with others; managing services; improving services; and setting direction. Each of these domain areas have four sub-categories though these tend to be more behaviourally rather than functionally themed. Demonstrating personal qualities focuses on developing self-awareness, managing yourself, continuing professional development and acting with

integrity. Working with others stresses developing networks, building and maintaining relationships, encouraging contribution and working with teams. Managing services addresses planning, managing people, managing resources and managing performance. Improving services looks at patient safety, encouraging improvement and innovation, critical evaluation and facilitating transformation. Finally, setting direction looks at identifying the contexts for change, applying knowledge and evidence, making decisions and evaluating impact.

Again, many of these sound generic, and could be applied to many fields but it is the detail and indicators that illustrate each sub-category that provides context and shows how that competency is evidenced in pharmacy practice. Helpfully, each sub-category also provides examples of the competency at one of three levels – student, practitioner and experienced practitioner. It also has examples in practice using scenarios and case studies to demonstrate how that competency is experienced in the working environment at all three levels. This provides clarity as to the expectations of what a particular competency actually means.

Although this sounds complex, the use of diagrams helps to illustrate how the framework comes together to focus on service delivery. So, in broad terms many of the requirements stipulated by Campion *et al.* (2011) appear to be fulfilled in terms of using the language of competency and relationship to the organisation. Where it is less clear is around the use of any competency libraries and the relationship between cross job and technical competencies.

Looking at how the competency is used the focus tends to be on personal development rather than being firmly fixed to HR systems though it states that the framework can be used or adapted to help with staff appraisal. There is also an e-Learning resource associated with the framework that provides short e-learning sessions that link to the framework, as well as other medical related competency frameworks such as the Medical Leadership Competency Framework. As a result, the framework has a looser usage than suggested by Campion *et al.* (2011), really only addressing how competencies can be used to reflect on a practical theory of effective job performance and how technology can be used to enhance usability.

In terms of CIPR Guidance, more than 12 competencies are found but they are bundled into five clusters for ease of understanding and above all there are useful examples of competencies in action at a variety of levels. There is no explicit link to competency scholarship and very little reference to the body of knowledge that supports the pharmacy profession, but there is recognition that there is a body of knowledge and this is embedded in student curricula and must be acquired.

4.3.5. Reflections from practical applications

The table overleaf provides a useful summary incorporating the reflections based on Campion *et al.* (2011), the CIPD and discussions against the competency scholars and concepts of body knowledge as discussed above.

	GCN	ACCA	ICE	RPS
Analysing competency information (identifying competencies)				
1.Considering organisational context	□	□	□	□
2.Linking competency models to organisational goals and objectives	□			□
3.Start at the top				
4.Using rigorous job analysis methods to develop competencies	□	□		
5.Considering future-oriented job requirements				
6.Using additional unique methods				
Organising and presenting competency information				
7. Defining the anatomy of a competency (the language of competency)	□	□	□	□
8.Defining levels of proficiency	□	□	□	□
9.Using organisational language	□	□	□	□
10. Including both fundamental (cross job) and technical (job specific) competencies	□	□	□	□
11.Using competency libraries				
12.Achieving the proper level of granularity (number of competencies and amount of detail)	□	□	□	□
13.Using diagrams, pictures and heuristics to communicate competency models to employees	□	□	□	□
Using competency information				
14.Using organisational development techniques to ensure competency modelling acceptance and use				
15.Using competencies to develop HR systems (hiring, appraisal, promotion etc)	□	□		
16.Using competencies to align the HR system	□	□		
17.Using competencies to develop a practical theory of effective job performance	□	□	□	□
18.Using IT to enhance the usability of competency models		□	□	□
19.Maintaining the currency of competencies over time				
20.Using competency modelling for legal defensibility (eg test validation)				
CIPD Guidance	In part.	□	In part.	In part.
Explicit link to competency scholarship	□	□	□	□
Explicit link to body of knowledge	□	In part.	Reference made but not articulated	Reference made but not articulated

Table 4.2. Summary of professional competency frameworks against criteria

Where a box has been left blank it is because no evidence can be found to support the best practice component. This does not mean that the framework has not considered this but rather that no evidence can be found for it based on the research approach adopted.

What is striking from looking at the four frameworks is that they all fail to reference in detail any body of knowledge associated with that profession/occupation and none explicitly connect to competency scholars such as Soderquist *et al. (*2010) and Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005). There is, however, some reference to knowledge in the ACCA, ICE and RPS frameworks but it is implicit in that practitioners should have acquired this through formal qualifications associated with the profession, rather than it being stated clearly what that knowledge is and integrated into the framework.

In addition, specific aspects of Campion *et al.* (2011) tend not be evidenced. Under the heading of analysing competency information, strategic integration with organsiational goals and objectives; future proofing; and demonstrating types of research that underpin competency identification are less in evidence. Organising and presenting competency information tend to follow the suggested principles, though the use of competency libraries is something that does not get mentioned. There are two kinds of competency libraries available to organisations. Those that are compiled by industry leaders in a particular field, such as the Lominger Library in the US that coordinates leadership competencies, or they are in-house compiled by the company for reference. As these are competencies relating to a profession, it is perhaps

understandable that organisational libraries have not been referenced. It is also suggested that the establishment of competency frameworks by these professional bodies could initiate the creation of their own repository and reference sources. In respect of using competency frameworks, how these connect to organisational development techniques and strategies is not explicitly stated though this is understandable given that these are professional rather than organisational frameworks. Also, legal defensibility which focuses on issues to do with change of job roles and redundancies again tends to have more resonance with organisational issues. That said, for some bodies such as the ACCA and ICE it can be inferred frameworks can afford some degree of protection.

The most critical issue appears to be tackling the vexed question of how competencies can retain their currency and ensure individuals not only have the skills and behaviours they need now but in the future. This remains the challenge.

There are a number of points for reflection based on the above analysis. In most cases, there is some reference to the organisational context in which the professional frameworks would be used (links to issues around how individual/practice competencies can connect to the idea of core competencies which relate to the organisation). There is scope to make this stronger as many professions also occur inside organisations and need to work within a competency framework hierarchy. This is something that must be considered when developing a framework for PA as not all practitioners

work in agency settings but rather in organisations that will have their own frameworks.

All professional bodies organise and present competency information differently but all identify competency areas that contain more detailed information than lists and include evidences of what that competency means. Vagueness is one of the criticisms of much competency development, in particular in the work of those looking at communication generally and PA such as Fleisher (2007) and the ECOPSI project. At least the Government Communication Professional Competency Framework had clear examples of what certain competencies look like in practice. It is clear that it is possible to create more meaningful competency definitions that have value.

Importantly, all professional bodies identify different levels of competency relating to stages of a career – some with more detail than others perhaps reflecting some of the debate around entry level and management. This is a useful as it suggests that frameworks can have clear progression with different competencies being evidenced differently in different stages of a career or perhaps industry setting.

Only one organisation, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, provided very detailed case study scenarios that linked to practical examples of the competency in action that added extra granularity, enabling the terminology to be made real. The idea of developing a competency framework that has

work-related examples allows for more creative approach to competency development and for a degree of organisational customisation perhaps.

ICE provided the most detail in terms of three core areas (contextual, practice and behaviour) and it was the framework which came the closest to linking competence, competency and some form of wider strategic and societal awareness and not just a focus on the 'doing' knowledge which falls more broadly into skills. Such an approach lends itself to taking a more holistic view of an occupational domain especially one that perhaps is more complex. This could have value for PA.

Most stated that the purpose of the framework encompassed recruitment, performance management, training needs, personal development, with only one adding a reference to linking to curriculum. Only two looked at how to acquire relevant competencies through specified training and qualifications, a finding that seemed surprising. Professional competency frameworks should direct people to the type of training and development that can help underpin their development. Two had created explicit online self-assessment tools to help practitioners identify skills gaps and these offered a helpful and innovative application of technology to support the CPD process.

None of the frameworks really addressed criticisms of competencies, in particular how to keep them focused on the future and not the past to ensure they keep pace with rapidly changing environments. Most tried to tackle the

issue of being too unwieldy and unusable by clustering concepts and integrated visuals and graphics to aid understanding.

Although none of the frameworks appeared to provide a perfect solution they did reveal a range of possibilities and examples of how to articulate the skills and behaviours for an effective profession.

4.4 Evidence of PA competency frameworks

Although the literature revealed research into PA competencies, it did not identify any applied competency frameworks in the style outlined by Whiddett and Hollyforde (2003) with a complete collection of clusters, competencies (with or without levels) and behaviour indicators as illustrated by the frameworks above. The research revealed that the focus was on lists of attributes. These are not fully developed competency frameworks. This does not mean that one does not exist somewhere in practice, but to date none have been revealed. However, during the qualitative phase of this research project, Connect Communications, a leading privately owned PA agency, acknowledged that they had developed a competency approach for their appraisal system.

The MD agreed that this could be shared in this thesis. Competencies were clustered into four broad areas: business, technical, personal and management. Each had a range of sub-categories but on analysis few could be argued to be PA specific and there was no evidence of what these actually meant in terms of evidence. Only understanding of legislative//political

process could be seen to be directly PA related. Interestingly, the competency of influencing and persuasion was explicitly listed which has clear links to the theory of persuasion falling out of the communication knowledge root.

Business Competencies
- Pursuit of excellence
- Customer awareness
- Contribution to corporate success
- Promote Connect culture/goals
- Cost aware

Technical Competencies
- Research, insight and analysis
- Written skills
- Client handling/account management
- Selling and marketing
- Understanding the legislative/political process
- Oral/communication/presentation
- Administration/organisation
- Business development
- Prioritisation/Time Management
- Forward/Strategic/Planning

Personal Competencies
- Communicates effectively (face to face, in presentations, through written word)
- Team Player
- Creativity
- Energy and Drive
- Judgement
- Influencing and persuasion
- Problem solving and analysis
- Planning and organisation
- Accuracy and attention to detail

Management Competencies
- Leadership
- Managing activities
- Capacity to motivate
- Coaching and developing
- Delegation

Table 4.3. Connect Public Affairs Competency Table

Of greater interest is the Connect Diploma at Bronze, Silver and Gold awards where there has been an attempt to identify specific PA activities, but these do not seem to be directly connected to the fourfold competency categorisation above. That said, it does show that it is possible to create evidence to demonstrate skills, for example: at Bronze level – monitor Hansard debates and identify items relevant to clients; Silver - follow a piece of legislation through parliamentary stages including providing reportage on

bills.   In addition, there is a clear focus on winning business and client satisfaction that is very different to the role of those performing PA in-house. This reinforces again that it is possible to build in some form of granularity in any proposed framework, but also highlights the need to provide a solution that allows for different types of PA practice.   Finally, the type of competencies suggested in the Connect framework mirrors scholarly work from the likes of Fleisher (2002, 2007) and McGrath (2006) in terms of the type of attributes necessary such as listening, communication skills and relationships.

4.5 Conclusion and themes emerging

Returning to the purpose of this chapter, there are key points that help to inform RQ5: *What does a contemporary competency framework look like for PA?*

Practical application has revealed a number styles and structures of frameworks being used. Adopting ideas from ICE using contextual, behavioural and technical competencies is a useful way to demarcate between competence, competency and the ability to understand the wider operational and societal context in which work operates. This starts to link to ideas around social and meta-competencies explored by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005). This concept could easily be developed or an additional thematic area created that addresses the conceptual knowledge of a practice. It could also fully integrate the practical knowledge that supports PA delivery

into functional competencies helping to tackle the vexed issue of the large yet disorganised literature on PA as identified by Meznar (2002).

The ACCA, with its detail around job levels, profiles and sectors, provides insights into how a framework could be developed to take into account different types of professional identities that exist within a practice area. This could provide ways to incorporate ideas around cultural hybridity and multiple identities as suggested by Abbott, Zheng and Du (2014), whilst at the same time capturing key components of a professional identity (Ibarra, 1999).

Importantly, the Government Communications Professional competencies shows that communication competencies can have granularity and provide clear evidences of what particular competencies actually look like in practice. This addresses issues around the generation of mere lists which has been a recurring problem when looking at PA and PR competencies either from a scholarly perspective (Fleisher, 2007; Gregory, 2008; Jeffrey and Brunton, 2011; McGrath, 2006) or more industry-focused projects, such the Watson-Helsby (2012) or VMA (2012) reports. Although the work undertaken by Connect shows that PA competencies can potentially be captured there must be more robust ways of demonstrating these beyond the generation of lists.

Picking up the earlier points that many competencies are generic, this reflects the concerns of Fleisher (2007, 2009) in that many PA competencies relate to the communications job family as a whole, so defining what is unique to PA is the challenge. Here the Government Communications framework is relevant

in that it tries to identify what are core communication skills applicable to all communicators, as well as the additional skills applicable to specific communication disciplines. This illustrates a layering of competencies to show what is core. This provides a useful way of thinking about PA and how such a framework could be structured. A layering approach could be a mechanism to manage debates around whether PA is a unified discipline as purported by Windsor (2005).

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

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5.1. Introduction to the chapter

Using the Corley and Gioia (2004) methodology outlined in Chapter Three, this chapter identifies the themes and aggregate dimensions emerging from 29 interviews undertaken as part of this study. Although 31 interviews were conducted, two are being discounted for the purposes of this chapter as the focus was on informing thinking about competency development rather than PA and their comments have been included in the discussion in Chapter Four. As a reminder, the grid below provides an overview of interviewees as discussed in Chapter Three, and a summary of interview respondents can be found in Appendix D.

Agency	Freelance	In-house	Decision maker/gatekeeper	Other
8	5	10	4	4

Table 5.1. Summary of participants for interview analysis

The data has been analysed following a standard qualitative approach as outlined by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) of summarising the meaning emerging from the interviews, categorising or grouping of meanings and structuring or ordering of meaning using narrative. The Corley and Gioia (2004) approach sits within a grounded theory framework that aims to build an explanation or to generate theory around a central theme. Those who advocate a grounded theory approach, such as Strauss and Corbin (2008), suggest a very structured and systematic style of analysis. The Corley and

Gioia (2004) method supports this tradition with a transparent, formalised and rigorous approach to interpreting qualitative data. Grounded theorists argue that without clear procedures the final explanations generated may not be sufficiently robust.

Such an approach may seem at odds with a critical realist philosophical stance where the idea of certainty and law-like generalisations and theory that is totally grounded in the data are to be treated with caution. The researcher believes, however, in the importance of transparency and rigour in terms of process and believes a more structured approach to data analysis allows for clarity and improved narrative and discussion of the data. Indeed, given such a philosophical position, the importance of adding as much depth as possible appeared attractive rather than using a more fluid approach of template analysis (King, 2004), or other forms of thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher had previously rejected taking a pure interpretivist approach to the study and combining a positivist orientation to the analysis seemed appropriate and in keeping with the critical realist and post-positivist position. In this respect, it is the process of grounded theory that has appeal in terms of transparency and robustness of data analysis. The final results, when combined with results from the quantitative studies, still remain firmly associated with the concept of tendencies rather than empirical generalisations (Lawson, 2003) which is at the heart of the critical realist worldview.

In terms of approach, initial themes in the interviews were identified and put into categories (open coding) using constant comparison insight (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). Open coding enables the researcher to capture the main sense of what is said by rephrasing using fewer words (Kvale, 1996). This then moved to conceptual coding reflecting on the terms and language used by interviewees (Strauss and Corbin, 2008) to establish first order concepts. The analysis then moved to axial coding where relationships were sought between the concepts to create second order themes. Finally, these themes were gathered into several overarching dimensions. Although this sounds a linear approach, in practice the researcher followed a 'recursive, process-orientated' style of analysis (Locke, 1996:240) that was more reflexive. The process reflects a more inductive style of analysis to allow the concepts in the data to emerge and for the pre-knowledge gained through the literature to shape and inform, but not test, the themes emerging. Here ideas and concepts emerge slowly through gradual abstraction of the data.

However, pure induction is difficult as it is often impossible for the researcher to be divorced from pre-knowledge, but with constant reflexivity it is believed that although the data has been interpreted with insight from pre-knowledge, the codes and categories that have emerge do so strictly from the data in line with Strauss and Corbin (1990). There are, however, scholarly debates and disputes about the meaning and emphasis placed on prior theoretical knowledge in a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992, 2002). Reichertz (2010) suggests that grounded theory has in fact always contained elements of abduction and is becoming more so with the importance placed on logical inference. It is the researcher's view that grounded theory does indeed contain elements of abduction and inference is logical and relevant. As suggested by Reichertz (2010), data is to be taken seriously but one cannot

ignore previously developed knowledge and this must be queried and questioned. Constant questioning and reflection fits well with a critical realist stance of uncertainty and tendencies rather than predictable generalisations.

Overall, four aggregate dimensions were identified and these are outlined below although they interconnect and link together. Each dimension is initially contextualised and is then supported by a summary matrix that illustrates the first and second order concepts that shape the final dimension. This is followed by a discussion that provides insight to the data. This includes some numerical references to add weight to the strength of voice and also to flag minority or alternative views that might be worthy of note. It also involves representative quotes that help ensure the voice of the informant is maintained. As a result, each section clearly demonstrates how the informant voice has been interpreted and how it has moved to the more theoretical and abstract level of the knowledgeable agent or researcher.

The chapter concludes by reflecting generally on the impact of these qualitative findings on the five research questions ahead of a detailed discussion of all the findings in Chapter Seven.

5.2. A changing landscape and a changing practice

The majority (21/29) of respondents clearly thought that the practice of PA had changed over the last 15 years. Pressures from inside and outside the organisation appear to be creating a changed landscape, with many practitioners viewed more as management consultants rather than narrow lobbyists. Many now see their role widening, with more demands being

placed on them due to commercial and business pressure. Also, the evolving nature of communications, with the drive to integrated campaigning, brand management and content co-ordination across different platforms, appears to be impacting on the practice. Additionally, the importance of demonstrating value also figured highly, with an increased use of planning and evaluation tools. As one practitioner put it *'the practice has grown enormously since the 1980s when yes there were drinks in pubs and contacts. It has become more professional now, just another [communications] business'. (Int. 6)*

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes
• Internally more focus on planning, research and evaluation • Externally issues of transparency, scrutiny and regulation of the industry	Evidence-based
• Devolved institutions • Internationalisation including European dimension • Digital impacts and access to information	Environmental complexity
• Impact, role and use of digital media • Impact, role and use of media	Integration of channels and skills
• Beyond lobbying – breadth of the job with more commercial demands • Reputation management and stakeholders beyond Westminster and Whitehall	Business consultancy

Table 5.2. Aggregate Dimension Construction for a changing landscape and a changing practice

5.2.1. Theme: Evidence-Based

The growing importance of PA becoming an evidence-based practice became apparent. Around a third of respondents (13/29) emphasised the importance of robust research, planning and evaluation and even though some did not refer to planning explicitly, they did refer to the need to show long-term impact (10/29) and clear objective setting (11/29). Although perhaps these propositions do not seem high, as Int. 25 pointed out there does appear to be a growing trend towards systemisation, even if it is not always called planning: '*my first programme was about three pages, lots of analysis and what the situation looked like. Nowadays it is 20-30 pages possibly even more with everything laid out very clearly exactly what to do, when to do it and how do it'.*

At the same time, the issue of transparency and increased scrutiny was a constant theme (20/29). Not that practitioners necessarily felt that this was a bad thing. Those who discussed transparency often linked this to issues around ethical behaviours and honesty and felt that greater openness could help enhance the reputation of PA by making it better understood and more of natural component of a healthy democratic process: *'Number one is the transparency agenda and you see this across corporate life generally but you see it in PA explicitly…[we must be able] to hold the mirror up to our arguments so they stand the test of public scrutiny'. (Int.19)*

5.2.2. Theme: Environmental Complexity

On one level, around a third of respondents talked of globalisation and internationalisation impacting on the domestic public policy environment (10/30) and also spoke of devolved institutions and the need to understand where decision making rested, navigating European, national and regional structures. (12/29): *'We have now moved towards a devolved UK as the institutions of the EU impact even more strongly on the UK we have to look at what is going on in different political landscapes and environments'. (Int.18)*

The biggest impact, however, is the increasingly complex and fast paced nature of public policy due to technology, with significant numbers (22/29) suggesting that it is impacting on how the practice operates:

'I think the second big change is a bit wider and relates to how the communication industry has changed with greater emphasis that there is on digital campaigning and the role of twitter and facebook and all of that in lobbying. I think has changed the way people actually approach PA'. (Int.22)

Also, easy access to information is changing the expectations on what a PA practitioner actually does:

'PA has changed dramatically since I first came into consultancy back in 1989 and that has been mostly as result of technology...access to information was seen as a privilege…now large clients can put their finger on a keyboard and find out by and large what they need to know very quickly themselves….PA is now more about information that is difficult to get hold of

or ethereal and putting an analysis on it, what does it mean, how will it play out'. (Int.18)

These changes appear to have led to a much more integrated approach to PA and a widening of skills.

5.2.3. Theme: Integration and widening of skills

Overwhelmingly, respondents spoke of the integrated nature of the role and the importance of understanding the wider communication landscape and having the skills necessary to operate in a more integrated approach. In respect of digital, its impact and its increasing role the majority of respondents referenced this explicitly (22/29). As Int. 19 simply put it: *"I think digital has changed everything".* Another said:

'I don't think there is anybody in the team would describe themselves as a parliamentary affairs person anymore – it is about wider communications and that is what we are looking for and we have creativity and digital written into every job description'. (Int. 22)

Yet traditional media too is seen to be becoming increasingly important (20/29) and this integration of skills was often discussed in the context of the discipline becoming more professional.

'I think it is difficult to do PA without good knowledge of how media works and operates…and how PA operates in UK and internationally particularly Europe so I think one of the things that has changed in my career is the world of Brussels'. (Int. 11)

Another said: *'I do think the industry has become more professional and more integrated. When it was quite stand-alone we just dealt with the politics side, now more integrated discipline linking to press and social media...need more multi-skilled people'. (Int. 13)*

5.2.4. Theme: Management consultancy

A good majority of practitioners (22/29) suggested their role had moved beyond lobbying. Often roles now included a broader remit of stakeholder relations (15/29), in part prompted by the increasingly complex public policy world and the role of digital in amplifying and stimulating debate and discussion: *'Thought I could put a circle around it. I build relationships with key people – officials, politicians. Not at all. Now it is about business, local government, other communities...about conversations'. (Int.17)*

The term reputation management (11/29) also appears to be used more frequently to discuss aspects of the PA role. At the same time, the increasing importance placed on linking the business and operational world to the world of politics and policy (19/29) requires an individual that has sound commercial acumen, as well as an understanding of the socio-political world and how different policy discussions will play out commercially, operationally or competitively. Interestingly, as Int. 4 stated: '*In the early days [PA practitioners] were policy people now they are business people first'.*

Another respondent argued: *'Any business or organisation lives in a world that is run by legislation and regulation and it is very important if you want to be successful…that you need to ensure that the legislation and regulatory*

environment doesn't rule you and that you have a role in engaging with the process'. (Int.18)

Such a role requires a substantial amount of internal negotiation and persuasion to ensure that the organisation is aware of the possible impacts on it and indeed managing organisational expectations of what can be achieved. Hence the role of being an influencer inside the organisation (13/29) also appears to be of relevance and one that links firmly to the role of trusted advisor, strategic counsel and consultant rather than a pure lobbyist that perhaps implies a more outward one-way only focused role.

5.3. Clarity of purpose but with some identity ambiguity and tension

The majority of practitioners spoke passionately about their role in the public policy process (22/29).   As Int. 22 suggested: '*PA is a force for good in the sense in that it is a very dangerous place to be in when government takes decision on regulation without consulting the people that are going to be affected by that regulation*" or as Int. 7 pointed out: [it is] "*about supporting democracy...all sides need to be understood*'.

Above all, nearly all practitioners (26/29) placed understanding the political system as critical to what they do and part of their unique skill set. As Int. 2 stated: '*understanding of the political system and policy development and to be involved [in it]'.*

Debates around professionalism focused on areas such as research, planning and evaluation but also the importance of providing appropriate advice. This was also evident when talking to those on the agency side. A professional should know what arguments and messaging might work and the necessary timings involved and to manage client expectations even if it means turning down business. As suggested by Int. 9: *'it sounds like a cliché but it is about doing a good modern professional job now; it is not about simply providing access which is I think perhaps how it used to be. Certainly, it's not how we operate now'*.

There was some tension between those believing that sector expertise was crucial, whilst others felt that one of the key skills of PA practitioner was to be able to know how to find out and research new areas and have the ability to understand complex issues very quickly. Though it was suggested that the type of industry and organisation in which PA takes place influences the style of PA.

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes
• Expertise in understanding the political system, its process and nuances • Translating and connecting the political and business worlds	Intellectual capital grounded in political understanding
• Style of PA varies between difference sectors, organisational cultures • Broad agreement on competency requirements (links to 5.4)	Sector and organisation impacts on PA
• Lack of clarity on whether PA is a profession • Growing clarity on what constitutes PA professionalism	Professionalization strains

Table 5.3. Aggregate Dimension Construction for clarity of purpose but with some identity ambiguity and tension

5.3.1. Theme: Intellectual capital grounded in political expertise

As indicated above, nearly all practitioners (26/29) suggested political insight as their skill-set. This includes elements such as monitoring the public policy environment, providing insight in terms of policy, process, timings and stakeholders in order to help the organisation navigate the socio-political environment. As Int. 13 argued: '*it is feeding and understanding what is happening, understanding what the political priorities are then focusing and tying this in to your business and strategic needs'.*

In order to do this, around half referenced the importance of networking to build social capital and access intelligence (14/29). Very few practitioners went into detail about the mechanism of how to build this social capital apart from using the generic term networking. Two practitioners suggested that working for a political party (either government or opposition) was important as it helped to create a finely tuned political radar, but others suggested that it was not necessary to be involved in politics directly and working for a political party had a finite time line of a couple of years after which an individual's contacts started to move on.

Indeed, one practitioner felt strongly about the fact that being too closely aligned to a political party could be a hindrance and cause for concern, as those in power may want to distance themselves from the idea of cronyism and deliberately not take calls. It is the importance of being political with a small "p" that was significant and wanting to network, read and immerse oneself in the contemporary political world that is seen as essential.

As Int. 6 pointed out you must: '*talk to range of different people and to capture the subtleties of communications, you are a jackdaw looking forward and back and acquiring information…you have to have the ability to find out who knows what and who is willing to help. You can't know everything and solve every problem*". As argued by Int. 22: *"we would never hire someone off the back of their little black book of contacts'*.

Many practitioners (22/29) suggested that in essence the role is one of translation providing the organisation-business-government interface. Translating the political world to the business one and the business

environment to the political one.   Often this was driven by the need to obtain clarity and to understand the key issues by all sides. As indicated by Int.17, PA is evolving into a much more transactional relationship regarding information: '*they (policy makers) need information, they need to have things bounced off as much to do with their policy but more of a sense check and building future policy. If it isn't going to work for industry it isn't going to work full stop'. (Int.17)*

 Establishing clarity was reinforced by Int. 23 who made the following point: '*had a perspective client recently and their entire business in the UK revolved around the implementation of one EU directive and the timeliness of implementing it. I could service the client and get them together with the Minister. This is example where you can get clarity about the intention of the government and this is at the heart of business. That clarity is worth to some companies, an entire business'.*

Again, the complexity of the public policy environment was mentioned in this context of understanding: '*So for us as practitioners it is an on-going challenge to manage all that information to make sense of it, to look at the interrelationships…between different political locations and really just to ensure that you can forward think what that political landscape might be looking like'. (Int. 18).*

5.3.2. Theme: Sector and organisation impacts on PA practice

It emerged during discussions that practitioners felt there were different styles of PA, in part linked to the earlier point of it being an evolving practice and the different demands being placed on it. Although only a third specifically

mentioned this (9/29), it became clear during interviews by how individuals spoke; for example, as Int. 18 said: '*I can only speak from agency perspective*' that the role could be subtly different. As pointed out by Int. 13: '*I have had experience of working in several different fields, different roles depending on which industry you work in*'. This was reinforced by Int. 10 who said: '*there are people who specialise in the minutiae of policy and then would argue there are people who do the policy analysis work. Then there are those that do regulatory but this can be technical as well so where does it fit in (to lobbying) policy analysis and detailed compliance work?*'

This became apparent with the different examples of PA activity that practitioners gave during their interviews. Although the researcher agreed not to give specific examples of campaigns due to the confidential nature of the PA work involved, these activities varied from discreet defence negotiations with minimal media involvement to high profile media-driven campaigning around taxation on alcohol. As Int. 13 said: '*it all depends on the client. Some will want a campaign and not want to be seen to participate and will want a coalition of interests around it while not having any profile or visible role; some individual CEOs take a different view and want to interact with politicians and PA to make that happen*'.

One practitioner explicitly talked of her commercial work in bidding for government contracts and using political knowledge to build better bids. This is unlikely to be on the agenda for some practitioners. Two practitioners who had experience of working for trade associations spoke about the need to establish a representative voice involving a substantial amount of internal co-

ordination and consultation before bringing a collective voice to government. Those involved in charities spoke about campaigning to bring about legislative changes and altering opinion and often demonstrated the passionate belief in conveying the cause. Those involved in private sector work spoke about the need to manage legislative and regulatory threats. One practitioner in particular talked in terms of government often creating '*existential threats*' to organisational strategy (Int. 23), with PA being closely aligned to managing that threat.

There was also the sense that different issues required different skills to be developed and this linked again to the growing need for an understanding of media and digital skills. Some campaigns require a high-profile style often involving the media to nurture public opinion in a particular way in order to put pressure on those in power: *'its framing through the media that's a big part of what I do'.* (Int. 9). Alternatively, more often than not it was about quiet resilience to stick at a subject matter. As Int. 22 argued: *'the reality of PA is that you are (often) dealing with issues that quite frankly nobody is interested in'.*

At the same time, as discussed earlier, digital is impacting on access to information and that in turn is changing the role of PA practice to a function more concerned with insight rather than simple information gathering. Some of those interviewed felt this was going one step further, leading to a focus on providing more in-depth sector expertise. As suggested by Int. 12: '*increasingly skills are in a specific sector such as health or transport and have a topic focus'.*

The above point was also reinforced by the four people now working on the other side of PA based on what they now need or expect from PA practice. One said: '*I think you know it is probably easier for people to access information… and that has changed the services that are required from perhaps consultancy and makes it easier for organisations to manage PA in-house and I suspect it means for a higher quality specialist sector analysis as well*'. (Int. 14)

One practitioner explicitly made the point that some organisations have a greater need for PA than others, arguing: *'good PA practitioners funnily enough correspond (in my view) to where they have a crying need for PA and lobbying, for example in the energy industry, gambling'.* (Int. 23). He went on to make the point that PA is most sophisticated in organisations that had a clear organisational strategy that required engagement with the policy process to bring about change.

This linked to wider points about organisational culture and how engaged the senior management team were from an in-house perspective in understanding and recognising the value of PA, and also how much freedom a PA consultant had in being able to manage their expectations of what PA can and cannot deliver. As suggested by Int. 18: *'one thing that is always a challenge is getting the senior management team to get engaged with the information you are providing'.*

Certainly, from a public perception point of view, one practitioner who works in the third sector argued that charity PA practitioners got a much better deal: *'if you know Shelter lobbying government on affordable homes, then the public*

say it is valuable. Some think if it is just a shareholder organisation then it is wrong'. (Int. 7)

As part of this general discussion, a minority of practitioners stated that they felt in-house teams and PA consultancies are diverging. In part this reflects the possible move towards a wider reputation management function and also reflects the impact of regulation that focuses on agency rather than in-house teams. As Int. 10 suggested: '*on the one hand good agencies that add value offer a range of services but there is also wider work being done with limited efficacy that devalues PA. Then on the other hand there is a growing in-house sector. I think lobbying agencies and in-house practice almost in a divergence'.*

In part this debate around divergence also links to access to information. As Int. 18 suggested '*it seems there has been a pretty substantial rise in the number of in-house teams within business and organisations and I think partly this is really to manage that information… I think senior management want somebody in the office next door to say what does this mean'.*

Although not raised by many practitioners, whether you are in a junior or senior role does impact on your daily work experience. As Int. 22 pointed out: '*At a junior level monitoring is a big part of what an account executive … also a big part of their work is tracking the communication with MP offices'.* He went on to add: '*as you go up the ranks your focus is less on setting up the meeting rather on coaching the client to attend the meeting and developing the arguments they are going to make'.*

Despite a sense that PA does vary, a clear sense of some of the core skills required clearly emerged. Although this will be looked at in detail in 5.4. below, it is worth noting here that this included effective writing skills, presenting arguments and counter arguments, sense-making and planning, research and evaluation.

5.3.3. Theme: Professionalisation strains

Nearly all those interviewed (22/29) suggested that PA is becoming more professional. This was often raised in the context of how PA had evolved. However, four interviewees felt that fact PA had always been professional or at least there had been pockets of professionalism, especially within larger companies. As Int. 25 suggested: *'PA always had more professionalism in it than we currently claim',* and he went on to argue that: '*there have always been dinosaurs wondering around claiming to know the secretary of state and arguing that gives them the edge but it wasn't widespread then and it certainly isn't widespread now*'.

Although there was not a clear-cut agreement on what being a professional constituted a number of strands emerged which tended to flow back to conversations about what PA practitioners actually do. Often the discussion became entwined with whether PA was a profession or a craft function.

For many practitioners, professionalism was linked to the core skill of understanding how the political system works (26/29), the ability to translate between business and government and to influence when appropriate. It is about having the appropriate skills and behaviours as outlined in 5.4, focusing

areas such as writing well (21/29), simplifying complex issues (15/29), having empathy with other individuals and having a depth of emotional intelligence (18/29). The idea of empathy will be further explored in 5.4., but two out of the four decision makers interviewed suggested professionalism was rooted in understanding the pressures on elected representatives and those that provide advice.

Defining behaviours did come out during debates around professionalism and often merged with specific questions around the type of behaviours appropriate for PA practice, in particular the need to be ethical and honest (14/29). As one said: *'All professions have a code of ethics and if you don't follow them you get kicked out – stop practising. That is a real profession'. (Int. 25).* Interestingly one practitioner took the view that the focus should be more on values: *'I am a firm believer in establishing more values than ethics rather than codify thy shall do this and thy shall do that so the more you stipulate the boundaries the more people work up to those boundaries'. (Int. 21)*

Although those mentioning ethics seems a modest proportion (around a half), the researcher believes that though it wasn't specifically mentioned by more it should not mean that these individuals are advocating that practitioners should be unethical and dishonest. It could be that ethical behaviour is regarded as implicit.

The debate around professionalism amongst respondents coalesced into discussions around effectiveness. Here the ideas around research, planning and evaluation were dominated by the need for strong objective (or outcome)

setting and the need to have robust and transparent processes. As Int. 25 argued: '*a second big change is in structures, systems and processes. The design of our political programme nowadays is much more systematic',* and this is reinforced by the comment from Int. 19: *'Being a PA professional is being prepared to be measured'.*

The idea of the importance of a PA practitioner's commercial acumen tended to be reinforced again here, with a significant majority (20/29) talking of the importance of PA linking organisational strategy to the political world. Some practitioners (10/29) also saw professionalism as part of a widening or blurring of skills into wider public relations.

Inconsistency emerged around the discussion on whether PA is a profession. On the one hand a minority argued that PA needed to be a profession in a traditional sense, as outlined by Int. 16: '*think professionalism for our practice is becoming a recognised profession like other recognised professions in the UK...encourage people to be member of a professional body, [with] fee structures to benchmark yourself and charge the same way other professions do'.* Here the concept of 'traditional' picks up on such ideas as signing up to codes of conduct (3/29), having some sort of licence to operate with a quality standard, accreditation and qualifications (5/29). Though these views are only held by a small proportion of respondents.

The subject of qualifications was not mentioned by many practitioners when debating professionalism (6/29), suggesting that qualifications are not prominent in their thinking and those that did mention them held extremes of views. On the one hand Int. 16 argued: '*I am a big supporter of qualifications'*

and for this particular individual the idea was aligned to ideas around the need for PA practitioners to have a licence to operate. For others, this was not the case, as argued by Int. 25: '*I don't think it is a profession, it is a job but it is dependent on competencies that are very difficult to measure and to hand out certificates for'*. Another interviewee suggested that the idea of some form of accreditation would be useful, but this needed to be looser to take into account the need for both practical knowledge but also the softer skills: '*For me it is like the red tractor mark*' (Int. 26) arguing that: '*you don't have to have this if you're are a farmer in order to sell to major supermarkets but it demonstrates that there are certain standards behind it'*.

This slight tension perhaps links back to the concept of knowledge and the belief that PA is an applied practice. As suggested by Int. 11: '*I would be an advocate of PA apprenticeships because the combination of doing a course and seeing what you are taught in action'*. He also made the point that '*earlier in my career I went on those courses… and learned enormously about bill stages and how to deal with standing committees, who to lobby was really important but I never got from the course was how to build a coalition of like-minded individuals or interests and get them around the table'*.

Although not mentioned by many respondents the idea of training and development as part of professionalism did get raised. One of the representatives from one of the larger PA agencies made the interesting point that they specifically do not want to get involved in any of the courses run by the two main professional bodies, preferring instead to develop their own people internally in whom they had a vested interested. As Int. 22 pointed out:

'*we want to develop our own staff as in effect that is what we are selling we want to develop them the X way without that sounding like a cult!*'

Surprisingly, one practitioner suggested that: '*beginning to think that [being a profession] is not necessary in this modern age PA striving to become a traditional profession when traditional professions are starting to redesign what being a profession means… so there is an opportune moment actually for the sector to say to itself, lets define better what being a professional means. It has to be values driven*'. (Int. 21).

Again, for many practitioners the conversation around PA as a profession focused on professionalism and performance on the job linked to effectiveness, behaviours and skills was in itself interesting. As one said: '*There is an Increasing desire for it to be regarded as professional therefore fairly standard professional tools and techniques and ladders to be climbable [need to be in place]….days of the roller deck gone*'. (Int.19)

It is professionalism and not the concept of a profession that appears to resonate more strongly. Two agency practitioners also flagged the importance of providing a service and to be honest to the client on what is possible: '*You have to talk about expectations because you can't promise to deliver anything as you can't promise to change the mind of parliamentarians and government, but you can say we can enable and facilitate the process of dialogue and discussion so that arguments can be aired and through the strength of those arguments we hope you can win the case*'. (Int.18). This links to the wider point about PA practitioners being trusted advisors and

skilled influencers helping to manage expectation, a point made by around of respondents (14/29).

5.4. Body of Knowledge visible but lacks realisation and depth

A majority of interviewees (22/29) discussed ideas around the type of knowledge necessary for PA from the practical perspective of what PA practitioners do. In particular, the focus is on understanding political systems and how decisions are made, the levers to pull and the processes involved. At the same time, interviewees did also flag up previously discussed components such as general communication skills (12/29) and the need to understand your own organisation and sector in order to relate it to the wider political context the concept of translation again (22/29). There was limited evidence that practitioners had a deep theoretical understanding of the tools and techniques of communication, such as framing or persuasion, even though these were being applied effectively in different PA campaigns. Only when probed did those interviewed tend to think more conceptually about the type of ideas that might underpin the practice of PA itself or the possibility that there might be theoretical knowledge that could deepen what they actually do, such as theories of persuasion or relationships.

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes
• Political systems and how decisions are made	Public policy insight and intuition
• Communication general including role of stakeholders, psychology (links to 5.4 on competencies) • Persuasion, arguments and counter	Applied communication skills

arguments	
• Translating of political and business worlds	Understanding organisations
• Body of knowledge could be useful • Needs something to hang on to but has to be applied	Knowledge context of PA weak

Table 5.4. Aggregate Dimension Construction for body of knowledge visible but lacks realisation and depth

5.4.1. Theme: Public policy insight and intuition

Given the earlier discussion in 5.2. under the theme of PA identity being shaped by political expertise, it is unsurprising that the key knowledge explicitly referred by interviewees rested on knowledge of the political system. As Int. 17 said, it is the **'***Big picture – know the political landscape". (Int.17)* This concept of knowledge has a very practical perspective *"Understanding of political system and policy developments'. (Int. 2)*

However, the point was made by practitioners and decision makers operating outside of Westminster that too few PA practitioners understood the devolved institutions: as one said: *"'very few London PA agencies know how to address the increased devolution in the UK'.* (Int. 14)

In terms of how this knowledge was acquired, interviewees were less clear, with some (9/29) talking about either direct experience of working in government or b learning on the job. Having an interest in the political world was also seen as important. As suggested by Int. 22: '*I guess it comes back to the political antenna, a lot of it you develop on the job because you have seen how similar campaigns have evolved previously and you are able to*

extrapolate that and that comes with experience and I do struggle to see how that would be taught in a class room environment'.

There was no reference to a wider conceptual understanding of the how democracy operates and the role of organisations within it, apart from the belief that it is important in a democracy for all voices to be heard. That said, two interviewees did talk about the importance of understanding the needs of society and PA operating in a social space. This was however in the context of how to devise more effective campaigns. The wider issue of deeper ideas surrounding knowledge will be picked up later in this section.

5.4.2. Theme: Applied communication skills

As with the debate around political knowledge, the focus when asked about knowledge and what practitioners needed to know related back to the practical daily skills of communicating with stakeholders. As pointed out by Int. 24 '*communication skills obviously…encompasses written and verbal communication, getting the message across'.*

As will become apparent when exploring the specific functional competencies, the type of communication skills referred to included writing effectively (21/29) which meant being able to construct succinct one or two-page briefs that captured the main points of an argument. Also, as referred to in the quote above, the concept of messaging was mentioned that embedded ideas around framing and establishing a strong narrative (15/29), but also then being able to deliver the message in a written form, a social media form and also from a media perspective, also figured highly.

Nobody picked up on any theoretical ideas that supported the communication process apart from referencing the idea of persuasion (17/29): *'Skilled practitioners can get through this [volume of information] – is about persuasion'* (Int. 7). Knowledge about different theories of persuasion was not evident, though in practice persuasion techniques were clearly applied in different campaigns. A lack of knowledge of communication theory also applied to understanding stakeholders and building relationships (15/29) as part of communication knowledge *'it is about the ability to talk and present the case, the one-to-ones, keeping the channels going'* (Int. 26). This is integral to the role of PA, but no practitioner demonstrated any insight into any conceptual knowledge that underpins building relationships.

5.4.3. Theme: Commercial knowledge of growing importance

As mentioned a number of times before, the importance of a commercial understanding and knowledge also arose under this theme. As one said: *'It has evolved. Now we need a sense of commercial impact. Now look at costs. In particular, connecting what they [PA practitioners] know about policy and potential impact on the business'*. *(Int. 4).*

Another said: *'Key is for PA not to get bogged down in the minor issues need to focus on the big things. Understand that their role is to implement the organisational strategy...Must have a strategic look over the longer-term – about the business'. (Int. 6)*

The importance of commercial understanding and awareness also figured highly when discussing identifying and recruiting senior PA practitioners with

the Recruitment Consultant. This ties firmly to ideas in the Watson Helsby (2012) Report on the PA and its link to organisational strategy.

5.4.4. Theme: Limited awareness of conceptual knowledge

As illustrated with the above themes, most interviewees never spontaneously gave a sense of there being a wider body of knowledge that underpins practice. When probed on the idea of knowledge, practitioners instinctively talked about practical aspects of the job. As Int. 6 suggested: *'is there a difference to the doing?",* and as Int. 7 pointed out *"knowledge is learnt practically as responsibility grows you learn more'.*

Only one interviewee argued that: '*There is a body of knowledge but no commonality or understanding. Various schools of thoughts for example, Grunig and Hunt, stuff from management, psychology, sociology. There is something but need a cannon – we need to bottom this out. Then there is the straight forward practical stuff – the how to?'* **(***Int. 1)*

That said, when really pushed by the researcher and given examples of conceptual and applied theoretical ideas then around a quarter of practitioners (7/29) felt there would be an appetite to understand more. *'Case studies, experience from other markets, hard to say where take from, perhaps would be interested to know roots, political systems, social context and theoretical frameworks would make it more academic discipline. How to meet the need of society and solid basis for it might be helpful'. (Int. 2)*

Another said*: ''I had never thought of it like that. Very true. We just do stuff but yes thinking about it things like persuasion, psychology, how to structure*

an argument and what makes good evidence. The whole idea of reality and how discussions and dialogue create reality. Also, the wider stuff about society'. (*Int. 26)*

The tone of these discussions is clearly illustrated by the following *'Intellectually very little understanding about its roots and what it is there for'. (Int. 10)*

5.5. Broad competency agreement within a fragmenting practice

Although the debate on knowledge led to mixed and limited views, there was strong agreement on the broad skills and behaviours required for PA practice, but often these varied on when they would be used and at what stage of a PA career. Ideas around being a diplomat, negotiator, influencer and communicator all figured highly. Being a strong listener with good political and social antenna were mentioned and the ability to create a connection with people and articulate strong, persuasive arguments were constantly raised – ultimately the PA practitioner is an advocate, whether inside to senior management or externally to policy makers.

Discussions on skills and behaviours were often entwined with those around effectiveness and professionalism. As one respondent in argued '*the idea of competencies should lie within a bigger debate around ethical standards and professionalism'* (Int. 20). At the heart of this was the growing importance of measurement. At its basic, this focused on ultimately getting the public policy outcomes set but also included ideas around outputs (for example, the

contact programme and number of people met). This was, however, quickly followed by the need to measure how public policy attitudes were changing and the type of responses to arguments.

Time and time again, practitioners spoke of the importance of getting ideas and arguments down on paper and bringing these ideas to life so they were understandable. This coupled with understanding the political environment in order to bring these ideas to life was also critical.

1st Order Concepts	2nd Order Themes
• Wider understanding and empathy • Honesty, ethics and personal credibility	Importance of emotional intelligence and social awareness
• Interpreting the political environment and connecting to the organisation • Understanding of the mechanics of the political process and when and how to intervene	Need for organisational and political awareness
• Being analytical capable of synthesising information • Able to create clear persuasive arguments, messages and evidences • Relationship builder inside and outside the organisation	Functional competencies of a strategic communicator underpin the practice

Table 5.5. Aggregate Dimension Construction for broad competency agreement within a fragmenting practice

5.5.1. Theme: Importance of emotional intelligence and social awareness

Although discussion around behaviours (competence) and skills (competency) often coalesced, with interviewees often referring to both at the same time to whatever was asked the majority of practitioners (18/29) suggested areas around emotional intelligence, empathy and understanding others (in particular around grasping another's point of view) as important.

As outlined by Int. 17: *'it is empathy, really understand where different people are coming from'.* This can be exhibited in many different ways and neatly summed up in the comment: '*Being able to talk to anybody in a way to make them feel an individual, boil issues down to key points and arguments….PA is not about ornithology (watching) but about process and more you speak and meet people the more plates you spin. It is ability to think on your feet' (Int. 6).* In this context, Int. 6 talked of being able to make conversation and connect with a whole host of individuals on their level making their interests relevant to your interests and being diplomatic and personable in order to put individuals at ease to initiate conversations.

Although only mentioned by around one-sixth of respondents (5/29), the concept of listening needs to be further considered as often social awareness is predicated on active listening in order to read a situation and facilitate transactional conversations and relationships. It may well be that respondents felt the concept of listening did not need to be explicitly stated as it falls within the overarching idea being an effective communicator and demonstrating empathy, and relates to ideas around political insight and social capital.

Other comments about behaviour really relate to the ability to connect with people and to build personal credibility. There was no consistent one word or phrase used to describe credibility, but taken together around two-thirds (20/29) talked of openness, transparency, personable manner, politeness, integrity, sincerity, not a timewaster, non-bias, efficiency, patience, adaptability, resilience, helpful, organised, confident. Interestingly, one practitioner specifically referenced humility: *'I think one of the most telling things when I came into X agency was that the PA team behaved very differently to the Financial PR team or the Industrials Team – a fundamental difference – I think we have humility…you would never find the partner in those other areas pouring the tea', (Int. 18*) which is an interesting variation on the idea of credibility.

The other major theme here linked to the importance of being ethical and honest and supports ideas around personal credibility. Around half (16/29) mentioned this explicitly in terms of behaviours, often in the context of linking it to professionalism. This perhaps seems low but this could be because many practitioners feel it is self-evident and given the importance practitioners placed on supporting democracy (22/29), it is unlikely they would be taking the opposite view of believing they should be acting unethically and dishonestly.

A slight twist on behaviours comes from one of the elected representatives when questioned about the behaviours they like to see exhibited in PA professionals said: '*politeness, sincerity, brevity all wrapped up in humour!'* *(Int. 14*). Perhaps this ties in again to issues around personal credibility and

the importance of reading situations, not being a time waster and bringing value to a discussion or debate and the technical skill of getting to the heart of arguments and conveying key points.

5.5.2. Theme: Need for organisational and political awareness

Picking up again on the constant theme running through this chapter, practitioners stated that their core skills involved understanding the political system and bringing political insight (26/29): *'There are the skills around understanding – the public policy environment, decision making processes, who is who and how decisions are made – that is the meat of our work'. (Int.21)*

Another respondent said: *'The need for political insight, how government works, public policy context, regulatory frameworks, parliament, legislation and party politics (structures, policies, decision makers) and specialist areas of devolved administration, local authorities and European Commission and Parliament and the interplay with government – stakeholder relations'. (Int.5)*

This, linked to organisational strategy and having a commercial acumen to connect the political and organisational world, is also a practical competency requirement that again has formed a theme running through this chapter.

5.5.3. Theme: Functional competencies of a strategic communicator underpin the practice

In terms of practical skills, a number of areas were consistently raised, including research, planning and evaluation (13/29) and establishing clear

outcomes (11/29), creating persuasive arguments, understanding counter-arguments and how to address these (17/29). This links closely to ability to make sense of complex information and to be able to interpret this and simplify information to the core principles (15/29). On a very practical level, ability to write (and also speak) well (21/29) was flagged numerously and often linked to concepts around being an analytical, critical and strategic thinker (20/29).

Other aspects of skills mentioned included communication generally and also the idea of a managing relationships with a broader range of stakeholders (15/29), including the importance of internal stakeholders and being skilled influencer inside the organisation through managing expectations (14/29). As part of drilling down on how PA actually perform their role, apart from returning to ideas around political insight, a broad range of words were used, including coalition building (10/29), opening up conversations (14/29) and negotiation and consensus building (8/29).

So, there are some common threads that appear to run though the core functional skills of a PA practitioner, yet as discussed earlier there seems to be a divergence in how some of these skills are applied in practice against a backdrop of a transparency and a changed media and social media world. This is reflected in the words of one respondent, as follows: *'The transparency of modern day government, the information-age and social media have shaped PA more clearly as a discipline of PR (not simply lobbying governments) but political insight to inform decision-making, campaigns and business plans'. (Int. 5)*

The blurring of boundaries with PR more broadly and linking to concepts of being a strategic thinker and an effective planner also emerged as was well articulated by Int. 23: *'It is about the initial analysis and the creation of the strategy, the mapping of where the resources should be and mapping where they are. It is the usual development of a communication strategy because as soon as do real PA you must work back to defining your objectives, mapping your resources to achieve those objectives then once you have done that it is just about talking to them (government etc) and if need be embarrassing them through the media'.*

All respondents in various ways touched on key aspects of the following areas: campaigning, intelligence gathering and monitoring, argument construction and messaging, contact building, forging alliances, problem definition, writing and being able to make the complex easy to understand and relevant.

5.6 Concluding reflections

A number of points are revealed from the qualitative findings that have a bearing on the research questions. A detailed discussion takes place in Chapter Seven that analyses these findings against the literature and links to the quantitative findings in the next chapter, but ahead of this initial thoughts that help inform the research questions are outlined here. In respect of RQ1 looking at the shape of practice, then it is clear practitioners feel the practice has evolved, is situational and that technology has broken down the mystique of PA. Campaigning now often integrates media and digital skills and often advice given falls more in line with strategic counsel. Regarding the

knowledge that underpins practice in RQ2, then the concept itself clearly causes confusion with a focus firmly on the practical rather than the conceptual. That said, there appears to be a realisation that PA uses a breadth of knowledge when ideas are put into the language of practice. Turning to RQ3 and RQ4, and the skills and behaviours of PA practitioners, then there is a shift away from PA being seen as narrow lobbying and it now requires a range of strategic communication skills and a depth of emotional intelligence. In terms of a competency framework in RQ5, it is clear than a framework will need to be agile and responsive to a range of sectors, organisations and roles though there appears to be a growing clarity on the type of attributes that such a framework should contain.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

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6.1. Introduction to the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the findings coming from the quantitative survey (or questionnaire) of PA practitioners. As outlined in Chapter Three the role of the survey was not to test any specific hypotheses emerging from the qualitative study. Instead, the survey was intended to help illuminate and provide additional perspectives on the following:

- To check that there was an appetite for PA to get to understand itself better by understanding the knowledge that underpins it (supporting RQ2, RQ5)

- To check that there was a sense that PA could agree on a set of behaviours and skills and to start to identify what these were (supporting RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

- To understand more fully the concept of effectiveness and professionalism as it related to PA picking up on themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews (supporting RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

- To elucidate relationships between knowledge, behaviours and skills and what this might tell us about the state of the PA practice (supports RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

Such an approach to integrating quantitative work into the overall study is compatible with a critical realist position by leaning towards exploring tendencies rather than empirical generalizations (Lawson, 2003). Additionally, as Cheek *et al.* (2015) argue, the importance of continually asking questions throughout the research process to ensure that the appropriate methods are used encourages the researcher to be agile in their thinking. In this case, it was felt an alternative use of survey could prove useful to garner additional insight, as rationalised in Chapter Three.

In terms of analysing the data, the researcher used a combination of SPSS and Excel with data sets generated automatically by Survey Monkey software into the respective Excel and SPSS spreadsheets. In total, there were 50 respondents. The quantitative element is designed to elucidate and explore rather than test theory. The focus of the analysis, therefore, is based on generating meaningful insights that can contribute to the research questions, rather than on creating complex statistical patterns that might be more relevant for large data sets with substantial amounts of numerical data. As Robson (2002:393) argues: 'the negative side of readily available software is that it becomes that much easier to generate elegantly presented rubbish'. As such, analysis must be appropriate in terms of its purpose and reflect any limitations in the data gathering process. This concept has guided how statistical techniques have been used.

The researcher reflected on individual survey sheets but did not have to manually enter data into the SPSS system. A data matrix was prepared

automatically by Survey Monkey software that included converting any categorical data (whether descriptive or ranked) into numerical codes. Where there was missing data, based on a non-response, the SPSS spreadsheet cell was automatically left blank. It was filled by a full stop by default and treated as a missing variable for analysis purposes. The researcher subsequently checked the data matrix for errors looking for any illegitimate codes, obvious omissions and cross checking a sample of five manual questionnaires against the data illustrated in the data matrix. Given the nature of the sample, its size and subject matter, any form of weighting data was ruled out as being inappropriate. This checking was also necessary to ensure that the researcher became familiar with the automatically generated numerical codes given to categorical data and to create a basic codebook. As Pallant (2013) points out, preparing a codebook involves deciding how to label and document how the variables are defined and labeled and assigning numbers to the possible responses. This enables the data to remain meaningful during analysis and interpretation.

A basic exploratory data analysis (EDA) approach based on Tukey (1977) was used by initially looking at individual variables to really understand the data and its components. EDA suggests the use of a range of graphical techniques to help the researcher be as open minded as possible to the data, looking at areas such as values, trends, proportions and distributions, as suggested by Sparrow (1989). This enables the researcher to go on and compare and look for relationships between the variables.

Consequently, the data has been explored and discussed firstly by looking at individual variables to provide some context and basic overview. This broadly relates to looking at the data gathered against each question asked. Then the data moves into comparing variables to help elucidate and explore interdependencies and provide more comparable information. For a number of variables there is discussion around the central tendency (primarily using the mode – the value that occurs the most frequently – as it is argued by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) that for descriptive data this is the only measure that can be interpreted sensibly. In many cases this is in the form of a percentage. There is also some discussion of dispersion around the central tendency if thought useful. Although dispersion measures are only really suitable for numerical data, when categorical data has been converted to numerical it is possible for these to be shown and used as part of the discussion. In terms of dispersion it was not felt relevant to use standard deviation as this relates to the extent of spread of numerical data around the mean and in most cases, it is the mode that is being used to discuss the central tendency.

When reflecting on relationships between variables it is usual to use non-parametric statistical significance tests. These are tests that are used when the data is not normally distributed which tends to relate to categorical data. Here significance relates to testing the probability of a pattern occurring by chance (Bernam-Brown and Saunders, 2008). To understand whether two variables are associated, the Chi Square and/or Cramer V tend to be used when looking at categorical data. It is also suggested that to explore ranked

data the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test should be used to help understand the representativeness of the sample. Finally, in order to examine the strength of relationships between two variables Spearman's rank correlation coefficient tends to be applied. It is recognised, however, that with the small data set under study the value of these tests must be questioned as their value is reduced as they will often show low degrees of probability and reliability. Although the software automatically ran such tests, the researcher ruled out placing significant value on them. The purpose of the survey is to help illuminate concepts and suggest tendencies and it was felt the data could make a contribution irrespective of any significance tests.

The section below now presents the findings from the quantitative study by specific question. It firstly looks at variables that provide an overview of the respondents before looking at possible relationships between the variables being investigated. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest full number. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix E.

6.2. Overview of respondents

In answer to Q1, how long have you worked in PA the majority 88% (with n=50) had worked in PA for at least three years or more, with most at 28% stating they had been in practice between 6-10 years, followed at 20% by those saying they had worked in PA for 15 years or more. So, the data set is skewed slightly to an older practitioner.

In response to Q2, which asked where practitioners worked, there is a clear bias towards agency practitioners with the majority of respondents at 50% (with n=50) working in agency. Those working in-house (public sector) and freelancers represent the second largest category both at 14%. This was followed by 12% of respondents coming from in-house (private sector) and finally 6% coming from trade associations and 4% citing in-house voluntary/NGO roles. So, although respondents do represent a range of settings in which PA is conducted, there is a bias towards agency life.

With respect of Q3, which asked about practitioner job titles, there are responses from a range of levels but the majority of respondents at 65% (with n=49) coming from manager and director level grades and 14% at senior vice-president/account director level. That suggests a greater level of experience and insight into practice in alignment with for Q1 in terms of representing the views of slightly more mature and experienced practitioners. Only 6% suggested they were at account executive level with 14% suggesting that none of the categories applied, though few provided further information. This may relate to more holistic in-house roles when classification of jobs becomes more difficult.

Q4 asked respondents to describe the sector within which they worked and the agency theme emerged strongly. A total of 42% (with n=48) cited 'agency' which is not unexpected given that half of respondents defined themselves in Q2 earlier as working in agency. The second largest sector represented at 21% come from the public sector (this combines those working in central and

local government with the NHS and education sectors). This was followed by pharmaceuticals and not-for-profit both at 6%. There was limited representation from those working in construction, manufacturing, financial services and leisure. Those without any representation included transport, IT, retail/wholesale and utilities. So, respondents are not equally representative across specific industry sectors although it can be argued those working in agency do traditionally reflect a diverse client base. Interestingly, 13% of respondents suggested they did not fit into any category listed. On investigation, these individuals defined themselves as freelancers mirroring the earlier response to Q2. Some freelancers do specialise in different sectors and this question gave respondents an opportunity to declare this, but in this case these individuals preferred to stick to the freelance categorization.

Q5 looked at gender and respondents are slightly biased towards males at 55% compared to 45% (with n=47). This perhaps reflects the slightly more male bias in the PA industry as a whole.

Q6 looked at age. The majority of respondents fell into the 30-40 age range at 36% (with n=47). If this is added together with the 41+, 51+ and over 60 categories then 72% of respondents were over 30 and that suggests the slightly more experienced make-up of respondents, as indicated in previous questions.

Q7 asked where practitioners spent most of their time practicing PA. There was a good mix of PA experience working across a range of public policy settings, although London (Westminster/Whitehall) dominated with 83% (with

n=47) stating it was where they spent most of their time. That said, a good number of practitioners selected working in the devolved institutions (32%), local government (28%) and European Institutions (19%) as the second most important location of where they conducted PA activity. This was the same pattern when reflecting on the third most important location of where they spent their time with 26% in the devolved institutions, 17% local government and 19% in European Institutions. The one area that ranked much lower in terms of where PA practitioners spent their time was working with the domestic governments of other countries with 47% stating that it was not applicable to their role. The study was keen to ensure that there was a broad experience base, incorporating not just the PA role at Westminster/Whitehall but also when being conducted in the devolved institutions and Brussels and this has been broadly achieved. It was felt this would enable a more holistic view of the PA function to be gained.

6.3. Individual Variable Analysis

Q8 asked those working in-house how PA was viewed and understood by the organisation. Around three-quarters of respondents (74%) (with n=31), stated that that the organisation viewed PA as crucial/essential, with 73% arguing that it had an excellent understanding of the function and could explain what it did. Around a quarter (23% said the function was viewed as important but no more so than any other function, with 17% stating that the organisation had a good understanding.   This perhaps shows the growing recognition by organisations that the political arena is one that can impact on its operations. Only 3% suggested that practice was viewed as 'nice to do' rather than

essential, with 3% suggesting that the organisation was aware that PA had value but did not understand it and 7% suggested that the organisation had a limited understanding of its value and could not explain what it did. There is a lower response rate here because the question stipulated that those working in agency need not answer.

Q9 asked practitioners about the challenges facing the PA industry, with respondents asked to rank on a scale from 1 (high) to 10 (low) a range of possible challenges. With any ranking caution needs to be applied because even if some items are ranked highly, this need not mean those that rated lowly are insignificant to the respondent – ranking merely tries to tease out some degree of prioritisation. Based on combining the top three percentage ranks for each category it appears to suggest that practitioners view the reputation of the industry/lobbyists by the public and also by the media and policy makers as the top two challenges facing the industry, with 50% of practitioners citing both of these. Though there is a significant minority at 23% who ranked reputation of the industry amongst the public at the lower end of the scale.

	1	2	3	Percentage of those ranking this 1-3 (high)	Percentage of those ranking this 8-10 (low)
Reputation of the Industry or lobbyists by the public	17.5	22.5	10.0	50%	23%
Reputation of the Industry or lobbyists by the media and policy makers	12.5	10.0	27.5	50%	8%
Trust and Integrity	20.0	10.0	12.5	43%	15%
Showing public affairs value	17.5	15.0	7.5	40%	23%
Measuring and evaluating public affairs	5.0	10	10	25%	25%
Demand for greater business and commercial understanding	10.0	7.5	7.5	25%	50%
Complexity of policy making	7.5	7.5	7.5	23%	33%
Changing skills required to do the job	5.0	5.0	10.0	20%	33%
Regulation	5.0	7.5	7.5	20%	28%
Demand for greater management and leadership skills	0.0	5.0	2.5	8%	65%

Table 6.1. Simplified comparison of high and low ranked challenges facing public affairs adapted from original data table to Q9.

Initial reflection suggests that alongside wider reputational issues, trust and integrity (43%) and showing PA value (40%) are considered the top four major challenges for practitioners in the coming years. Whilst areas around measuring and evaluating the value of PA, demand for greater business and commercial acumen, complexity of policy making, changing skills requirements and regulation garner fairly mixed views as to the challenges this may present. To note is the belief held by 65% - a significant majority of practitioners - that a demand for greater management skills and leadership will not be an issue moving forward which may seem at odds with the need to improve the reputation of practice as a whole.

These top four areas are also supported when looking at the mean average ratings with reputation amongst media and policy makers (3.98), reputation amongst the public (4.35), trust and integrity (4.53) and showing PA value (4.65). This shows the average sentiment among respondents towards these issues fell towards the higher end of the scale with other ratings all above 5.0 towards the lower end of the scale. This was also evidenced when looking at the median, with reputation amongst media and policy makers and reputation amongst the public showing at 3.5, trust and integrity at 4.0 and showing PA value at 5.0. So, there is broad consistency amongst the central tendencies.

For Q10, when practitioners were asked whether PA needed an agreed skill-set, around three-quarters of respondents (76%) (with n=37) suggested that it did, but around a quarter (24%) stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed. A significant number of (n=13) skipped this question, suggesting perhaps the question of skills had limited relevance to some practitioners.

Continuing the theme of skills, Q11 (with n=37) asked practitioners to identify the importance of specific skills against a specified list and to rate these from essential/very important, desirable/important, moderately important to least important. Then to suggest how well these were performed by practitioners from highly competent/perform very well, competent/perform well, moderately competent/perform less well to not competent/perform least well. The table below provides a simplified overview, leading on those skills that practitioners felt were essential and cross-referencing these to performance.

	Essential/Very Important	Desirable important	&	Highly Competent/perform Well	Competent/Perform Well
Ability to communicate ideas (writing & verbally)	97.3%	2.7%		44.4%	52.8%
Listening and processing complex information	91.9%	8.1%		27.8%	58.3%
Building coalitions & working collaboratively	70.2%	29.7%		22.2%	44.4%
Issues Management	63.9%	27.7%		28.6%	51.4%
Problem Solving	62.1%	32.4%		22.2%	52.8%
Legislative knowledge	59.4%	35.1%		41.7%	38.9%
Project/Campaign research and planning	56.8%	37.8%		36.1%	38.9%
Commercial understanding/how business works	48.6%	35.1%		0%	50%
Media understanding and its usage	37.8%	45.9%		5.6%	69.4%
Social media understanding and its usage	27.0%	54%		11.1%	36.1%

Table 6.2. Simplified cross-reference comparison between importance and performance of PA skills adapted from the data table to Q11.

The two areas that dominated were ability to communicate ideas (writing and verbally) at 97% and listening and processing complex information at 92%. In terms of how well practice performed these, although the majority of practitioners felt these were performed well – 44% rating practice highly competent and 53% competent for ability to communicate, and 28% highly competent and 58% competent. However, it might be concluded that there was still room for improvement especially if these are skill sets that are deemed essential to practice.

Falling in the central zone of importance between 40 – 70% come areas such as building coalitions (70%), issues management (64%), problem solving (62%), legislative knowledge (60%), project/campaign research and planning (57%) and commercial understanding/how business works (49%). In terms of how well practitioners performed these, there is a mixed picture in Table 6.2, but in general terms the results show slightly lower levels of suggested competence in these areas. Of particular interest is legislative knowledge which showed that although 42% thought practitioners were highly competent and 39% competent, surprisingly 19% thought practitioners only showed a moderate degree of competency or no competency at all.

At the lower end of the importance scale, 38% of practitioners cited media understanding and usage as being essential and deemed least essential social media understanding and its usage with only 27% of practitioners believing it to be essential. Although these appear to be significantly less important than the other categories mentioned, they still represent between a quarter and third of respondents which is a significant minority. Of interest is that both these categories show the highest percentage for skills that are deemed desirable amongst all categories. This may suggest that these skills are seen to be emerging and areas that are becoming increasingly important and set to grow in the future. At the same time, both these categories show the highest percentage of respondents, suggesting that practitioners are competent in these areas rather than highly competent. This again possibly reveals a need to improve skills. Interestingly, the only categories in which respondents suggested practitioners were not competent were in social media

and understanding (14%), commercial understanding/how business works (14%), media understanding and usage (8%); and, rather oddly given its importance to PA, legislative knowledge (6%). Again, (n=13) skipped this question perhaps reinforcing and revealing a lack of interest in the subject.

When asked in Q12 whether there were any other skills worthy of mention, 10 respondents added comments and these are worth referencing here. Although legislative knowledge scored in the central zone of importance, three respondents drew out the need for political understanding and understanding of public policy formation and evidence-based policy making (although it was mentioned that this could be categorised under legislative knowledge). Interestingly in this context, one individual made the following point regarding skills: '*parliamentary processes and intelligent use of them is key. I see too much emphasis on candy floss processes such as EDMs*' (Respondent 45).

Other responses in this section included business development, networking, relationship management, diplomacy, resilience, pragmatism, taking a brief, providing counsel, presentational ability, continual measurement, monitoring and evaluation using emerging technologies, data science and ethics. Some of these might be deemed to fall into the categories of communication skills and campaign planning and research, but it is worth drawing these out given that individuals took the time to want to highlight these areas specifically. They also touched on aspects of behaviours and knowledge that are explored in later questions.

For Q13 (with n=33) respondents were asked whether PA practitioners needed an agreed set of behaviours. The majority of respondents at 79% (with n=33) suggested that they did, but a similar pattern emerged as to skills with a significant number (21%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing or disagreeing entirely. Again, a significant number of individuals (n=17) skipped this question as well, perhaps suggesting a lack of relevance.

Continuing the theme of behaviours, Q14 (with n=33) asked practitioners to identify the importance of specific behaviours against a specified list and to rate these from essential/very important, desirable/important, moderately important to least important. Then respondents were asked to suggest how well these were performed by practice from highly competent/perform very well, competent/perform well, moderately competent/perform less well to not competent/perform least well. The table below provides a simplified overview leading on those behaviours that practitioners felt were essential and cross-referencing these to performance.

	Essential/Very Important	Desirable important	&	Highly Competent/perform Well	Competent/Perform Well
Personal credibility (eg reliable, trustworthy, ethical)	97%	3%		22.6%	54.5%
Skilled influencer (outside the organisation)	84.5%	15.5%		45.1%	48.4%
Skilled influencer (inside the organisation)	69.7%	30.3%		38.7%	45.2%
Socially aware and intuitive	63.6%	30.3%		19.3%	54.8%
Collaborative and adaptable	57.6%	39.3%		9.7%	51.6%
Courage to challenge	57.6%	39.3%		9.7%	45.2%
Intellectual curiosity	54.5%	42.4%		22.6%	35.5%
Resilient, motivated and energetic	48.5%	48.4%		22.6%	61.3%
Ability to get on with people	48.5%	39.4%		16.1%	64.5%
Decisive thinker	48.5%	30.3%		9.68%	54.9%

Table 6.3. Simplified cross-reference comparison between importance and performance of public affairs behaviours adapted from the data table to Q14.

The two essential behaviours that dominate this category are practitioners demonstrating personal credibility (97%) and being a skilled influencer outside the organisation (85%). In terms of how well these were performed 23% of respondents thought that practitioners were highly competent and 55% competent in terms of personal credibility and 45% highly competent and 48% competent in being skilled influencers. As with the findings on skills in table 6.2. there seems scope for improvement.   Interestingly too, it is the personal credibility category that about a quarter of respondents (23%) suggest that practitioners are only moderately competent or not competent at all. Given the importance that is placed on this category, a relevant reflection is that the practice could perform better here.

The rest of the categories fall within the central 40-70% range, however it is worth highlighting the high rating given to being a skilled influencer inside the

organisation, with 70% of respondents suggesting that this was essential, ranking third after personal credibility and being a skilled influencer outside the organisation. Given that this also scores highly as a desirable/important behaviour by 30%, it might suggest that this is an area of growing importance. Findings revealed split responses in terms of whether respondents believe practitioners were highly competent (39%) or competent (45%), but it is the area too that 16% suggest practitioners perform less well so if this is a desirable attribute then perhaps it is an area that needs to be addressed. The rest of the behaviours bunch closely together in terms of their importance with evenly mixed views about competence in these areas, but none rating highly in terms of performing these poorly.

When asked in Q15 whether there were any other behaviours that were relevant, six respondents added comments. Three in particular flagged the importance of perspective, ability to see the long term and ability to think and be strategic. In addition, there were comments about being organized and systematic, understanding big politics and where the 'wind was blowing' and having an equitable vision. Interestingly, one individual suggested: '*Modesty, lack of ego. Often missing in many PA specialists I deal with – particularly consultants'.* (Respondent 45)

Q16 asked respondents to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that PA needed its own body of knowledge. Although the majority of respondents at 60% (with n=32) either agreeing or strongly agreeing that it did, a significant number 41% neither

agreed nor disagreed or disagreed completely. So, this statement garnered mixed views. There was also a significant number at 18 who skipped this question that again suggests the question did not appear to have much relevance.

When the concept of knowledge was explored in more detail in Q17 which asked respondents to rate different statements from very helpful, helpful to not helpful in terms of helping us understand what PA did, how it worked and its role in society, then a more complex picture emerged.

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not Helpful
How individuals and organisations build relationships and ideas of stakeholder engagement	54.5%	42.4%	3%
How issues and crisis emerge, grow and are shaped	45.4%	36.4%	18.1%
The role of debate, discussion and dialogue and how people make sense of things	42.4%	45.4%	12.1%
The role of business and organisations generally in society	42.4%	36.4%	21.2%
How persuasion is used to develop arguments eg facts, figures, case studies	33.3%	57.6%	9%
How people create different realities and have different takes on the same situation	27.3%	45.5%	27.2%
The way society creates different systems of governance and policy formation	24.2%	60.6%	15.1%
The role of media and social media in society and its impact	21.12%	60.6%	18.2%
The way resources get allocated in society	18.1%	48.5%	33.3%
An understanding of the different ethical traditions and ideas	18.1%	45.4%	36.3%

Table 6.4 Ranking of statements in terms of knowledge helpfulness in understanding public affairs based on data table to Q17.

The statements for this question were drawn from some of the underlying knowledge roots identified in the literature. With n=33 these questions also had a high non-response rate of 18 people which perhaps reflects a limited awareness and understanding in this area or indeed a feeling that it has little relevance.

That said, for those who responded the majority of ideas appeared to resonate with practitioners. The discussion here combines the very helpful and helpful scores as rated by respondents. Stakeholder engagement (97%), issues and crisis management (82%), role of business in society (88%) and role of debate, discussion and dialogue and how people make sense of things (79%) were rated highly. These were followed closely by persuasion (90%), followed by dhow people created different realities (73%). It is worth noting that two categories seemed to suggest more extreme of viewpoints with a significant number stating they were not helpful to understanding PA. These included the statement the ways resources get allocated in society and understanding different ethical traditions. For example, in both cases 18% felt those statements were very helpful and a third stating they were not helpful.

Interestingly it is the knowledge drawn from communication roots that appear to resonate more fully with practitioners and perhaps this relates more to their applied nature. The statement that fared less well was the one relating to the political and economic knowledge roots in terms of understanding how resources get allocated in society though this was slightly counter-balanced by the understanding of governance structures which comes from the same tradition. At the same time, ethical traditions faired worst of all and that is perhaps dichotomous given the reputational challenges facing the practice. So, although the idea of a body of knowledge engendered mixed views when asked explicitly what components might be in a body of knowledge, respondents appeared to show some interest, with practitioners suggesting that in most cases these ideas were helpful in understanding what PA does.

Q18 asked whether individuals believed PA was a profession and the overwhelming majority said that it was at 70% (with n= 33), but a significant minority at 30% or just under a third stating they didn't know or categorically stating it wasn't. Again, a significant number at (n=17) skipped this question. So, as with skills, behaviours and knowledge appear to engender quite a schism of view, with a significant minority in disagreement.

Continuing the theme of PA being a profession, Q19 gave respondents who had answered 'yes' to PA being a profession items to consider in defining what being a profession meant, though not all did so with n=25. Respondents had to rate whether certain elements were very important, important or not important to the concept of a profession. These components were drawn from the literature on the concept of a profession and professional identity.

	Very important	Important	Not Important
Being accountable for the advice given	64%	36%	0%
Having career pathways and options	56%	44%	0%
Being valued by wider society eg seen as a positive thing for democracy	48%	48%	4%
Visible planning, research and evaluation	44%	48%	8%
Membership of a professional body	36%	32%	32%
Certification (eg accreditation by a professional body)	28%	44%	28%
Having an agreed set of skills and behaviours	24%	64%	12%
Qualifications	24%	52%	24%
Having an agreed body of knowledge	20%	64%	12%

Table 6.5 Ranking of components in terms of importance in defining PA as a profession based on the data table to Q19.

Being accountable and having career pathways and options led the list in terms of their importance to the concept of PA being a profession, with nobody suggesting they were of no importance. Interestingly, three items in particular polarized views – certification, qualifications and membership of a professional body - with equal or near equal numbers saying they felt it was very important and also not important. Yet these are criteria that are often cited as being necessary under a strict definition of a profession. Rated fairly lowly on the scale in terms of being deemed very important came an agreed set of skills and behaviours (24%) and a body of knowledge (20%), though both these categories show a significant number of people suggesting them to be important both at 64%. However, both these categories also had people suggesting that they were not important at 12% and 16% respectively. The body of knowledge component is also relevant as earlier in Q16 a significant minority at just over 40% neither agreed or disagreed that PA needed a body of knowledge at all. This may, however, be due to lower response rates to this question and the earlier figure would have included those who did not think PA was a profession. It is still worth noting that the idea of knowledge is one that seems to generate mixed views.

Q20 looked at professionalism and asked respondents irrespective of whether they felt PA was a profession, if it still needed to be professional and what items they felt were important to practitioners in the delivery of professional PA practice. With n=33 not all respondents answered this question. Again, the question items were drawn primarily from the literature review.

	Very important	Important	Not important
Providing appropriate advice (even if it means saying something the client/management don't want to hear)	97%	3%	0%
Being effective (eg getting the right things done)	84.8%	15%	0%
Objective setting focused on goals (eg attitudinal change, legislative goal)	75.8%	24.2%	0%
Planning, research and evaluation	69.7%	30.3%	0%
Delivering organisational value	66.7%	30.3%	3%
Using best practice approaches	51.5%	45.4%	3%
Exhibiting an agreed set of behaviours	45.4%	45.4%	9%
Networking and contacts	39.3%	51.5%	9%
Exhibiting an agreed set of skills	28.1%	56.2%	15.6%
Objective setting focused on process (eg number of MPs met)	6%	48.4%	45.4%

Table 6.6. Ranking of statements in terms of importance in terms of PA professionalism based on the data table to Q20.

The four elements that stand out as being very important and/or important to practitioners, with nobody stating that they were not important, are the elements of providing appropriate advice, being effective, objectives focused on goals and planning research and evaluation. This is followed by a central zone that only shows a marginal number of respondents stating that they were not important that include delivering organisational value, using best practice approaches, exhibiting an agreed set of behaviours and networking and contacts. The two elements that come in behind the rest do so because they reflect a more diverse range of views. Coming in ninth out of a list of 10 items is exhibiting an agreed set of skills, with the majority stating that it was important at 56% but with 16% stating in wasn't important to being professional. Then last was objective focused based on process fairly evenly split between it being important at 48% and not important 45%.

Following on from the concept of being professional, Q21 gave respondents an opportunity to offer any other thoughts on the concept. Only one respondent did so and it is worth capturing this here as it does help to provide some insight into the issue around skills, behaviours, knowledge and professionalism and perhaps why this issue polarises some individuals:

'*For me professionalism in PA should not be built primarily on an agreed set of skills or knowledge. It should focus on behaviours and ethics. Medics, lawyers, accountants, deliver functions where keeping patients well or employers on the right side of the law relies on keeping up to date with quickly evolving technical knowledge. PA doesn't really; it's the wrong model for us, our issue is to stay ethical. I think the push for technical professionalism is great for professional bodies but maybe not for their members or employers. To give an example, you can join the top PA jobs direct from a career in politics or the media. These people can be highly effective, ludicrous to suggest they need to do an approved qualification or conversion course first like they would were they becoming a doctor or barrister'*. (Respondent 44)

It is interesting that this respondent focused heavily on behaviours but also on ethics. As in Q13, there was a significant minority who neither agreed or disagreed or disagreed completely that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours and in Q17 the statement on ethics engendered the lowest percentage of individuals finding it central in terms of understanding PA.

Q22 explicitly asked whether PA practice would benefit from a framework that brought together knowledge, skills and behaviours. Here around three-quarters of respondents of 73% (with n=30) suggested it would but there is still a significant minority of 27% that held a contrary view. So again, a polarisation of viewpoint was in evidence. It must be noted, however, that just under half of respondents (n=20) skipped this question and that could suggest that many have either no opinion on the subject or are apathetic. However, this figure is broadly in line with those who believe PA to be a profession and who feel the practice would benefit from an agreed set of skills and behaviours.

The final question of the survey Q23 focused on transparency, a topic that has impacted heavily on PA practice in recent years. In part, this was asked to unearth whether a consistent view of what transparency meant would emerge, but also to look at any relationships with earlier viewpoints. Respondents were asked to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with a number of statements defining transparency. These statements were derived from the literature and also from topical PA debates. With n=32 a significant number of practitioners skipped this question but it is still useful to reflect upon where the emphasis on transparency appears to lie as it does relate to wider reputational challenges for the field. The table below summarizes the findings and is ranked according to the statements respondents were in most agreement with.

Transparency is……….	Combined strongly agree & agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Combined Disagree & strongly disagree
Adhering to professional codes of conduct (eg APPC, CIPR, PRCA)	100%	0%	0%
Abiding by an agreed set of standards of advocacy when engaging with those in public life (honesty, visibility, truthfulness)	100%	0%	0%
Always being professional	100%	0%	0%
Organisations clearly stating that they do conduct public affairs activity	90.6%	6.2%	3.1%
Not doing anything you wouldn't want made public	87.5%	9.4%	3.1%
Public Affairs agency clearly stating the names of clients work for	84.4%	12.5%	3.1%
Abiding by the Transparency of Lobbing Act (applicable to consultant lobbyists)	78.1%	15.6%	6.2%
Having public affairs objectives that you are happy to make available	68.7%	18.7%	12.5%
Having all public affairs activities made available (including meetings, papers and letters) but detail deemed commercially confidential withheld	46.9%	18.7%	34.3%
Listing meetings with all policy advisors and makers (civil servants and ministers) but nothing else	31.3%	25%	43.7%
Sometimes being in conflict with the principles of confidentiality	21.8%	43.7%	34.3%
Having all public affairs activities including meetings, papers and letters made available	18.7%	28.1%	53.1%
Sometimes being in conflict with delivering effective public affairs	15.6%	43.7%	40.6%

Table 6.7. Simplified ranking of agreement to different statements on transparency adapted from the data table to Q23.

Interestingly, the three areas where all respondents either agreed or strongly agreed were with the following statements:

- Transparency means abiding by an agreed set of standards of advocacy when engaging with those in public life (honesty, visibility and truthfulness)

- Transparency means adhering to professional codes of conduct (eg CIPR, PRCA, APPC)

- Transparency means always being professional

This throws up a slight tension based on earlier response. Q13 saw just under a quarter of respondents stating they neither agreed nor disagreed or disagreed entirely that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours yet behaviours

are at the core of advocacy standards. Also for Q19 there were mixed views as to whether PA is a profession yet abiding by professional codes of conduct of the professional bodies figure highly here in terms of transparency yet membership of a professional body and the concept of certification appeared to polarise views.

6.4. Examining relationships between variables

It was felt appropriate to compare a number of categorical variables to explore whether there were any possible relationships or issues to help elucidate the data further, and to look at any connections between knowledge, skills and behaviours. Given the small data sets and skipped questions there is an issue of whether any relationships can be explored with any sense of validity. That said, the researcher believed it was still worthwhile to compare variables to see if they revealed any suggested tendencies or traits that could be explored against the earlier literature and the qualitative research.

Gender and Age

The data revealed no major inconsistencies when comparing gender and age against practitioner views on skills and behaviours, with similar percentages of men and women in agreement or disagreement with each variable. This was also the same for practitioners over and under 40 years old. The only slight change of emphasis was that more men (with n=33) strongly agreed that PA needed an agreed set behaviours (42%) compared to women (7%) whose preference was for agreed (64%).

In respect of knowledge, more men (with n=32) tended to strongly agree/agree that PA needed its own body of knowledge (72%) compared to women (43%) with more women appearing to be undecided (neither agreeing nor disagreeing at 43% as opposed to men at 11%).

Skills and Behaviours

There is broad consistency of views between skills and behaviours (n=33). For example, 100% of respondents who strongly agreed that PA needed an agreed set of skills also strongly agreed/agreed that it needed an agreed set of behaviours. Also, 78% of respondents who said yes it needed an agreed set of skills also strongly agreed/agreed it needed an agreed set of behaviours. At the other extreme 67% of respondents who disagreed that PA needed an agreed skill-set also disagreed it needed an agreed set of behaviours. So, on the surface a consistency of view on skills and behaviours. However, around a third (33%) of respondents who disagreed PA needed an agreed skill-set suggested that it needed an agreed set of behaviours. This perhaps indicates a greater interest in the behaviour aspects of the role.

Skills and knowledge

With n=32 the relationship between respondent's views on skills and that of knowledge showed a more variability of view. Those respondents who strongly agreed/agreed that PA needed an agreed set of skills, also felt that the field needed its own body of knowledge. For example, 63% of respondents who strongly agreed that PA needed an agreed skill-set also

strongly agreed/agreed it needed its own body of knowledge, whilst 67% of respondents who agreed that PA needed an agreed skill-set also strongly agreed/agreed it needed its own body of knowledge. However, again a third (33%) of respondents who said yes PA needed an agreed skills-set neither agreed nor disagreed or disagreed entirely that is also needed its own body of knowledge. This perhaps suggests a lack of tangibility as to what knowledge means. Finally, 100% of those individuals who disagreed that PA needed an agreed set of skills also disagreed that it needed its own body of knowledge.

Behaviours and knowledge

With n=32, the relationship between respondent views on behaviours and knowledge showed a similar pattern as with skills. The majority of those strongly agreeing/agreeing that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours, also felt that the field needed its own body of knowledge. For example, 67% of respondents who strongly agreed that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours, also strongly agreed/agreed it needed a body of knowledge, whilst 59% of respondents who agreed that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours also strongly agreed/agreed that it needed a body of knowledge. However, again around a third (33%) of respondents who strongly agreed that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours neither agreed/had no view/disagreed entirely that it needed a body of knowledge, whilst 41% of respondents who agreed that PA needed an agreed set of behaviours also neither agreed/had no view/ disagreed entirely that it needed a body of knowledge. At the same time, 20% of respondents who held no view on whether PA needed an agreed set of behaviours disagreed entirely that it

needed a body of knowledge, whilst 100% of respondents who disagreed it needed set of behaviours also disagreed it needed a body of knowledge. So, there is some skepticism as to the value of a body of knowledge.

Knowledge and the concept of PA being a profession

Again, with n=32 some interesting insights emerge looking at respondent views comparing these two variables. In general terms, those individuals believing that PA to be a profession also felt that it should have its own body of knowledge. For example, 100% of respondents who strongly agreed that PA needed a body of knowledge also agreed it was a profession, and 82% of those saying they agreed that PA needed a body of knowledge also agreed that it was a profession. However, 63% of respondents who had no view on whether PA needed a body of knowledge also thought it was a profession, whilst at the same time 40% of those who disagreed that PA needed a body of knowledge also felt it was a profession. However, the majority of respondents, at 60%, were consistent in also stating that they didn't feel PA was a profession. So, there is evidence of a slightly mixed view on the role knowledge perhaps plays to an occupation being considered a profession.

PA as a Profession and Competency Framework

This variable cross tabulation had 30 respondents. The majority of respondents (77%) who said PA was a profession also agreed that it would benefit from a framework that would bring together knowledge, skills and behaviours, but this means 23% who said 'yes' to it being a profession didn't think that it would benefit from such a framework – a significant minority.

Conversely, 71% of respondents who stated that PA was not a profession felt however that it would benefit from a framework.

This relationship and those relating to skills, behaviour and knowledge in the previous sections above perhaps help to illuminate some of the tensions and inconsistencies in terms of how the practice views itself. It perhaps too illustrates that there is a significant minority that perhaps has some resistance to any form of codification.

6.5. Relating findings to the objectives of the survey

As indicated at the start of this section, the survey had very specific objectives and the findings are now briefly summarised against these with a much more detailed analysis linking fully to qualitative study and literature in the discussion chapter that follows.

To check that there was an appetite for PA to get to understand itself better by understanding the knowledge that underpins it (supports RQ2, RQ5)

There does appear to be a majority of practitioners who feel that the practice would benefit from having its own body of knowledge. It is, however, by no means a clear-cut view with a significant minority at 41% either having no view or actively saying it does not. However, when more granularity is added in terms of providing specific statements about types of knowledge, then practitioners seem to suggest that many of these would be helpful. So,

perhaps there is some curiosity about the concept of knowledge, but at the same time some uncertainty as to what the concept really means.

To check that there was a sense that PA could agree on a set of behaviours and skills and to start to identify what these were (supports RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

Although by no means universal, around three-quarters of practitioners believe having an agreed set of skills and behaviours would be beneficial to practice. This still leaves a significant minority believing that it does not, so there is a challenge here in terms of perhaps not alienating those that are skeptical. When drilling down on the ideas of skills and behaviours there does appear to be some consistency in terms of what practitioners believe to be the attributes necessary for delivering PA and these do support ideas such as a move towards more evidence-based practice as suggested in the earlier qualitative work. Where perhaps the views are more complex are around media and digital skills which emerged quite forcefully in the qualitative work, but are seen are more desirable rather than essential in the quantitative work. The importance of behaviours also emerge strongly as does personal credibility.

To understand more fully the concept of effectiveness and professionalism as it related to PA picking up on themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews (supports RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

The complexity of concepts of what practitioners believe underpins a profession and being professional is also suggested. Whether PA is a profession threw up mixed and often contradictory views and trying to define the components of both illuminated inconsistencies, especially around the relevance of certification and membership of a professional body. What is clear is that effectiveness is grounded in concepts such as objective setting, transparency, planning and research.

To elucidate relationships between knowledge, behaviours and skills and what this might tell us about the state of the PA practice (supports RQ2, RQ3, RQ4 and RQ5)

The survey suggests that although practice appears to split broadly 75:25 in favour of more agreement around skills and behaviours, but the value of a competency framework and the role of knowledge in it is more debatable. Respondents also demonstrate some inconsistencies in how strongly they feel about these concepts. This perhaps suggests a practice not quite at ease with itself in part as it matures and reflects on its own role and identity.

6.5 Concluding reflections

A number of themes are revealed from the quantitative findings that have a bearing on the research questions. As indicated earlier detailed discussion takes place in Chapter Seven that analyses these findings against the literature and links then to the qualitative findings in the previous chapter, but ahead of this initial thoughts that help inform the research questions are

outlined here. Regarding RQ1 and the shape of practice, although there is an appetite to better understand practice, there is large minority of around a quarter to practitioners who are sceptical about competencies and knowledge revealing a clear diversity of view. This diversity of view continues when looking at issues of professionalism and whether formal qualifications are necessary. Regarding RQ2 and the knowledge that underpins practice, there is broad agreement that a body of knowledge would be helpful though there remains a significant minority again who feel it is not necessary. Confusion around knowledge is evident yet when concepts are put into the language of practice then there is a realisation that perhaps these are relevant, especially those drawn from the communication tradition. For RQ3 and RQ4 on skills and behaviours, there is a broad agreement that practice does need an agreed of skills and behaviours though again there is a significant minority who did not. That said, there appears to be some agreement on what these attributes might be. In terms of RQ5, although the majority of respondents felt a framework that brought together knowledge, skills and behaviours would be useful there was still significant minority who did not. Taken together, the survey clearly shows that PA practice is not unified although there are common threads but the practice itself can take many forms. As such a framework needs to embrace diversity, as well as encourages clarity and focus.

CHAPER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

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7.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter links the findings from the qualitative and quantitative studies with reflections from the professional competency framework review, and draws out key thematic areas for in-depth discussion against the previously explored literature. These thematic areas are informed by the research aim, objectives and questions. The chapter seeks to give meaning and context to the findings and helps to address the issue of 'so what' which as Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2008) suggest can be an issue for research. It interprets and synthesises the results presented in previous chapters and draws out implications for relevant theories and concepts addressed in the literature.

It does not explicitly relate the findings to the aim, objectives and questions of the study but these are integrated fully into the thematic discussion. The aim, objectives and questions are then explicitly addressed in the conclusion chapter based on the ideas emerging here. This final chapter draws strands together from this discussion and also look at the implications of the study to PA research and practice, as well as the limitations of the study and methodological issues and opportunities.

7.2. A stratified world and a stratified practice

7.2.1. Evolution of PA

The qualitative study (explored in 5.2: aggregate dimension of a changing landscape and a changing practice) suggests that the practice has evolved

over the last ten years in part due to the changes in the public policy environment, with increasing complexity caused by transparency, devolution, technological change and globalisation. There is also a feeling that a greater number of individuals and organisations are becoming involved in public policy debates, supporting the views of McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) and Schepers (2010). As Interviewee 28 pointed out when discussing in-house teams: '*They are growing…some blue chips now are only happy if they have a relatively big in-house team"* and as argued by Interviewee 30: '*The PA business is growing. You have seen mergers between the big agencies and also lots more in-house teams ramping up their capabilities'.* Also, as Q8 in the survey revealed, 74% of practitioners stated that the organisation they worked for viewed PA as crucial and essential and when reflecting on the full data there is a suggestion that there is perhaps a growing recognition by organisations that the political arena is one they know can impact on their operating environment and that they need to engage with it.

At its heart PA remains the same – it is the discipline that builds relationships between organisations and those who shape public policy (Fleisher, 2002, 2007; Hillman, 2002; Paluszek, 1995); Schuler, 2002; Toth, 2006). As Interviewee 9 said when asked what PA does: *'a big part for me is reputation management that means helping organisations be they corporate, NGO helping in their dealings with government whether an opportunity or threat. Helping them negotiate those relationships – utilising the media or dealing directly with the civil service and politicians. Helping them negotiate that landscape*'.

Yet the world of public policy has become increasingly complex and the role of practitioners equally so. From the qualitative study (explored in 5.2.4: second order theme of PA moving to more of a managerial orientation) PA appears to have grown to become one of stakeholder and relationship management involving a greater mix of audiences. The emphasis is on relationships and dialogue rather than monologue or a one-way communication process, presenting PA as a two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical style of communication (Grunig, 1984).

As Interviewee 9 argued: '*it is about stakeholder management which is an old-fashioned term but it is what you do and be able to do it effectively at lots of levels and internally as well…also set of skills about building coalitions around negotiation and effective information exchange*'. It is the area of stakeholder theory that was the most highly regarded theoretical concept that practitioners felt would be helpful to them in understanding their practice as evidenced in Q17 of the survey, with only 3% of respondents arguing to the contrary. Also, the subject of skills in Q11 of the survey revealed that building coalitions and working collaboratively featured third in the essential/very important category.

7.2.2. Relationship Management

Relationships appear central to PA, not perhaps to the extent of a reliance on personal contacts but understanding the wider stakeholder context in which PA operates and the ability to understand the networks involved in different decision making processes is critical. As stated by Interviewee 19: *'the days*

of the roller deck are gone', and as illustrated by Interviewee 5: *'it is not simply lobbying governments but political insight to inform decision-making, campaigns and business plans'.* The ability to research, identify and understand these networks and the mood of different players in the policy environment is a key skill requiring a wide social antenna. In part this is revealed through the response to Q14 of the survey that placed being a skilled influencer outside the organisation as one of two top requirements of PA practitioners, as well as the response to Q17 that identified relationships and stakeholder engagement as the most helpful statement in understanding what PA does. As suggested by Interviewee 10: '*PA is an integrated practice and wider stakeholder theories are coming into play*'.

This supports the idea that relationship theories (Ledingham, 2004) and the situational theory of publics (Grunig 1984) underpin much of PA practice. The situational nature of PA is one that will be further discussed and forms a common theme, but the qualitative research in particular revealed that the style of PA varied between organisations (explored in 5.3.2: second order theme of sector and organisational impacts on PA practice). As Interviewee 11 said: '*PA depends on the client some will want campaigning work and will want to be visible and some will not want to be seen to participate and will want a coalition of interests'.* So, there are different styles of PA that it is suggested can cause identity ambiguity. Some styles of PA may fall neatly into Drucker (1989) concept of knowledge work, whilst other aspects fall more broadly into the concept of promotional intermediaries (Davis, 2013).

The suggestion that PA is a stakeholder discipline fits well with Griffin's (2005) analysis that PA had gone through different stages of understanding as reflected in different thematic waves. The most recent third wave focusing on the blurred boundaries of PA and its evolution as a stakeholder practice, rather than being narrowly defined by solely political interaction.

The concept that PA as one of co-creation of policy with a breaking down of traditional boundaries between stakeholders, organisations and governmental bodies, as suggested by McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010), is alluded to in the findings though this hasn't been empirically tested.   As Interviewee 17 pointed out: '*you are trusted helping both parties speak the same language – I helped draft the letter into [the Government Department] and I helped [the Government Department] draft the letter out. I thought that summed it up'.* If anything, this statements gives credibility to the idea of PA practitioners as the ultimate discourse worker a concept identified by L'Etang (2004), though perhaps too reinforces the concerns of Foucault (1972) and control of power and ethical concerns.

Such an approach relates more to the ideas of societal corporatism (Grunig and Jaatinsen, 1998), with its focus on negotiation and collaboration rather than pure advocacy or pure collectivism.   When discussing what PA does, practitioners mentioned the importance of creating alliances and developing arguments that demonstrated wider societal interests. '*You have to construct arguments that appeal to the stakeholders that are in a position to influence…you have to say this is the change we need and this is why the*

change is needed. They are not stupid they know you are doing it for our own

benefit but also there has to be a public good in that and that public good is I

don't know whether it is as important or more important than it was before but

*it is certainly crucial' (*Interviewee 22).

Here the importance of building inclusivity into the PA communication process

is important and links to the ideas of Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) who

argue that defining the level and type of inclusivity in any PA campaign is

critical as those arguments that appear to be less self-serving and garner

wide-appeal are more successful.   Understanding these type of arguments,

and the importance of debate to identify the wider public good perhaps links to

some of the ideas around virtue ethics and 'internal goods' (Dobson, 2004)

and the character of the PA practitioner, along with the more practical

approaches to ethical advocacy (Edgett, 2002) and Baker and Martinson

(2002) view on corporate responsibility.

So, the role of PA remains that of a political boundary spanner being the

window-in and window-out for the organisation (Post, 1982), and as an

interfacing role being a buffer and a bridge (Meznar and Nigh, 1995). As

Interviewee 30 put it: '*We help organisations engage with the democratic and*

public policy process'. This study also suggests these earlier definitions are

evolving, building on the concept of PA being a political exchange activity

(Hillman and Hitt, 1999). The research perhaps is less clear on whether PA

has evolved to become one of political alignment (van Schenden, 2010). That

said, it could be argued that bringing in the external viewpoint to those inside

the organisation and being change agents inside contributes to the concept of alignment. Being a skilled influencer inside is one of growing importance rather than just taking the 'message' out, as suggested in both the qualitative study when looking at specific skills (explored in 5.5.3: second order theme of the functional competencies of a strategic communicator) and revealed in Q14 of the survey which found that being a skilled influencer inside the organisation was rated highly as an essential and desirable skill.

It is suggested that the importance of PA practitioners being transformational inside the organisation is a less well-explored area of PA but one that appears to be emerging. Returning to Q14 in the survey, being a skilled influencer inside the organisation ranked third in terms of it being an essential skill, with 70% of practitioners valuing its importance. As Interviewee 28 pointed out: '*my job is to inform my bosses what is going on in the big bad political world*'. Managing internal or client expectations and educating senior management about what is achievable are seen as a key part of the role.

7.2.3. Counsel and Consultancy

Returning to the debates about defining lobbying and PA, practitioners often used the terms inter-changeably, supporting the views of Anastasiadis (2006) that the function struggles with terminological confusion. That said, the qualitative study suggests that practitioners see lobbying as part of PA (explored in 5.2.4: second order concept of PA moving towards a management consultancy orientation), often referencing lobbying in a narrow sense of focusing on communicating around one particular issue at one

particular time but that this sits within a larger set of relationship activities and dialogue. As Interviewee 15 said: '*there are lots of different names for it (PA) but in essence it is about government relations*', and interestingly Interviewee 23 did not really use the terms PA or lobbying, preferring to talk about it in the context of obtaining change. Interviewee 10 also pointed out because of the lobbying legislation '*lobbyists are now called lobbyists and some of us with legal minds see the niceties of that but some of us have wider stakeholder functions….in reality it is an integrated practice*'.

In terms of how PA practitioners approach their work, responses mirrored much of the literature that has explored the mechanics of PA practice (Dahan, 2009; Vining, Shapiro and Borges, 2005) with an increased focus on planning, objective setting and building alliances.   This move towards 'evidence-based' PA is explored in 5.2.2. (second order theme of the same name).   As Interviewee 19 remarked: '*being a PR professional is being prepared to be measured'.*

Responses to Q11 in the survey also highlighted building coalitions (70%) and project research and planning (57%), and although these categories fell within in the central zone of importance in terms of being ranked as essential, they were seen as desirable, perhaps reflecting a growing shift in importance. Planning, research and evaluation were also ranked highly in terms of PA being seen as a profession, with only 8% of respondents in Q19 of the survey suggesting that it was not important. Also, objective setting with a focus on

goals, was only one of three statements that in Q20 of the survey received unanimous support for being very important or important.

As more policy and legislative information is in the public domain, the qualitative study also suggests that those working in PA, especially those working in agencies, felt that they could no longer rely on providing basic information in terms of the who, what and how of the political process. Instead, they felt they had to build their value on providing additional levels of analysis and insight by reflecting on how different political scenarios might play out amongst stakeholders and how political decisions relate to the commercial aspirations of the organisation. Interviewee 9 was adamant that PA practitioners needed a '*strategic mindset*', an idea amplified by Interviewee 13 who pointed out that PA went beyond monitoring and was about: '*understanding what is happening, understanding what the political priorities are then focusing and tying this in to our business strategic needs*'. In other words, as suggested by Interviewee 5: '*it is about political insight to inform decision-making, campaigns and business plans*'.

Therefore, the true value of PA lies in becoming more strategic rather than providing a tactical understanding of the public policy process. In other words, the study seems to suggest that PA is falling more into the realms of management consultancy (explored in 5.1.4: second order theme of a move towards a management consultancy orientation). This mirrors the suggested growing importance of interpretive competencies (Noordegraff ,2000) and analytical and information processing competencies (Finegold and

Notabartolo, 2010). These points will be explored shortly in section 7.5. when looking at the specific skills for PA practitioners.

7.2.4. Mix of tools and techniques

The literature also explored the idea of quiet and loud PA activities (Harrison, 2000). Many practitioners talked consistently of the need for succinct briefings to convince policy makers of different viewpoints and alternative solutions and links to the concept of quiet campaigning. This is illustrated by Interviewee 19 who talked about the key skill of PA as *'an ability to put ideas down on paper, it's that simple',* and to get that in front of the right people who take decisions. This will be looked at in detail when looking at PA competencies in section 7.5.

Additionally, there appears to be a sense that media and digital communication are increasingly impacting on how policy makers take decisions. The study suggests there is a growing need for PA practitioners to understand how the media works and, as appropriate, respond to and create loud PA campaigns through improved digital and media literacy. In both the qualitative and quantitative studies, practitioners cited media and digital skills of growing importance and the need to integrate these either directly (by having the skills themselves) or indirectly (by working with others) into PA strategies. As suggested by Interviewee 11: *'I think it is difficult to do PA without a good knowledge of how media works and operates'*, and as argued by Interviewee 22: '*I think the second big change…is far greater emphasis that there is on digital campaigning'.* The widening and integration of skills

(explored in 5.2.3: second order theme of a widening of skills) appear to support this view. Yet media and digital understanding came the lowest in the ranking of essential skills in Q11 of the survey, but both ranked highly in terms of being desirable at 46% and 54% respectively, and this perhaps indicates that these are areas that are perceived to be emerging skill requirements. These types of 'promotional' skills sit well with the view of PA practitioners as promotional intermediaries (Davis, 2013).

It emerged in the qualitative discussion that PA strategies tend to be organisational, sector and issue specific given the situational nature of PA. Those PA practitioners in more conservative sectors or working in areas that have narrow interests reinforce the view of PA being quiet, targeted and evidence-based.   As Interviewee 28 said: '*Some colleagues seen as aggressive in taking company positions. We don't do that. The [government department] know who we are and at the right levels. We don't need to go over the top'.*

In many respects these ideas reflect the thinking of Schlichting (2014), whose study into German PA, saw the rise of public profile lobbying equating more to Harrison's (2000) concept of loud campaigns thus supporting the need to integrate digital and media skills into campaign planning. Yet at the same time, there continues to exist non-public activities which focus on direct lobbying to decision makers primarily through face-to-face or 'quiet' campaigns as identified by Harrison (2000). The determination of which route to take is governed by a number of triggers such as the type of issue and its

stage in development, along with the level of public interest or criticism of the issue or organisation.

Emerging from the qualitative study is evidence that appears to support the ideas of Harrison (2000) in terms of viewing PA as performing different roles such as marketing, reputation building and issues management – the latter fitting more to what many might perceive as a traditional view of PA. Practitioners clearly see themselves delivering different types of PA depending on the type of organisation and sector in which they operate. Some talk of PA narrowly with a focus on specific regulatory almost technical aspects of regulation or legislation that requires expert to expert communication with very little outside attention.

Then there is the wider view of PA reflecting ideas around how public policy may or may not impact on organisational operations and its competitive advantage, perhaps reflecting the ideas of Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) and the idea of Porter's Five Forces. Finally, there is an understanding that PA is about contributing to organisational reputation by ensuring the organisation is aligned to the evolving and changing socio-political environment.   This suggests that Windsor (2005) is right to point out that PA is not a unified discipline as it can take many forms, depending on the political environment and the organisation in which it operates, as well as the views of Bauer (2015) who argues that there are number of institutional factors that impact on responsible lobbying. So as said before PA by its nature is situational and often nebulous. As summed up by Interviewee 17: '*I thought*

at first [when I came into PA] it would be a lot more about direct lobbying and I could put a circle around it – I build relationships with key people – officials, campaigners, politicians – and it would be a recognized package of work. But no. It isn't at all'.

7.2.5. Situational aspects of PA

This connects to the idea of a growing sector impact on the type of PA delivered by practitioners, and the type of PA expected by policy makers (explored in 5.3.2: second order theme of sector impacts). In the qualitative study respondents suggested that sector and organisational influences are strong, with PA practitioners being seen as trusted advisors having an in-depth understanding of specific fields and able to make valuable contributions to public policy debates.   Others, often from an agency perspective, tended to be less vocal on this point, arguing that the skill of the PA practitioner is to pick up on the key issues for the client and make these relevant to both sides.

The situational nature of the practice is relevant. As Interviewee 28 made clear: '*no one person's conception of it is like the next person it is always down to the type of organisation and its issues',* or as elaborated by Interviewee 10 when he talked about there being different types of lobbyist: '*you need to allow for the differences depending on the type of organisation. There are people who specialize in the minutiae of policy and would argue that people who do policy analysis work is highly technical; then there are those who do regulatory but this can be technical as well. So, where do these fit in in terms of strict policy analysis and detailed legislative compliance work'.*

So, it could be argued that this fracturing of PA lends itself to the concept of multiple identities and cultural hybridity (Abbott, Zheng and Du, 2013), and this may carry some weight as suggested in the literature. From the qualitative study, it reveals PA relationships and networks are becoming more co-creational, fluid and broad, moving beyond the narrow confines of the straight forward PA-political dynamic. As Interviewee 5 indicated: '*the transparency of modern day government, the information age and social media have shaped PA more clearly as a discipline of PR*', or as argued by Interviewee 9: '*a big part for me is reputation management*'. These ideas (explored in 5.3: aggregate dimension of a growing clarity of purpose but with some identity ambiguity and tension) reveal a growing cohesion around the purpose of PA but with some identity strain. This is also seen in 5.2.4. under the second order theme of PA shifting slightly towards a management consultancy orientation.

Clearly public policy formation has multi-directional influences as increasingly suggested by Schneider and Ingram (1997), Gutman and Thompson (2004) and McConnell (2010). This ties in to the idea of increased environmental complexity which was a key theme emerging from the qualitative study (explored in 5.2: aggregate dimension of a changing landscape). PA practitioners are at the centre of this web of connections and issues, all of which are different depending on the organisation, its strategy and wider sector concerns. This has become increasingly so given the internationalisation of public policy and devolved institutions. As Interviewee

11 argued: *'you need a good knowledge of how PA operates in the UK [given the devolved structure] and internationally particularly Europe'.* This was supported by responses to Q7 in the survey. Although Westminster/Whitehall dominated and was where practitioners spent most of their time, there was a significant number who talked of national assemblies and European Institutions. Taken together PA always has been, but perhaps is becoming more so, the interface of multiple activities within an organisation supporting the notion put forward by Shaffer and Hillman (2000).

Abbott, Zheng and Du (2013) also talked of mutual sense making which relates to how people within an organisation share and understand knowledge, construct meaning and co-create value. PA too is about sense making both internally and externally. Both the qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that practitioners see themselves as being able to synthesise information, construct meaning and interpret the policy and organisational worlds in order for both sides to get the best possible outcome. These sense-making skills came across strongly (explored in 5.5.3: second order theme of PA practitioners needing the competencies of a senior communicator). Interviewee 2 specifically talked of being a '*translator of issues*'. Helping people make sense of things was one of the statements in Q17 that PA practitioners felt was one of the most helpful in understanding what PA does, with 79% citing it as being very helpful or helpful. It is also suggested that the two areas that dominated Q11 in the survey that looked explicitly at skills: the ability to communicate ideas and listening and processing complex information both contribute to the ability to help others make sense of things.

Also, in terms of responses to Q14 in the survey, a skilled influencer inside and outside the organisation both rated highly and it can be argued contribute to this notion of PA practitioners being able to get individuals to understand and make sense of issues.

Abbott, Zheng and Du (2013) also talk of identity multiplicity with individuals inside global organisations reflecting a range of identities depending on their specific situation as they have to navigate multiple perspectives and norms. This study suggests that for PA practice there does not appear to be one type of PA practitioner, with the type of PA delivered varying between organisations, the type of policy discussion or technical legislative change required and whether the individual is in-house or in an agency. Thus, it may be helpful, to view PA practice as having multiple identities. Some PA practitioners may have identity preferences for working in certain sectors or dealing with certain issues, whilst others may be more adaptable and reflexive.

Returning to Harrison (2000), who discussed the importance of thinking about PA from a commercial perspective, the qualitative study suggests that PA practitioners appear to be aligning more fully to organisational imperatives and regarding themselves more as business people first. Having commercial acumen and putting the language of business into the language of government and vice versa appears to be increasingly important. This is suggested in the discussion on the second order theme of the importance of PA in understanding organisations (explored in 5.4.3.), as well as by the

second order theme of needing both organisational and political awareness (explored in 5.5.2.). Taken together these can be seen as a key competency. As pointed out by Interviewee 6, PA practitioners: *'must have a strategic look over the longer term – it is about the business'.*

This is perhaps less clearly evidenced in the quantitative study. Q9 which asked about the challenges facing PA practitioners, the demand for greater business and commercial understanding garnered mixed views, with 25% of respondents ranking it amongst the top three and 50% ranking it the bottom three. Additionally, Q11 put commercial understanding/how business works at the lower end of importance and it is one of only three categories where respondents to the survey suggested PA practitioners were not competent. This slight divergence may be because the type of business or commercial knowledge may vary between sectors and have different levels of relevance.

So, taken together the research indicates that perhaps the landscape in which PA operates is becoming increasingly stratified, as is PA practice within it. Incorporating different styles of PA within some sort of competency framework will be important. A degree of caution, however, needs to be exercised given the importance placed on detailed job analysis in competency development by Campion *et al.* (2011) in line with the thinking of Stevens (2014). Given the stratified nature of the practice a focus on pure job analysis may be problematic given the variety and styles of PA practice and the type of environmental complexity in which PA operates. To note is the ACCA competency framework explored in Chapter Four that gave due recognition to

different types of accountancy practice across sectors, whilst maintaining a sense of overall professional identity through knowledge, skills and behaviours. Thus, there is a precedent for creating a framework that embeds cohesion whilst allowing some flexibility and difference. Reflecting on how the ACCA has tried to express this may be useful in terms of creating a framework for PA.

7.3. Internal tension and contradictions – cohesion and diversity

7.3.1. Increasing maturity

The earlier section reinforces the view of Windsor (2005) that PA is not unified. Nonetheless, the research also reveals that there are signs the practice is maturing and having a greater sense of its own value as nearly all who were interviewed said the PA was becoming more professional (explored in 5.3.3: second order theme of professionalisation strains). As Interviewee 13 said: '*I do think that the industry has become more professional and I think more integrated*'. When probed in Q20 in the survey, the top four elements cited as very important/important to professionalism (all of which received 100% support): providing appropriate advice; being effective (getting the right things done); object setting focused on goals, and planning and research and evaluation link to the move towards a more evidenced-based approach to PA. Though objective setting and planning had significant number saying these were important rather than very important. However agreed skills and behaviours rated lower on the scale of professionalism.

Regarding exhibiting an agreed set of behaviours, only 9% stated they were not important, with 45% each for stating it was either very important or important. Regarding exhibiting an agreed set of skills, 16% stated they were not important, with 28% stating they were very important and 56% important. This perhaps seems slightly at odds with the ideas of being effective and offering appropriate advice as it could be argued appropriate skills and behaviours underpin these. This could reflect some form of resistance to wanting the practice codified and will be further explored shortly.

7.3.2. Practice tensions

The study also reveals tensions between practice and the nature of what constitutes a profession taking into account the views of Downie (1990) and scholars taking a sociological perspective (Hughes, 1958; Millerson, 1964; Vollmer and Mills, 1966). Before exploring these in detail, it is worth noting that there is a divergence of view on whether practitioners view PA as a profession. From a qualitative perspective, this divergence is discussed in the second order theme of professionalism strains (explored in 5.3.3.). Interviewee 28 was adamant: '*It is more of a trade. One doesn't need a series of qualifications to practice it more based on experience or whatever expertise your bosses think you need*', or as Interviewee 25 pointed out: '*I don't think it is a profession it is a job but is dependent on competencies that are very difficult to measure and to hand out certificates for*'. Yet at the other extreme there are those that see PA moving towards being a profession. As Interviewee 16 suggested: '*Being a profession for our practice is becoming a recognized profession like other recognized professions in the UK. I think that*

is the direction of travel and we are at the early stages of our journey', and as Interviewee 11 suggested: '*Yes, it is a profession and I think it has grown a fair amount'.*

This divergence of view was also supported by the quantitative study. In response to Q18 in the survey asking whether PA was a profession, the majority (70%) said it was but a significant minority (30%) stated they either did not know or said it was not. When these respondents, who argued it was a profession, were asked in Q19 of the survey what they thought defined being a profession, being accountable and career pathways received unanimous support for being very important and important. In third place came being valued by society with only 4% saying it wasn't important. Certification, agreed skills and behaviours, qualifications and a body of knowledge rated more lowly, yet all of these are important components when reflecting on Downie (1990) criteria of being a profession. There appears to exist a clear polarization of view around whether certification, qualifications and membership of a professional body constituted PA being considered a profession, with a greater variability of view as to whether these are very important or not important. For example, being a member of a professional body was seen by 36% as very important, 32% important and 32% not important; certification was seen by 28% as very important, 44% important and 28% not important; having agreed set of skills and behaviours was seen by 24% as important, 64% important and 12% not important; having qualifications was seen by 24% as important, 52% important and 24% not

important; having an agreed body of knowledge was seen by 20% as important, 64% important and 12% not important.

Yet the situation is not clear-cut. When respondents were asked in Q23 what transparency meant, all of them rated abiding by codes of conduct of the professional bodies.   This seems at odds given that membership of a professional body was not seen as being important by 32% of respondents when asked what items were important to PA being viewed as a profession. So perhaps there is some inconsistency of view. This may have relevance from the wider perspective of ethics. Given the importance placed on the role of practice community to stimulate a virtue ethics approach (Dobson, 2004; MacIntyre, 1984) then how community is encouraged within PA may become challenging.

Although a more detailed discussion on competencies will take place shortly in section 7.5. below, this internal tension is also evident from other aspects of the quantitative study. When asked in Q10 whether PA needed an agreed skill-set and in Q13 whether PA needed agreed set of behaviours, in both cases around three-quarters of respondents said that it did – but this still leaves a significant minority suggesting that it did not. In fairness, these specific questions also had a high non-response rate which may suggest that many practitioners feel the questions to be irrelevant.   So, skills and behaviours garner mixed views and their relevance to PA being considered a profession also has a mixed reaction. Moreover, when respondents were asked more generally about the concept of professionalism and the

components that may underpin it in Q20 of the survey, then again skills and behaviours rated in the bottom four. Nevertheless, behaviours were seen by 45% of respondents as very important compared to skills at 28%, so perhaps it is the behavioural aspect of PA that is of more interest to practitioners.

Also, there was a broad split of views when practitioners were asked in Q16 whether PA needed an agreed body of knowledge, with 40% either saying they either didn't know or disagreeing that it did. This is a significant minority of respondents. Yet when the idea of knowledge was explored in more detail in Q17 which offered practitioners a range of statements of uses of knowledge at work, then the majority of practitioners found these examples to be helpful to understanding practice. The concept of knowledge is explored in detail at 7.4. below, but in the context of the profession and professionalism debate it is worth noting that although there appears to be an appetite to provide more context and codification to the practice by a reasonable majority of practitioners, there is still a significant minority who are against to the concept of knowledge. This could pose challenges to establishing a body of knowledge itself and to knowledge conversion especially when looking at tacit to explicit knowledge as outlined by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995).

That said, for those believing that PA is a profession, there appears to be a consistency in view that it would benefit from a body of knowledge and a competency framework. This became apparent in the cross tabulations in the quantitative study at 6.4. Regarding skills, behaviours and knowledge, there was slight inconsistency of view, with some practitioners agreeing that PA

needed agreed skills, but not behaviours and/or an agreed knowledge base and vice versa. So, perhaps this throws up some of the tensions within practice when called upon to reflect upon itself.

7.3.3. Broad agreement on competencies

Amongst the majority of practitioners who believe the field would benefit from an agreed skill-set and behaviours, there is a broad agreement on the type of competencies a framework should contain. Skills focused on those necessary for operating as a strategic communicator and in many instances these are the same for most senior communication roles – being analytical, ability to synthesise information, ability to create clear persuasive arguments, messages and evidence. These are discussed as part of aggregate dimension of a broad competency agreement (and hence a possible framework) within a fragmenting practice (explored in 5.5.3: functional competencies), along with the importance of emotional intelligence and social awareness (explored in 5.5.1.).

The only area of fundamental difference compared to other senior communicator roles appears to be the need to have political insight and awareness (explored in 5.5.2.). Given the general nature of some of the competencies listed, then any type of framework would need to make these relevant to PA practice through specific examples and this is the challenge that is more fully rationalized later in this chapter in section 7.5. and Chapter Eight.

So, the practice of PA does appear to be developing some degree of professional identity in line with the views of Ibarra (1999) and Schein (1979) in the sense of establishing a broadly agreed constellation of attributes, values, motives and experiences but some identity ambiguity clearly remains given the situational nature of the practice.

Nonetheless, for some there is a reluctance to accept that PA warrants an agreed set of skills and behaviours at all. Being able to reach out to those who may view the practice slightly differently is a clear challenge that was revealed in the research but one that is also recognized in the scholarship. Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) argue that any competency approach must integrate knowledge, understanding, values and skills that sit within the practitioner. The practitioner must be the focus. The key is the word understanding. It is suggested that practitioners understand their practice well but may feel reluctant to articulate this using the formal language used within organisational structures and HRM or potentially could feel threatened by it.

7.3.4. A new form of professionalism

It is argued that the concept of a PA being a profession according to the strict criteria of Downie (1990) is not one that will carry weight.   There are skills and expertise and a growing recognition of what these are, but there are issues around the concept of knowledge and its importance as looked at in detail in section 7.4. below. Also, there is a divergence of view as to whether these skills and expertise can be codified and be linked to some form of certification and qualifications.

In terms of a client relationship authorised by some sort of institutional body, there is some doubt about the role of a professional body in the field of PA as this notion generates inconsistent views. Additionally, the concept of public esteem is one that PA is still trying to build. In response to Q9 where respondents were asked about the challenges for the industry, its reputation in the eyes of the public, as well as media and policy makers were in the top two (both at 50%), along with trust and integrity coming in third at 42%. So, the perceived value of PA to wider audiences continues to be problematic.

Another criterion is that in order to discharge professional functions individuals must be independent of the influence of commercial pressures. This is a slightly blurred criterion as in reality most occupations have to cover their costs to provide services and PA agencies are no different. Although it could be argued that advice given must be appropriate and not driven by a 'cost criterion' and indeed respondents in answering Q14 in the survey regarding workplace behaviours put personal credibility (being reliable, trustworthy and ethical) top with 97% stating that it was essential/very important. This could be seen as supporting PA practitioners who offer the best and most appropriate advice, rather than that which might generate the most revenue to the PA agency. Also, in Q19 of the survey, those who thought PA was a profession put being accountable for the advice given at the top of the list. This connects well to the debate around character and a virtue ethics approach to supporting PA.

Another key component for Downie (1990) is for those in a profession to be educated as distinct from being trained. Given the divergent views outlined to issues of codification and certification, then perhaps this criterion is one that could frustrate any formal suggestion that PA is a profession. Finally, it is suggested that if the criteria above are satisfied, a profession must have moral and legal legitimacy. Here understanding the role of advocacy in society is key and is still debated. At least now there is a recognition that the function exists under The Transparency of Lobbing, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (as well as similar regulatory codes in the devolved institutions). The present study did not have the intention of proving one way or another the legitimacy of the practice of PA, though it is in the tradition of believing advocacy is integral to democracy. Until wider reputational issues are addressed then this will remain a criterion that could cause problems.

Based on this study, there are elements within the traditional view of a profession that PA may be able to fulfil but this formal concept does not sit easily – not just from an external perspective but also from how PA views itself. Perhaps what works better for PA is the sociological view of a profession and the ideas that professions have characteristics such as specialist skills, intellectual and practical training, professional autonomy and some form of collective responsibility. There appears to be a suggestion that there is a skills base (though much of this sits within the role of strategic communicator but with the additional component of political insight). Even within a sociological view there is still a sense of professional jurisdiction

through some form of training and accreditation to a professional body. However, as the research reveals, there is a significant minority of practitioners who appear reluctant to accept these concepts though ideas around a growing collective responsibility and professional autonomy may be maturing. For example, in response to Q23 on transparency, all practitioners believed that adhering to professional codes of practice and abiding by agreed set of standards of advocacy were important.

Therefore, the concept of linking the idea of PA as a profession to more of a twenty-first century approach to knowledge-based occupations (Kipping, Kirkpatrick and Muzio, 2006), may provide a better contextualisation. This might help to reflect the evolutionary nature of PA and its variety of practices. This lends itself to the concept of traits within a profession and perhaps allows the critical realist perspective of tendencies to underpin such an approach rather than absolute truths and certainties.

7.4. Knowledge complexity and interdisciplinary challenges

7.4.1. Defining knowledge is problematic

For practitioners, knowledge is an area that lacks a clear understanding with a blurring of boundaries between the conceptual and the practical. Though this mirrors the same complexity and blurring of distinctions that was found in the literature (Meznar, 2002; Windsor, 2005; Davidson, 2015). Here there is the suggestion that there are lots of theories, ideas and concepts around PA but that they are disorganized and lack structure and thus more work needs to be done to establish a sense of coherence and clarity.

The qualitative study under the aggregate dimension that suggests that a body of knowledge is almost visible but this lacks realisation and depth (explored in 5.4.) highlights that the default position for practitioners is to connect the idea of knowledge to the functional understanding of political systems, the levers to pull and the processes involved. Often this is linked to the experiences and expertise of actually doing the job. As Interviewee 9 pointed out: '*There is (knowledge) but I think academic knowledge has to be allied to a practical street smart way of working. You obviously have to understand the public policy process, how formulated, pressure points. Have to have a pragmatic understanding of what is happening, how politicians think and issues of the day*'. So, knowledge rests on understanding public policy and the insight PA practitioners bring to their organisation. This is often connected to the fact they have an historical perspective and have seen similar issues and problems before and hence can bring that experience or wisdom when new challenges are presented.

In terms of conceptualising practice, practitioners tend to focus on the knowledge of practical skills in rather a generic sense such as applied communication skills. It is suggested that there is little realization that what they do has a deeper theoretical and conceptual context and a lack of awareness of models and working theories that could help with the daily activities of a PA practitioner such as framing and persuasion to their role as issues managers. This was reinforced by the quantitative study when in response to Q16 that asked the specific question about whether the practice

needed an agreed knowledge base there was a significant minority of 41% neither agreeing or disagreeing or actively disagreeing that it did. This combined with the low response rate to this question suggests on one level a distinct lack of interest. So, practice seems at odds with the scholarship. Fleisher (2007) suggests an agreed PA Body of Knowledge is necessary for professional practice. Yet practice, although seeing itself as increasingly professional, does not universally agree that a Body of Knowledge is required.

7.4.2. A tripartite view of knowledge

The idea of a tripartite definition of knowledge (Bogo *et al.*, 2013), perhaps has some appeal in understanding and relating the concept of knowledge to PA. At one end of the scale there are explanatory or grand theories that underpin practice – perhaps some of the concepts identified by PA scholars such as social constructivism (de Lange and Linders, 2006), or structuration theory (Schlichting, 2014) that provide deeper understanding, but for practitioners these seem remote and indeed perhaps engender skepticism. Although for some there appears to be curiosity about what this might be, as Interviewee 2 said: '*perhaps it would be interesting to know roots*', or as Interviewee 10 pointed out following more of a discussion on what conceptual knowledge might mean then these '*might be helpful in understanding the purpose of PA'.*

Then there are intervention models (concepts and theories that might support certain types of daily practice). In Q17 of the survey, the idea of relationship and stakeholder engagement topped the list with 97% of respondents stating

that they viewed this concept as helpful or very helpful in understanding what public affairs does. As explored in the literature, there is a substantial amount of research, analysis and modelling that helps communicators segment audiences more fully and offers tactics on how to build relationships with different categories (Falconi *et al.* 2014; Ledingham, 2003; Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997; Freeman, 1994; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Second in the list with 82% of respondents stating it was helpful and very helpful to understand how issues and crises emerge, grow and are shaped. Again, there is depth of scholarship and practical perspectives on how to track, monitor and engage with issues, as well as avoiding crisis and how to adopt the best strategies (Heath, 1997; Coombs, 2007) by way of example. This also supports the view put forward by Heugens (2002), McGrath, Moss and Harris (2010) and Boddewyn (2012) that issues identification and management is fundamental to the role of PA.

Third on the list is the role of debate, discussion and dialogue and how people make sense of things, with 87% stating it is very helpful or helpful (it only ranks lower that issues management due to the slightly more respondents putting it in the helpful rather than very helpful category). These distinctions are marginal as the focus must be on whether practitioners view the concepts as being useful to their daily activities. Again, sense-making has its own academic traditions but at its heart it is about how people seek to create plausibility in order to understand ambiguous and often confusing issues and events a view put by Colville, Brown and Pye (2012), Maitlis, (2005) and Weick (1995). The responses of PA practitioners suggest that this resonates

with how they view their practice and also picks up on the ideas of Abbott, Zheng and Du (2013) in the context of mutual sense making as part of PA's growing identity as looked at earlier. It also supports the concept of PA (as part of PR) practitioners being discourse workers (L'Etang, 2004).

Sense-making also has links to persuasion which was another area that PA practitioners rated more highly, with only 9% stating that the concept was not helpful. Again, there is a substantial knowledge base and theoretical concepts that help give insights into the mechanics of persuasion as discussed in 2.2.4. and there are natural links here to the importance of narrative and linguistics whether from the fields of semiotics (Peirce, 1883; Saussure, 1959), framing (Bateson, 1972; Entman, 1993) or indeed concepts behind argument construction in the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1984) and how to build consensus. As will be explored shortly, the ability to write well and to create powerful stories and arguments is rated highly by practitioners in terms of skills but these practical skills are underpinned by a sophisticated set of knowledge principles.

It is the areas listed above in response to Q17 of the survey that appear to resonate most with practitioners and these tend to emerge from the communication knowledge roots with some connection to the field of cultural studies.   To note, those statements with a larger number of respondents rating them as not helpful to understanding what PA does were as follows: understanding different ethical traditions (36%); the way resources get allocated in society (33%); how people create different realities (27%); and the

role of business and organisations in society (21%). It is worth just reflecting on these briefly.

The higher rating for ethical traditions being unhelpful throws up a slight paradox. Within the qualitative study the importance of behaviours emerged strongly (explored in 5.5.1: the second order theme of emotional and social intelligence) with the idea of ethics subsumed within the concept of personal credibility. At the same time, in Q23 of the survey, all respondents agreed that transparency was about abiding by professional codes of conduct and abiding by an agreed set of standards of advocacy, both of which have ethics built in to them. Ethics is a whole field of study but there is also scholarship in the arena of ethical advocacy (Edgett, 2002; Berg, 2012) and responsible lobbying (Bauer, 2015) which appear to have character and virtue ethics at its heart. Many of the principles explored by these scholars, including appropriate advice, planning and evaluation, sensitivity, confidentiality and transparency, fit well with the concepts being ranked highly in terms of professionalism in PA which comes through in Q20 of the survey.

Additionally, the concept of resource allocation throws up some complexity, especially when reflecting on the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative studies. On the one hand, according to scholars such as Oberman (2008), PA at its heart is a resource-based function. For example, turning political resources into operational ones ensuring a firm's competitive advantage. Also, as explored Boddewyn (2012) developing the work of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), it is argued PA is based on resource dependency

theory, aiming to reduce environmental impacts, uncertainty and the political world's power over the organisation. It is precisely these arguments that emerge from the qualitative work (explored in 5.3: the aggregate dimension of clarity of purpose) and the growing importance of commercial acumen.

As Interviewee 13 succinctly put it: '*it is about seeking to influence government whether procurement or changing legislation*', supported by insight from Interviewee 18: *'it is about looking at your priorities for your organisation that you need to ensure that the legislative and regulatory environment doesn't rule you…the core issue is making sure that the environment is as least hostile to your objectives, aims and ambitions as possible'*. This aligns firmly to the concept of resource dependency and perhaps ultimately gives support to why PA takes place in the first place as illustrated by Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) who modified Porter's five forces model by adding the sixth and powerful force of political decision making that runs across all other forces.

The idea of resource dependency emerges from the organisational knowledge roots and is underpinned by the concept of systems theory (Katz and Kahn, 1966) and the importance of linking the organisation to the world in which it operates. So, in many respects systems theory conceptually supports why PA takes place. Also in this tradition is the role of business and organisations in society as articulated by scholars such as Carroll (1991) who talk of the importance of economic, legal and ethical responsibilities and the wider field of Corporate Social Responsibility scholarship. Here acting responsibly is

about building and nurturing reputation to ensure the environment remains less hostile and enable the organisation is able to deliver its mission and goals and ultimately to survive. It is through the qualitative study that the importance of reputation emerged strongly and reflected the evolving role of PA (explored in 5.2.4.). As Interviewee 9 stated: '*a big part for me is reputation management*', and as Interview 23 reinforced: *'(we) drive the strategy of the organisation'.* This also picks up on some of the thoughts about the public good that was touched on earlier in terms of what makes for more effective PA campaigns. Campaigns that are less self-interested and show wider societal commitment are better received.

One reason why perhaps in the quantitative study these organisationally focused knowledge roots were rated slightly lower could be because the qualitative study was able to draw out more fully reflections of what PA actually does which helps to illuminate these conceptual ideas. The quantitative study was used more to understand how PA went about performing its role and there is less scope to tease out these connections. That said, it is believed there is clear evidence that PA draws on knowledge from the organisational tradition.

The issue of reputation is predicated on building relationships that although part of systems theory, has a dual heritage with communication roots. It is clear from responses to Q17 in the survey (when stakeholder management was rated so highly), and to Q14 (that placed personal credibility and being a skilled influencing inside and outside the organisation important in terms of

behaviours), that the concept of social capital theory (Hazleton and Kennan, 2000), as a way of explaining PA value, may also be useful. The idea that relationships are based on communication and information sharing that facilitate social exchanges contributes to how PA practitioners are able to provide additional insight into the political landscape – through the networks and contacts they have - rather than relying solely on publicly available information.

Although the concept of networking per se is not seen quite as relevant as it once was with a shift to an approach involving more planning and evaluation and a broadening of skills (explored in the second order themes of evidence-based 5.2.2. and widening of skills 5.2.3.), there is still need for sound intelligence gathering (explored in the second order theme of political expertise in 5.3.1.). It is of course relevant to the idea of co-creational solutions and more collaborative approaches by people working together. So, the value of social networks (based on people's involvement in groups) as suggested by Dekker and Uslaner (2001) and the idea of reciprocity and value generation is one that allies well to the PA.

Finally, in the context of knowledge there are practice principles (the way the job is done) that perhaps relates to the daily practical delivery of PA. It can be argued that this could relate to the focus by practitioners on understanding the political system (explored in 5.3.1: the second order theme of intellectual capital of a PA practitioner being grounded in political expertise). Although in the quantitative study, legislative knowledge fell in the central zone of

importance, with 59% of respondents stating that these was essential/very important which seems surprising. Also, it is argued this practical knowledge relates to the functional skills that emerged during the qualitative study. Here practitioners often spoke of knowledge and skills inter-changeably.

The functional skills that emerged strongly in Q11 of the survey related to ability to communicate ideas (writing and verbally) with 97% stating these were essential/highly desirable and 92% supporting listening and ability to process complex information. Yet in both cases practitioners felt there was room for improvement. These skills fall firmly into the applied communication arena. In the central zone were also categories such as building coalitions (70%), issues management (64%), project/campaign research and planning (57%). These skills will be looked in detail in the discussion on competencies shortly but it is relevant that in terms of communication and handling complexity of information there are theoretical tools and techniques that help here, whether it is drawing on theories of persuasion, sense-making, framing and issues management or from a very practical perspective planning models (Gregory, 2008). The importance of planning certainly emerged during the qualitative study, as explored in 5.2.2., with the shift in PA becoming more evidence-based as discussed earlier.

So, it is suggested that perhaps there is a curiosity amongst practitioners that there are tools that might support and help to conceptualise the practice, but these are largely invisible and never explored as practitioners just get on and do the job, however much practical insight through interventionist concepts of

knowledge may carry some weight. This perhaps makes the establishment or getting agreement on some sort of Grand Unification Theory for PA (Schuler, 2002) remote, although given the fact that practitioners found individual statements that were grounded in knowledge roots helpful then perhaps the integration of different theoretical traditions and providing PA with a multi-eclectic theoretical base (Hillman, 2002) perhaps could garner support.   This also connects well to the broader debates about the role of meta-theory (Wallis, 2010).

Another practical component of the idea of knowledge appears to be the growing importance of commercial knowledge and business acumen. Although this was drawn out in the qualitative study explored in 5.2.4. under the second order theme of the trend in PA towards management consultancy and also in 5.3.1. with the second order theme of political expertise. Political expertise is critical but it is about translating this to the world of business and connecting the commercial imperatives of the organisation to the decision being taken in the political world. However, this did not rate as highly in the quantitative study, with commercial understanding ranking in the central zone of function skills importance at 47% though this is still nearly half.

7.4.4. Knowledge relevancy

In many respects, the practitioners' view of knowledge relates closely to Gregory's (2008:216) working definition based on the PRSA who defined knowledge as 'what practitioners need to know in order to undertake their work competently' although there is still some blurring into the idea of skills

which the PRSA defined as 'what practitioners need to be able to do to undertake their role competently'. What some of this debate is clearly not is a wider discussion of the underpinning knowledge that supports the practice as a whole and often practitioners may not explicitly know the things they know.

It is suggested the split between the ideas of explicit and tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Polyani, 1993) is hinted at in this study. There is limited awareness of explicit knowledge – the objective and codified which does exist, but which lacks tangibility. For example, Interviewee 19 pointed out in the context of what PA practitioners do: *'(it is) the ability to put ideas down on papers, its that simple...bringing the ideas to life so that they are understandable'*. What enables practitioners to do this is being a good story teller using various tools of persuasion and framing which an individual may do instinctively without being able to name the theory they are using.

The only broad reference to explicit knowledge emerged clearly in the qualitative study is understanding for example the mechanics of the legislative process – which is in the public domain anyway. Even within the idea of knowledge of the political system, there is a greater emphasis placed on the tacit and subjective – the expertise based on doing the job over a number of years, the subtleties of the policy system, the insight, the players in decision making and the networks involved and the type of arguments that will resonate. Here the focus is more clearly on the view of Greenhalgh *et al.* (2004) view tacit knowledge does not exist in written form, it is based on the

expertise of the individual and the meaning of knowledge is dependent on its context. This is where many PA practitioners believe PA derives its value.

This provides helpful insight since given the impact of technology democratising access to information including that of the political system, then a large component of supposed PA value no longer exists and indeed can in itself be codified. It is the relationship between the explicit and the tacit in the context of the political system and which is allied to social capital that is the important one for PA practitioners and one that was alluded to by a number of PA practitioners in the qualitative study. It is the intellectual value that PA practitioners bring to existing information that is their unique selling proposition and not understanding the mechanics of the political system per se.

This illustrates another area of difference between practitioners in terms of whether some of what they do can be taught and in part the drive towards professionalisation perhaps reveals these tensions. There is a fairly consistent split in views about the practice of PA as revealed in Q10 of the survey (24% stating PA didn't need an agreed set of skills); Q13 of the survey (21% stating PA didn't need an agreed set of behaviours); Q16 (40% neither agreeing, disagreeing or disagreeing completely that PA needed its own body of knowledge) and Q22 (27% stating it wouldn't benefit from a framwork that brought together knowledge, skills and behaviours). So, it is suggested perhaps that there is around a quarter of respondents who believe PA would not benefit from any form of codification. This remains broadly the case when

these variables are cross referenced as outlined in Chapter Six, section 6.4., though there is a hint that there is more variability of view in part perhaps because of the inter-changability of what is meant by knowledge, skills and behaviours. This is also reinforced by the divergence of view as to whether PA is a profession with a significant minority at 30% in response to Q18 stating they did not know or categorically stating PA was not a profession.

So the craft versus profession debate is visible, though as a whole the practice sees itself as becoming more professional as evidenced in the qualititave study (explored in 5.3.3: the second order theme of professionalisation strains). This perhaps mirrors the tension between the three levels of knowledge with those who believe PA is a craft, learned by doing with the focus on the practical experience and tacit knowledge and entry into the field not restricted to those who have qualifications that might demonstrate an explicit knowledge in the form of understanding inteventionist and explanatory concepts. It is a resistence perhaps to a feeling of boundaries and qualifications that some practitioners feel uncomfortable with. This inevitably will pose challenges to establishing any sort of competency framework for the field in terms of one that will be accepted and found useful by those in practice.

Of relevance is the approach of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and how they specifically incorporate different routes into pharmacy is a helpful one as it recognizes that diversity and variety of people who enter into that profession so there are thoughtful ways this diversity can be incorporated whilst

maintaining a sense of identification. At the same time, the thinking behind the ICE framework which focuses on professional development is also useful as it factors in ideas around self-awareness which may be of value as the field of PA is certainly become more aware of itself and its value. This will be further explored during the course of this discussion.

Irrespective of this backdrop, on one level research suggests based on the type of skills referred to be practitioners – for example, effective writing and persuasion and those broadly classified as applied communication skills – then certain theories and models such as persuasion theories (Ajzen, 1991; Fisbein and Ajzen, 1975; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and ideas around issues management (Chase, 1976; Heath, 2000) would have relevance and indeed could potentaly be taught to help validate what PA practitioners already do and add more depth. This supports the view of Cowan *et al.* (2000) that too much knowledge is suggested as tacit when in fact it could be codified.

So where does this leave the idea of a PA BoK? The author suggested in the literature that based on the work of scholars (Boddewyn, 2012; Getz, 2001; McGrath, Moss and Harris, 2010; Oberman, 2008; Toth, 2006; Windsor, 2005) that there are five main strands of PA knowledge roots: those from political science; culture; economics; communication and the organisation. When specifically asked about what knowledge supports practice the default position aways returned to aspects of applied communication and of course political knowledge and insight. Only when probed during the qualitative interviews, and through Q17 in the survey that linked to aspects of knowledge,

did practitioners revea that ideas which emerged from these knowledge areas were helpful. Occasionally words were used that revealed that knowledge from these knowledge roots are being used all the time such as the concept of persuasion which falls within the communication tradition, and the need for commercial and organisational knowledge that links to knowledge from the organisational theory tradition.

Although the research cannot categorically prove that these five knowledge traditions are the key ones that underpin practice, there is a sense that they have relevance. Some, such as those falling from the communication tradition, have more obvious practical applications perhaps confirming the view of Toth (2006) that there is little direct PA theory but there are theories (especially from communication generally) that supports the PA discipline, whilst other ideas such as reality construction, suggested by de Lange an Linders (2006), are more abstract. As such, the term creole, as used by L'Etang (2008) to discuss PR knowledge roots also has value to PA, as does the idea of creolisation frameworks (Abbott, Zheng and Du, 2013) as previously explored in the context of cultural hybridity and multiple identities.

Also, reflecting on knowledge relevancy and possible tri-partite nature of knowledge helps to shed light on how the SECI knowledge conversion process as outlined by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) might work. The explanatory and interventionist knowledge link to concepts of tacit to explicit and explicit to explicit knowledge movements, while the integration of wisdom into the overall knowledge structure encourages the tacit to explicit movement

(by giving importance to the tacit) and tacit to tacit to ensure knowledge is shared. Though it is recognised that there is concern about the sharing of knowledge and competitive advantage. So, a competency framework that helps to encourage this movement, or at least opens up the possibility of movement, whilst understanding the concerns around knowledge sharing could be useful. It is also a key component of embedding any virtue ethics approach within the field.

7.5. Competencies – a multi-layered approach

7.5.1. Terminological imprecision

Although aspects of competencies have already been discussed albeit under different themes earlier in this chapter, this section now explicitly brings together skills and behaviours so that there can be a more informed discussion in relation to the competency literature. A little repetition at times is therefore unavoidable but hopefully necessary to reinforce key points.

The literature identified there is some imprecision around defining terms such as knowledge, skills and competence and this has been a constant theme emerging from this study. Picking up on the complexity of knowledge as outlined above, this research has parallels with the work of Flynn (2014) who suggests when exploring PR competencies generally that there is a lack of consensus about the key terms. This is a constant problem that has been raised by numerous communication scholars such as Gregory (2008), Jeffery and Brunton (2010) and others. A similar pattern emerged again in this study of PA practitioners who referred to functional skills, behaviours and

knowledge interchangeably. This was particularly evident in the qualitative study in terms of how practitioners chose to define different activities. As Interviewee 9 said when being asked about PA behaviours '*not sure I know what you mean*'.

However, for the purposes of this discussion the definition developed by HRM scholars Garavan and McGuire (2001), who defined competence broadly as a skill in a functional area and competency as associated behaviours, is being used to provide structure. However, it is clear from the wider discussions around typologies in the literature that competencies are complex and are multi-dimensional constructs. The multi-dimensional nature of competencies is one that will be developed over the course of this section and relates to the complexity of how people work, behave and interact.

7.5.2. Widening yet agreement on skills

Despite using variable terminology, a broad agreement on the type of skills and behaviours did emerge from both the qualitative and quantitative studies. The qualitative study suggested that practitioners were seeing a widening of skills (explored in 5.2.3.) in terms of greater integration and the need to have an understanding of the media and digital landscape, as well as the political one, reflecting the earlier discussion on PA becoming an increasingly stratified practice. As Interviewee 10 suggested, PA is: '*at a crossroads that it is (becoming) more of an integrated practice of PR',* and supported by Interviewee 12: *'PA is pluralistic, multi-eclectic and also how to use media and social media'.* This did not, however, come over as strongly in the quantitative

study. In Q11, media understanding and usage and social media understanding and usage were rated bottom when practitioners were asked to identify the importance of specific skills with 38% and 27% rating them essential. These were seen as desirable, perhaps a sign that they are becoming more significant and an area that the qualitative study was able to draw our more fully. This supports the ideas of Louw (2010) who argues there is an increasing mediaisation of politics (and indeed society) and Castells (2009) on the rise of the networked society and its impact.

Additionally, three broad areas emerged as important for delivering PA practice (explored under the overarching dimension of a broad competency agreement within a fragmenting practice at 5.5.). These are emotional and social intelligence, organisational and political awareness and strategic communications. The idea of applied communication skills also emerged as part of the debate on knowledge (explored in 5.4.2.), and public policy and insight knowledge (explored in 5.4.1.). From the perspectives of strategic communication skills, the functional skills include being analytical, ability to synthesise complex information, ability to create persuasive arguments, messages and evidences, research, planning and evaluation. For Interviewee 17, the idea of skills for PA was simple and embodied many of the ideas above: '*you need an intellect (to) read through complex, badly written documents, understand what the arguments are in there, distill them, translate them…you are given information from all angles, all different colours, shapes and sizes, some anecdotal and some properly evidenced and you have to be able to sit through it and smell false ones and not let anybody spin you a line*'.

In the quantitative study in response to Q11 on skills, the ability to communicate ideas (writing and verbally) and listening and processing complex information dominated with 97% and 92% respectively which supports the ideas from the qualitative study. Then in the central zone of importance came building coalitions and working collaboratively (70%), issues management (64%) problem solving (62%), legislative knowledge (60%), project and campaign research and planning (57%) and commercial understanding/how business works (49%).

A couple of elements here appear to be slightly at odds with the qualitative study. Legislative knowledge came in at fifth in terms of it being rated as highly important, yet in the qualitative study the need for political awareness both in terms of the mechanics of the process, as well as wider interpretation for the organisation, were seen as important (explored in 5.3.1.). This lower figure may be a reflection of the question wording specifically asking about legislation rather than the wider political landscape. However, given that understanding the process is seen as one of the few differentiators of PA practice, surprisingly only 42% suggested that practitioners were highly competent and 39% competent at this skill, leaving 19% stating they felt practitioners only showed a moderate degree of competency or no competency at all. It might have been expected perhaps that practitioners would have rated this higher in terms of their performance. The idea of growing commercial acumen also emerged in the qualitative study (explored in 5.4.3.), translating the political and business worlds to each other, though

this appeared of lesser relevance in the quantitative study where a significant number at 48% stating it was important.

These functional strategic communications skills mirror those coming out of recent academic studies into PR generally (Goodman, 2006; Gregory, 2008; Sha, 2011; Flynn, 2014), as well as practically focused projects (ECOPSI, 2013; CIPR Future Skills Report, 2015; Global Body of Knowledge Project, 2016), all of which have been explored in the literature. These same strategic communicator skills also appear in the practically focused Government Communications Network Competency Framework. If one looks at the specific PA studies, the importance of these skills is in line with the findings of Fleisher (2007), VMA (2012) and Watson Helsby (2012). Even when reflecting on the specific PA competency model of Connect Communications, the only real PA competency highlighted was the understanding of the legislative and political process. All others fell within the categories of business, technical, personal and management and reflected generic concepts. The only clear difference with PA as opposed to other communication functions was the additional requirement of political insight.   So, the study suggests there is some common agreement emerging as to the type of skills required for PA practice, what is less clear cut is whether practitioners believe PA needs an agreed skill-set at all (as suggested in section at 7.3.) when exploring PA's cohesion and diversity.

7.5.3. Behaviours and ethics

When looking at behaviours the qualitative study revealed the importance of having wide social awareness and emotional intelligence (explored in 5.5.1.). Ideas around empathy, grasping another's viewpoint, emotional intelligence, honesty and personal credibility were also mentioned. Concepts such as openness, transparency, personable manner, politeness, integrity, helpfulness and sincerity were also flagged and seemed to support the concept of credibility. The role of trusted advisor inside and outside the organisation also came across strongly.   The crossover with skills also became apparent with ideas such as active listening.   As Interviewee 17 suggested: *'empathy – really understand where different people are coming from, if you have a room full of people arguing sometimes they are arguing in the same direction but they all have different perspectives'*, as supported by Interviewee 21: '*a listener and be able to paraphrase back to people what they think...understand the sensitivities of where people are coming from, what language and tone and style will be appropriate'*. The importance of character again comes through here with its natural links to virtue ethics.

The quantitative study too at Q14 revealed personal credibility (reliable, trustworthy, ethical) as the key behaviour, with near unanimous support for it being essential at 97% (with the remaining 3% stating it was desirable). Interestingly, only 22% said that PA practitioners demonstrated personal credibility very well/highly competently, with 54% saying that they performed well/competently, so some room for improvement was in evidence. This is noteworthy given knowledge of ethical theory rated poorly in terms of

knowledge statements (as discussed at 7.4.), and contributes to aspects of inconsistency in terms of tensions and contradictions in PA practice explored at in section 7.3. of this chapter.

Also, rated highly in terms of behaviours was being a skilled influencer outside the organisation, with 84% seeing it as essential, and being a skilled influencer inside the organisation, with 70% seeing it as essential. These behaviours perhaps support the view of PA practice at its heart being a relationship management function. In the central zone of importance was being socially aware and intuitive (seen by 64% as essential), collaborative and adaptable (at 58%) and intellectual curiosity (at 54%). To note, the ability to get on with people rated in the bottom zone of importance alongside resilience and being a decisive thinker, all of which were at 48% (and therefore significant).

7.5.4. PA differentiation

As with skills, behaviours mirror the type of attributes in both the PA and PR studies referenced above. Many of these behaviours especially interpersonal skills, communication and listening, appear in all four of the competency frameworks reflected upon in Chapter Four. This raises issues about how to make competencies work relevant when terminologies can be generic. It is the generic and list-like nature of competencies that forms a major strand of criticism (Frank *et al.,* 2010). The main way that this gets addressed is by making these competencies occupation specific by providing examples of what that competency looks like in practice through illustrations and case

studies, as exampled in the framework of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the Government Communications Network. Interestingly, in the qualitative study practitioners often illustrated their answers when reflecting on skills and behaviours with examples of PA activities. For example, Interviewee 18 spoke extensively about the details of a specific health related lobbying campaign and Interviewee 9 talked about the use of media pressure in terms of preventing a major change in retail pricing policy. Although specific details of individual activity would have to be changed for confidentiality reasons case studies could still be constructed. It is this level of granularity that is necessary in terms of best practice approaches, a point made by Campion *et al.* (2011).

So, this returns to the question posed by Fleisher (2007), what makes PA different and what the core skills, behaviours and indeed knowledge are necessary for practice. The key area that appears to be given greater emphasis above all others by respondents and which became very apparent in the qualitative study concerned the knowledge and understanding of the political landscape. Importantly, it is the insight that the PA practitioner brings and how the different policy scenarios may play out that is the true value of PA (as explored in 5.3.1. and 5.4.1.). If this is the case then it is not unreasonable to suggest that practitioners that have a greater practical knowledge of public policy, how it is formed, evaluated and implemented would increase their effectiveness. This suggests perhaps having some insight into how policy is made by drawing on public policy scholarship (Gutman and Thompson, 2004; Schneider and Ingram, 1997; McConnell,

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2010) would be useful. This is an area that vexes PA scholarship and practice – what can be taught. As suggested by McGrath and other scholars in the 2015 Special Issue of Interest Groups Advocacy, the process and mechanics of public affairs can be codified. This in line with the thinking of Cowan, David and Foray (2000) who argue that more tacit is knowledge explicit knowledge and therefore has the potential to be taught.

It is natural perhaps, given the fact that PA is a discipline within the PR family, that this study reveals similarities in skills and behaviours to those more generally looking at PR. It is just that what is generic and what is job or profession specific needs to be clearly articulated if a clear picture on PA competencies is to be developed. This was one of the key points which emerged from the discussion of various competency typologies (Boyatzis, 1982; Cheetham and Chivers, 1996, 1998; Kuijpers, 2001; Nordhaug, 1998; Sparrow *et al.,* 1994: Delamare Le Deist and Winterton, 2005) in terms of linking individual transferable generic skills, the unique firm-specific (often called core) and then those made necessary by a specific job or profession. So, there is a precedent for discussing layers of competencies and this concept is one that has value to PA given the findings from this study – there are skills and behaviours that mirror PR studies and then there are those that may have more relevance for PA.

The idea of layering of competencies is also consistent with the growing view that in the twenty-first century there has been a long-term shift in the occupational structure, with the rise of knowledge work and service

occupations that require a broad set of generic competencies.   This is in line with the views emerging from the OECD (2005) as looked at in the literature. The concept of competency layering also has precedent in the work of Jeffery and Brunton (2010) and Cernicova, Dragomir and Palea (2011) although they do not explicitly use this term. Findings would suggest that these ideas could be developed for PA.

Building on this line of thinking, the scholars mentioned above argue that there exist functional and behaviour competencies that relate to the domain or profession (that is those specific to a given field – in this case PA). Based on this study this could include ideas around how to gather political intelligence and analysis. Then there are competencies relating to cognitive processing capacity that can be sub-divided into domain specific abilities (those whose articulation defines the PA occupation). Again, from this study it could include elements such as the construction of arguments within a political context. Then there are generic abilities or transversal competences (those that relate to all work-related performance regardless of occupation).   The author suggests, however, that these could be considered from two perspectives. Transversal in respect of PR generally and transversal in respect of the generic competencies suggested by the OECD as required for work in the twenty-first century. So, for the PR transversal this could relate to the wider competencies relating to the work of a strategic communicator. Such a layering could help to bring some clarity to what fundamentally makes PA practice different to other communication disciplines but might also help to improve awareness and give visibility to the skills PA practitioners have in

both the specific and the generic for future career development and progression either within or outside the PA field. From the review of competency frameworks in Chapter Four it was concluded that all focused on the importance of the framework in terms of development and capturing skills and behaviours in order to improve awareness of one's own professional identity. Placing PA competencies in such a framework could contribute to this process of identification deemed important to the professionalisation debate (discussed at 7.3.). Also, such a framework could capture the nature of multiple identities with different types of PA practice reflecting variations of knowledge, discourse and promotional work which are all evident in what PA practitioners do.

Returning to the specific competencies emerging from the qualitative and quantitative studies, there are parallels to the findings of Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) and their work on identifying twenty-first century generic competencies. As explored in the literature, these five generic competency areas of analytical skills, interpersonal skills, ability to execute, information processing and capacity for change are deemed vital for the knowledge economy now and in the future. It is these themes that L'Etang and Piezcka (2015) modified and recommended could be used as a basis for the CIPR to develop a competency approach to PR in the UK generally. They argued that PR specific competencies sit within these five generic competency areas, though some have a greater focus than others. The author suggests that these twenty-first century competency areas can be layered so that the PA domain sits with in the PR transversal that in turn sit within the generic

transversal. As such, PA competencies can be clearly positioned within a larger framework of transferable skills. It is clear from the findings that PA practitioners articulate their competencies in such a way that the concept of layering would provide structure.   Table 7.1. contains an applied example using the Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) concepts:

	PR	PA
Analytic Skills (critical thinking; problem solving; decision making, research and enquiry)	Relates to all aspects of communication planning, research and evaluation for all stakeholders	Planning, research and evaluation specifically for PA audiences Research and Inquiry specifically on mechanics of political landscape
Interpersonal Skills (communication; collaboration; leadership and responsibility)	Effective writing, oral and visual communication	Effective writing and creating of persuasive arguments Alliance building and co-creation of solutions
Ability to execute (initiative and self-direction; productivity)	Implementation of PR activity	Implementation of PA activity
Information Processing (information literacy; media literacy; digital citizenship; ICT operations and concepts)	Media and digital skills	Ability to synthesise complex political and organisational information and make sense of it Media and digital awareness and usage
Capacity for Change (creativity/innovation; adaptive learning/learning to learn/flexibility)		Adopting new technology for campaigning

Table 7.1   Adaption of the Finegold and Notabartolo competency concepts (2010) @ Sarah Roberts-Bowman (2017)

Within this type of approach there is a clear opportunity to outline specific domain content competencies that in essence returns the debate back to the intellectual value that PA practitioners bring in terms of wider political insight.

Based on the findings the challenge will be how to balance the domain and the two levels of transversal as already discussed.

Findings also suggest there is a connection to some of the specific typologies suggested in the literature. The idea that competencies operate at three levels (Drejer, 2001; New, 1996; Rowe, 1995 as cited by Soderquist *et al.,* 2010) has some relevance to PA. Firstly, there is the idea that there are generic versus organisational competencies in the sense that there are competencies that are relevant to PA (whether in-house or consultancy) and to the wider PR family in which it sits, but these are also impacted by the type of organisational competencies, for example how specific sectors operate. The study revealed that PA is situational in line with the findings of Bauer (2015).

Secondly, there are managerial versus operational competencies. Although perhaps less clear from the findings some of the skills of the strategic communicator can be categorized as managerial, for example being the trusted advisor and having an ability to influence, whilst others relate to the operational, with the focus on understanding the political landscape and insight to inform the organisational decision making process. In many respects this has parallels to the seniority of the PA practitioner.

Finally, there are differences between competency as skills and competency as behaviours, as already suggested by Garavan and McQuire (2001). So, there are functional skills that relate to being a strategic communicator

generally within which sit the PA specific skill of understanding the political system. Then there are the behaviours - all of which relate again to be being a senior communicator - but with an enhanced focus on social awareness and emotional intelligence being able to be sensitive to people and situations.

It is less clear how some of the findings might relate to Soderquist *et al.'s* (2010) more complex system of integrating four types of generic management and functional behaviours and skills with four types of organisational specific management and function skills, but there is some evidence (given the situational nature of PA), that the relationship between the organisation and the individual has a powerful impact on how PA is conceived and delivered. The findings of this study concentrated primarily on the individual, but it is worth noting the importance of how any professional framework needs to work within a variety of organisational settings.

7.5.5. Finding the language of practice

Although PA appears to be developing a degree of professional identity, there remains possible resistance. To help address this issue the importance of focusing firmly on the individual practitioner and using the language of practice is paramount in terms of articulating competencies.   Campion *et al.* (2011) argue it is vital that in a competency framework that priority must be given to defining the anatomy of competency – in other words finding the right language to talk about competencies so that they are meaningful to those using them.   It is also important to include cross-job and job specific

competencies in many respects mirroring some of the importance ascribed to twenty-first century employability competencies and meta-competencies.

Given that the findings reveal PA aligned so strongly with the competencies of the senior communicator, trying to explain competencies and using the right language is critical. Here the work of Cheetham and Chivers (1998) might be helpful as their five dimensions of competencies provides a useful way to reflect on how to make competencies resonate and make sense to people.

They talk of cognitive competencies (explicit and tacit knowledge). In terms of PA, this allows the integration of areas that can be codified, such as the mechanics of the political process, but it also allows the idea of experience and political instinct to be captured as important to practice. In other words, helping to integrate ideas around PA being both a craft and a profession. It is also a way that brings in the idea of knowledge more formally into the competency concept. They also talk of functional competences. This relates to the specific skills. So, in the case of PA, this includes how to write effectively, synthesise information and construct persuasive arguments that will have political resonance. In addition, they talk of personal competencies or behaviours. Here for PA the focus can be social awareness and emotional intelligence that seems to emerge as fundamental. They also include the idea of ethical or values-based competencies, as distinct from behaviours. The concept of values is a useful one even though understanding of different ethical traditions and ideas rated bottom in the list of helpful statements in Q17 of the quantitative study, the idea of personal credibility rated top in Q14

when practitioners were asked to rate different behaviours (this included ideas such reliability, trustworthiness and ethical).

The idea of values may also be a better concept through which to understand the idea of lobbying itself. Although practitioners were not explicitly asked whether lobbying is ethical, it emerged from discussions that modern-day practice supports much of the approach, suggested by Edgett (2002) for ethically desirable advocacy, including the importance of evaluation, respect for those involved in the debate, clear visibility and validity of communication. These ideas are embedded in ideas around a shift to more evidence-based practice (explored in 5.2.2.); shift to more management consultancy (explored in 5.2.4); and professionalization strains (explored in 5.3.3.). It also connects to ideas around the importance of transparency and what this means as indicated by responses to Q23. Here adhering to professional codes of conduct and abiding by agreed set of standards of advocacy (honesty, visibility, truthfulness) received unanimous support.

Values, however, underpin behaviour and also embody the ideas of responsibility, so in many respects they may be considered bigger than ethics. It also connects to the ideas of Bauer (2015) who talks of responsible lobbying that links to the idea of an organisation's overall responsibilities to society. Bauer (2015) argues that PA practitioners should be lobbying in line with the organisation's stated corporate responsibilities and long term objectives, as well as wider ethical and democratic values. As Interviewee 21 put forward: '*I am a believer in establishing more values than ethics. Rather than codify thy*

shall do this and thy shall not do that so the more you stipulate the boundaries the more people work up to those boundaries'. So, there is a sense that values are more fundamental and rooted in the individual and their approach to understanding what is right and wrong and responsible behavior. Again, this does draw on the concept of a virtue ethics and embedding this approach into a competency framework may have merit.

Finally, Cheetham and Chivers (1998) put forward the idea of meta-competencies which they define as areas such as dealing with uncertainty, learning, reflection and which according to Brown and McCartney (1995) are the abilities under which all other competencies shelter. In particular, it embraces the higher order abilities around learning adapting, anticipating and creating and which are necessary for capacities such as judgment, intuition and acumen upon which all other competences are based. If one looks at the PA skills and behaviours as articulated in this study then many of the strategic communicator abilities have ties to the concept of meta, not least the importance of judgment and experience. The concept of meta-competencies links to the work of Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) and the growing importance of generic twenty-first century competencies.

Additionally, the idea of meta is a useful concept more broadly as referenced in the literature. Any subject can have some sort of meta-theory (or theories) and knowledge associated with it that is abstracted from the day-to-day considerations and might include things such as theoretical foundations, practical form and functional utility. It is not always necessary to have a

detailed knowledge of this meta-theory or theories to perform certain tasks, but it helps to provide greater insight into what is happening.

It is suggested that the literature reveals various meta theories and knowledge at work in the field of PA that helps give the practice some shape and utility, but findings from this study show that this is not necessarily visible to practitioners in terms of underpinning their functional and behaviour competencies. This invisibility relates primarily to the knowledge roots explored in the literature. This lack of visibility is clear from the findings when practitioners talk about their lived experiences of PA, they use the language of the practice – focusing on the tools and techniques - but meta-theory and concepts are revealed implicitly when probed or when specific questions are posed that illustrate these conceptual ideas. This is illustrated in responses to Q16 where a significant number of respondents (41%) neither agreed nor disagreed or disagreed entirely that PA needed a body of knowledge, yet to Q17 many respondents suggested the range of statements reflecting different knowledge traditions were helpful to practice.   This is also revealed in the qualitative work at 5.4. under the dimension of a body of knowledge being almost invisible and lacking in realization and depth. This has been further elaborated upon earlier in 7.4.

It was also suggested in the literature that the model by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) could have value to PA. This integrates the thinking from Cheetham and Chivers but also incorporates more fully ideas around

meta and social competencies from other sources. The original model is below.

	Occupational	Personal
Conceptual	Cognitive competence	Meta competence
Operational	Functional competence	Social competence

Figure: 7.2. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Typology of Competences (2005: 39)

Based on the previous discussion, it is suggested that the Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) model is adapted as a starting point around which a competency framework for PA could be developed.

In order for the model to be made PA domain specific and for it to incorporate aspects of knowledge, a number of modification need to be made. Initially, the meta competence needs to be redefined as values to take into account that there are higher levels of competences required that underpin general twenty-first century knowledge-based employability. Values also need to explicitly embed the concept of ethics and to reinforce the importance of these to PA. The social competence category also needs to reinforce the idea of emotional intelligence. These domain competencies then sit within a larger meta framework. At the same time, by adding sub-text to each category a clear division between the three different types of knowledge can be captured.

The explanatory perspective held at the meta theory or transcendental level; the intervention/practical knowledge at the conceptual level – that is what I need to know to do the job; and the practice knowledge in the form of functional skills – what I do. So, for PA, the model might be adapted.

META COMPETENCIES – transversal competence (skills) for 21st century employability
META THEORY/THEORIES – 3 levels of knowledge that sit across the PA function from the transcendental to the operational

PR transversal and PA domain competence and competency	**Occupational**	**Personal**
Conceptual	Cognitive competence -Explicit and tacit knowledge	Values competence -Behaviours
Operational	Functional competence - tools and techniques	Social competence -Emotional intelligence

Table 7.3. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Typology of Competences (2005: 39) adapted by Roberts-Bowman (2017)

Findings from the qualitative study (explored in 5.5.1.) and supported to a slightly lesser extent by evidences from the quantitative work at Q14, with being socially aware and intuitive rated fourth at 64% of practitioners regarding it as essential all point to the importance in PA of sound social awareness and emotional intelligence. These ideas link to the behaviours identified by Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) that are necessary to be effective in the twenty-first century and to wider ideas around occupational effectiveness supporting the views of scholars such as Abraham (2004); Carmeili and Josman (2006); Cote and Miners (2006); and Kunnanatt (2008) who point to emotional intelligence as critical.

The importance of integrating the ideas of meta-competencies such as learning, self-reflection and flexibility with values and social competences in any PA framework it is suggested helps to address the key weaknesses of competency approaches.   It enables a competency framework to be developed that is fluid and forward thinking rather than static. On an individual level the meta, values and social competencies encourage flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness to change, all of which underpin continuous professional development and encourage improved self-awareness. From an occupational point of view, by bringing together the knowledge, skills and behaviours at a meta, conceptual and functional level there is an opportunity to establish a framework that ensures the skills necessary for daily practice are constantly refreshed and not tied to one particular skill-set.   So, for example, the study suggests PA is evolving to more of an integrated communication function, incorporating media and digital skills (explored in 5.2.3.), with responses to Q11 ranking these as desirable (though not essential yet). As skills evolve with the changing environmental landscape, these can be accommodated.

The idea of meta-competencies also allows for incorporating the latest thinking from Garcea, Isherwood and Linley (2011) around strengths based approaches.   As an individual it is not just about recognising one's professional and/or occupational skills and where development is needed to improve effectiveness, but also to understand one's individual strengths. Based on the findings from this study, incorporating a strengths-based component to a PA competency framework perhaps has merit. As discussed

in this chapter in section 7.2., PA is situational, so the experiences of individuals within the practice can vary. By encouraging individuals to recognise their individual strengths, for example whether individuals prefer for to work on loud or quiet PA campaigns or whether PA practitioners have a sector and organisational preference can help individuals think more appropriately about their career choices, help to recognise often unrecognized strategic communication skills and help practitioners improve self-awareness of their own capabilities, rather than just focusing on how to address any PA weaknesses. This will be addressed in the next section 7.6. when the concept of postmodern careers will be discussed more fully.

Interestingly, given the clear situational nature of PA as flagged in the qualitative study and given the discussion on competencies, such an approach would allow the recognition that not all competencies are equally salient and as argued by Finegold and Notabartolo (2010), some may grow or become less important over time. Also, firms – be they PA agencies or organisations - are driven to differentiate themselves so some competencies may take on greater meaning than others. This also picks up on the intellectual capital of PA practitioners in terms of which particular strengths they wish to highlight as part of their individual unique selling proposition. In some cases, individuals may wish to highlight more generic competencies and at times more the domain specific depending on their career choices.

The literature made clear that for competencies to be meaningful they must be dynamic. Not only looking forward to competencies that are maturing but

also to how competencies develop over time. Thus, the literature suggested, and as the study of competency frameworks in Chapter Four revealed, a scale of proficiency in achievement of skills and behaviours is needed. Although the quantitative study did not explicitly ask whether skills and behaviours were different for different seniority levels in PA, the qualitative study hinted that there was a different emphasis on different skills depending on the level. As Interviewee 22 outlined: *'I am at a stage of my career when I don't actually do the monitoring myself but it is important that I read what is being sent to my clients'.*

The author argues that although there are similar functional and behaviour competencies emerging from this research project, as with other wider studies into PR generally and PA specifically, the relationship with HRM scholarship allows a move away from the generation of lists to a more insightful reflection between PA and competencies. This includes placing the PA or domain specific competencies into a wider set of PR and transversal competencies; sub-dividing competencies into a more meaningful typography by adapting the Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) model; integrating the concept of meta or twenty-first century competencies into PA practice; and developing the idea of the tri-partite or a continuum scale of practice knowledge looking from the meta or transcendental level, to the applied and interventional models and daily PA practice principles. These ideas should underpin any professional PA competency framework moving forward. This is not an easy task but it is argued the conceptual model outlined above can be translated, organized and presented in a way that can provide a reference for PA

practitioners.   As Campion *et al.* (2011) point out, using diagrams and illustrations to help articulate any framework underpins its usability.

7.6. Personal agency, structure and praxis: A multi-dimensional career in a postmodern world

7.6.1. An integrated and strategic practice

As suggested in the literature, Windsor's (2005) view of PA being multi-disciplinary should perhaps be re-considered as findings in this study suggest that practice falls more within the concept of interdisciplinary.   That is from a theoretical and applied perspective there is a more integrative synthesis in line with the thinking of Luttuca (2003) and Aram (2004) in terms of knowledge underpinning PA practice coming from a variety of fields and indeed the practice of PA being seen as a strategic communication function, with a limited (albeit valuable) differentiator from other strategic communication functions.

From an applied perspective, the qualitative study (explored in 5.2.3. and 5.2.4.) suggested that practitioners saw their roles as becoming more integrated, connecting more fully to digital and media skill-sets, along-side their political insight and campaigning awareness.   Although the integrated nature of PA did not come out as fully in the quantitative study where media and digital skills were rated much lower in terms of being essential than other skills (although they were rated the highest in terms of desirability) in Q11 of the survey.   The concept of theory is one that clearly vexes practitioners (explored in 5.4: the aggregate dimension of a body of knowledge which is

almost visible, but lacks realization and depth), and apparent in the responses to Q16 of the survey, with 41% stating they neither agreed nor disagreed or disagreed completely that PA needed a body of knowledge. Nonetheless, PA clearly uses a range of theoretical concepts, most notably being framing, persuasion, narrative, stakeholder mapping, storytelling wrapped up in commercial acumen and political insight. So, although there is a lack of visibility of the knowledge roots of PA practice, the fact that practitioners stated that some of the statements about the potential benefits of theories in the quantitative study at Q17 were helpful to understanding what they did, perhaps point to the fact that these concepts are being integrated into delivery all the time.

As indicated a good majority of practitioners suggested their role had moved beyond lobbying to one of management consultancy (explored in 5.2.4.) involving more complex territory such as reputation management, stakeholder engagement, internal and external advocacy and organisational strategy that appeared to be expanding the PA field. As reinforced by Interview 4: *'this has evolved from the old days of a contact programme and written analysis now must have a sense of commercial impact and ability to cooperate with other stakeholders....and an international perspective'*. This move reinforces the knowledge-based occupation of PA and the need to draw in knowledge and learning from a variety of sources.

The importance of reflecting on PA as a knowledge-based occupation is important as is encouraging the practice to be outward looking. As explored

in the literature, one of the reasons occupations like PA are not as diverse or as open perhaps to aspects of codification is because, as Bourdieu (1984) suggests, professions create their own field or social space with their own values and norms and only certain ideas (and people) are allowed into that field. Ironically of course, qualifications and certifications may reinforce the exclusivity of the field, but in the case of PA, it is perhaps subtle, based on social capital that an individual brings to that field that has more value, perhaps indeed the tacit knowledge that is valued.

It is important that a competency framework for PA does not stick at the boundary of the field – a key issue for knowledge transfer as argued by Ferlie *et al.* (2005). PA practice must want to acquire greater insight into its practice and have the absorptive capacity (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990) to do so. This problem is clearly articulated by the findings in this study, with a significant minority of respondents resistant to having an agreed set of skills, behaviours and knowledge. As Q22 illustrated, when asked would PA practice benefit from a framework that brought together knowledge, skills and behaviours, 27% said it wouldn't. That is why exploring new forms of professionalism, as looked at in 7.3., is a useful way to move forward.

7.6.2. A postmodernist lens to view the field

In many respects, PA like other occupations must respond to postmodern complexity and fuzziness of contemporary society. This is the point raised by Holtzhausen (2000) who argued that PR scholarship generally should take a postmodernist turn in order to understand the realities of practice. It is

interesting that in the qualitative study (explored in 5.2.1.) the theme of environmental complexity emerged more strongly than perhaps revealed in the quantitative study. In response to Q9, when practitioners were asked about the challenges facing the PA industry the bottom four were complexity of policy making (22%); changing skills to do the job (20%); regulation (20%); and demand for greater management and leadership (7%).

Also, against this complexity Noordegraff (2000) suggests professionalism is both increasingly important, but also difficult against a backdrop of fluidity in the sense what are the skills and behaviours necessary for an individual to be a professional when the environment and the organisation is constantly changing. That said, the concept of professionalism is something that the occupation is grappling with (as explored in 5.3.3.), with some of these tensions around the role of tacit and explicit knowledge revealed in the responses to Q10 which asked whether PA needed an agreed skill-set; Q14 whether it needed an agreed set of behaviours; and Q16 whether it needed an agreed body of knowledge, a significant minority felt the practice did not – demonstrating some resistance to the idea of codification.

As outlined in section 7.2., PA is a situational practice in terms of how it is perceived and delivered. As pointed out by Interviewee 11: *'I think you need to make a distinction what kind of PA and what type of organisation'*. Also, it is suggested that PA practitioners come into PA from a variety of pathways. Although how people entered PA was not an explicit question in this study, useful information is revealed through discussions during the qualitative study.

As Interview 4 pointed out: *'in large companies there is more rotation now so you may see a finance person move over into PA because they have management skills, but most still follow a traditional root'*. That traditional root may be appointing people who have started their careers in political journalism, the civil service, specialist knowledge in particular policy areas, political party officials or former politicians at local or national levels. In other words, PA draws on individuals that have some experience of working in and around the UK's democratic structures and governance. Interviewee 10 made the point: *'must say people who haven't worked in politics struggle to do this job'.*

As a result, it is suggested that different PR practitioners may demonstrate various competencies from the domain specific, transversal and meta strands and then start to build and deepen their skills and behaviours as they perform PA, whilst recognizing the need to explore and develop new competency areas. A framework that helps articulate these competencies and the choices available to practitioners is one that is likely to carry more weight. It could potentially fulfil the needs of the majority of practitioners who believe that practice would benefit from an agreed set of skills and behaviours and (possibly) knowledge-base, whilst hopefully drawing in those that might be more skeptical. In other words, a framework that liberates PA and one that is not reductive and closes it down.

Such a framework supports the shift in thinking in careers scholarship. Lo Presti (2009) and Baruch (2004) argue that although careers have traditionally

been defined using metaphors such as construction, fit, journey, a new metaphor is now being used – careers as board-games. As outlined in the literature, individuals must play an active part in their own career and build a story being proactive around the career board. Careers are no longer predictable and linear but often involve spirals with individuals moving around organisations, functions and roles.

Yet the opportunity to have greater clarity around careers is something that emerges during this study. As Interviewee 2 pointed out: *'there is no career route'*, reinforced by Interviewee 19 who suggested that for PA to be professional it needed to have: *'ladders to be climbable'.* To note, in response to Q19 that asked those who had said that PA was a profession to choose criteria for defining a profession, having career pathways and options garnered unanimous support as being very important/important.

7.6.3. New forms of career strategies

A framework that helps PA practitioners to build their personal story connecting to clear competency arenas it is argued would help PA practitioners better understand themselves and the career choices available to them. This would help them take advantage of the emerging career trends as argued by Baruch (2004), of careers being multidirectional, dynamic, flexible and fluid. Careers are now fuzzy and rather than being a process in which individuals go through major transitions over the lifespan of a career (Super, 1980); instead individuals now go through mini-stages (Hall and Mirvis, 1995) as part of continuous development. PA has itself evolved over

the last few years as indicated in the findings and PA practitioners themselves have had to adapt to a changing landscape (explored in 5.2.) and also have had to alter how they do PA depending on the organisation they work for. As argued by Interviewee 13: *'I have had experience of working in several different fields… different roles depending on which industry you work in'*. So, it could be argued that perhaps many PA practitioners too have experienced these mini-stages.

A PA competency framework that helps individuals through these mini-stages has relevance.   Interestingly, Interviewee 11 pointed out in respect of those who run communication departments they: '*often gone up via that route (connections) increasingly a journalist now but often it will be down to connections and not nepotism but kind of connections at a different level I suppose and a broader vision and often by pass the professional qualifications. They spend a long time getting to know life in general*'. He went on to add: '*still a division between craft of PA and how it works in practice and I don't think it is good enough to have the craft and the professional qualifications as they don't provide certainty to career progression…I wonder if PA is enough as a means in itself…can be stepping stone to board level jobs*'.

A competency framework underpinned by an adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) model, it is argued, could be the mechanism to help PA practitioners navigate these career pathways by enabling them to better understand and express their own capabilities and strengths. This supports

the notion of personal agency, with PA practitioners taking more control over their careers and encouraging, as Hall (2002) puts forward protean career attitudes.   This is underlined by flexibility and autonomy, but also by encouraging individuals to think about an enlarged career space and expansion of identity.   This plays to the idea of PA showing both cohesion and diversity in terms of professional identity (see section 7.2. on PA being a stratified practice and 7.3. in terms of professionalisation).

7.6.4. Making a virtue of cohesion and diversity

What is important here is the concept of cohesion and diversity that has been well explored in the entrepreneurship and network literature. Martinez and Aldrich (2011), whose work was touched on briefly in the literature, argue that cohesion through strong professional ties and identity is important at the start of careers in particular to access resources and advice, yet diversity and weak ties are important later.   Too much cohesion promotes homogeneity but the downside of this is it narrows an individual's horizons.   Yet too much diversity can hinder identification so that the network becomes meaningless.   Yet cohesion and diversity should not be seen as antagonistic.   It is suggested that perhaps PA can embrace cohesion and diversity by expanding PA's professional identity and a competency framework could be a mechanism to help practice do this in terms of identity growth.

The literature points to the idea of two career meta-competencies (Hall and Mirvis, 1995) - those that are necessary to help individuals cope with the challenges of the postmodern environment (as considered in 7.5. of this

chapter).   These are identity growth and increased adaptability.   A PA competency framework would contribute to the first, helping PA practitioners to view themselves holistically, improve understanding of the types of skills, behaviours and knowledge necessary for practice, and encourage professional identification whilst stimulating the possibilities for expansion and welcoming identity variation.   It also helps with the second by encouraging and valuing flexibility and diversity in PA practice by placing importance on developing the meta and values-based competencies.   As Interviewee 25 pointed out: *'The thing about PA is that is has always been amazingly open – you don't have to have lots of qualifications.   Have seen people employed from a variety (of backgrounds) – wouldn't want to put up hurdles to people'*.

In many respects, a more fluid definition of what constitutes a profession and a more integrated concept of competencies sits well with a critical realist stance.   This paradigm has been the one that has shaped this study.   A critical realist views the world more in line with tendencies recognising the underlining complexity and contradictions that make generalisations and predictions difficult.   As such a PA competency framework is about capturing the complexity and contradictions of practice focusing on competency tendencies recognising that some practitioners may have greater strengths, interests and skills in some areas than others and may have individual preferences in terms of how they operate and indeed how they entered the practice.   An adaption of the Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) typography (as suggested in section 7.5.) has the potential to underpin a framework that can articulate the breadth and depth of the practice.

When looking at the competency frameworks in Chapter Four, this approach reflects the spirit developed by ICE which viewed its professional competency framework more as a tool for continuous professional development and reflection rather than something that is static. Additionally, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society recognised diverse entries into the practice and provides case studies and examples to add granularity to generic terms. ACCA addressed the issue of the way accountancy practice differed between sectors. The Government Communications Network addressed areas around different types of roles within the PR field.

7.7. Conclusion

It is argued that PA needs and can embrace competencies. This is not to build its jurisdiction although this may well be one of the side effects or results of this action, but as a way of ensuring it remains an agile, relevant and individually rewarding occupation that reflects a strong professional identity but one that embraces variety. Creating an agile and values-based profession for the twenty-first century – one that is responsive and adaptable whilst remaining at its core the discipline that builds relationships with those that take governance decisions – is the opportunity. A multi-dimensional competency framework for a multi-dimensional career is possible and a suggested model of this is outlined in the conclusion.

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Chapter Eight – Conclusion and Areas of Contribution

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8.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter now focuses on the four inter-connected areas of contribution to PA knowledge that is suggested in this study. A representation of these areas is outlined in section 8.2: a suggested model of contemporary UK PA practice; a knowledge architecture for the field; a competency typology that underpins practice; and a practical competency framework that could result from this. These contributions are then explored against existing scholarship when each research question is discussed as these contributions explicitly link to the research questions asked. The chapter then looks at implications of the findings on the theory and practice of PA before looking at what a critical realist perspective may mean in terms of PA research and practice. Finally, it makes recommendations for future research.

8.2. Areas of Contribution
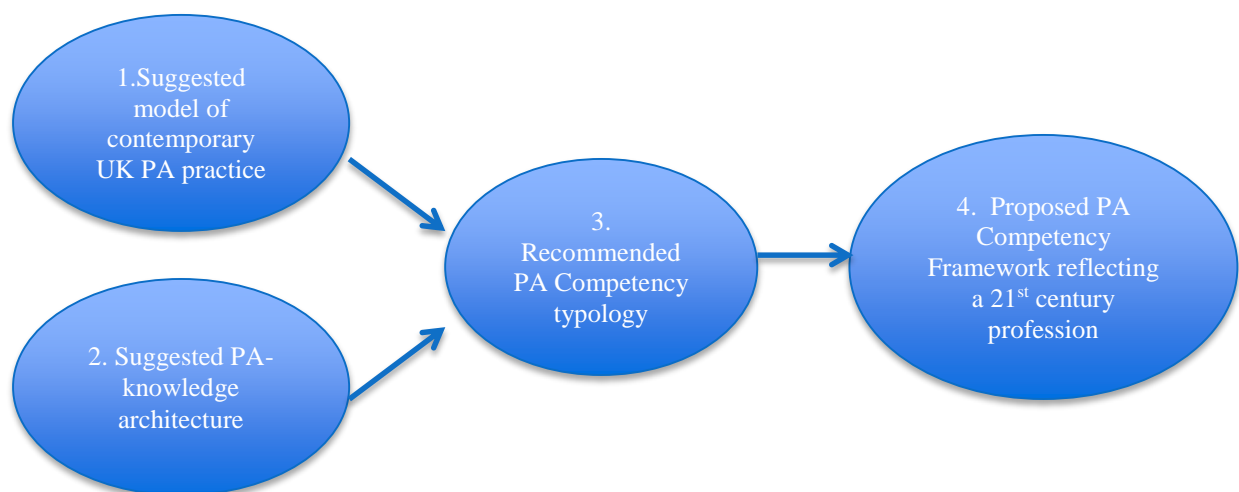
Figure 8.1 Representation of areas of contribution ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

Regarding the creation of a contemporary model of PA practice, the themes in the discussion have shaped a refreshed way of capturing the breadth of activity by looking at aspects of professional identity, multiple-identities and cultural hybridity. It draws out aspects of cohesion and diversity and the situational nature of the practice. This has formed the basis of a contemporary model of PA that is addressed in the discussion relating to RQ1. By understanding PA better, this has contributed to reflecting on the knowledge necessary for practice and how practitioners view the concept of knowledge. This has enabled the creation of a proposed architecture that gives structure and meaning to the literature and that reflects practitioner understanding. This architecture is discussed against existing scholarship in RQ2.

Together this has enabled the creation of a typology of PA competencies that moves away from the generation of lists to allow the establishment of a conceptual underpinning to the practice that is informed by HRM scholarship and also integrates the concept of knowledge. This typology is based on an adaption of the Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) model that was given prominence in the discussion chapter. This typology is outlined in RQ2 when the concept of knowledge is added to it and is further developed during the discussions in RQ3 and RQ4 when skills and behaviours are incorporated. These theoretical contributions have then gone on to inform a proposed practical PA Competency Framework that factors in the professionalisation strains of a maturing practice, whilst allowing the agility necessary for a twenty-first century profession.   It also situates the practice firmly in

postmodern forms of professionalism.   This practical framework forms the basis of discussions for RQ5. A practical illustration is outlined at Appendix F.

8.3. What is the shape of current PA practice and how if at all it has changed? (RQ1)

This study has shown that for individuals involved in the daily activities of PA there is a broad agreement about its purpose – to build relationships with and influence those who take decisions that impact on the organisation for which they work. What engenders debate is how this is done with a growing recognition that the discipline is becoming more stratified incorporating a range of activities including media relations and digital communications – in other words it shows knowledge, discourse and promotional traits. In many respects this is a response to the increasingly complex public policy environment. These concepts were explored at 5.2.3. and 5.2.4. as part of the discussions that shaped the aggregate dimension of a changing landscape and at 5.3.2. that drew attention explicitly to how sector impacts PA delivery.

Some aspects of PA are seen as narrow falling into a traditional view of lobbying with direct contact to a targeted set of decision makers. Whilst for many others, PA has a broad focus that integrates a range of different communication tools and targets a greater mix of stakeholders. A large part of PA is determining the best approach to use given the issue, sector and decision location. This supports the view that lobbying is a distinct activity in line with Milbraith (1963), yet it sits within a broader function of PA. As such the findings of this study support the view of Windsor (2005) that PA is not a

unified discipline and that it is highly situational as Bauer (2015) argues. Despite this, practitioners reveal there is a growing agreement on the skills and behaviours that are important for PA practice, though there appears to be a significant minority who do not believe that such an agreement is necessary. This split was evident in response to Q10 and Q13 of the survey that showed 24% and 21% respectively neither agreeing or disagreeing and disagreeing entirely that PA needed agreed skills and behaviours. So, on one level, there is a sense that the practice of PA is experiencing a maturing of its professional identity in line with identity scholars such as Ibarra (1999), yet at the same time there is some identity ambiguity and evidence of multiple identities, as explored by Abbott, Zheng and Du (2013).

There is also a suggestion that within this broadening of PA there is a shift towards PA falling more into a management consultancy orientation involved in tackling existential threats and managing risk. The landscape in which PA operates has become increasingly complex, with a greater variety of stakeholders involved in taking and implementing public policy decisions. As such reputation and a wider set of relationships are becoming important to PA practice. It is argued, therefore, that PA is firmly part of the PR field using a variety of applied communication skills. These thoughts link to discussions at 5.2. around a changing PA landscape and at 5.4.2. specifically looking applied communication skills. Though, as Moloney (2000) has noted, some lobbyists reject the function's inclusion as part of PR, it is clear that skills are becoming more integrated, aligned and more strategic in nature. This supports the trend

in PR generally as it moves to becoming more of a strategic management function (Gregory, 2011; Zerfass *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, the democratisation of information has meant that much of the supposedly privileged information on which much of PA rests is now in the public domain. Although it can be argued that much information has always been available such as copies of Hansard (the transcripts of what has taken place in Parliament), digital platforms have made this information more accessible and easy to source. Even policy discussions and consultations are readily available from the political parties. As a result, PA is about providing additional insight into political trends, how different policy decisions may evolve, scenario planning and how different players may react to different scenarios. This relates to discussions at 5.4.1. that explores the importance of public policy insight and intuition and 5.5.1. that looks at the role of emotional intelligence and social awareness. This is where the social capital of PA practitioners becomes important (Hazleton and Kennon, 2000). It is not so much about using social capital to gain access to decision makers which is perhaps an old-fashioned view of PA and in the age of transparency, one that can backfire, but rather it is about using social capital to provide context and a greater feel for the ebbs and flows of the political landscape and what insiders may be thinking and feeling at any given time.

Although there are signs of PA maturity, there are professionalisation strains as outlined at 5.3.3. and which emerged clearly in the quantitative study that revealed in Q10, Q13 and Q16 that asked specifically whether PA needed an

agreed set of skills, behaviours and knowledge when a significant minority suggested it did not. That said, there appears to be an appetite to want to be seen as professional in line with other professions but there is perhaps lack of clarity of what this actually means in terms of the role of professional bodies, qualifications and codification. Although the majority of practitioners appear to be comfortable with trying to get clarity on these areas and welcome the move to capture what being a professional practice means, there is a significant number who are resistant. This does not mean that these people are resistant to being professional, but they have concerns about whether PA itself is a profession and all the associated components of what this means. This poses challenges for devising a competency framework that is meaningful for the majority of practitioners.

In many respects, PA is battling with what many professions are struggling with in terms of what a profession means in the twenty-first century and the impact that technology and environmental complexity is having on professional boundaries, resilience and career planning and aspirations. That is why new forms of professionalism as reflected on by Kipping, Fitzpatrick and Muzio (2006) with much looser structures and boundaries is relevant, as is the concept of network professionalism (Furbey, Reid and Cole, 2001) and building a sense of PA community. It is argued that traditional forms of professionalism are not suitable for occupations in the knowledge economy.

The model outlined in Figure 8.2 overleaf tries to capture the scope of modern day PA practice. Findings suggest that PA practice continues to evolve and

now encompasses a broad array of activities. It therefore continues in the tradition of existing scholarship Harrison (2000), Schlichting (2014), Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) in terms of trying to capture the breadth of the field including reflecting its discourse and promotional elements. It aims to refresh these ideas to show the scope and diversity of UK PA practice emerging from this study and the increasing orientation and movement towards a strategic management function rather than being seen as performing a purely technical, albeit specialist, communication role.

Reputation, Risk, Change

Level of Noise

Non Public (Quiet)

Public (Loud)

Target

Narrow (eg decision maker)

Broad (eg citizen, consumers, NGOs, media

Motivation

Operational Single issue Low level of interest

Social legitimacy Reputational Sales Agenda setting High level of interest

Tactics

Face to face (direct lobbying)

Stakeholder activation (media, digital, grassroots)

Structural Influences
-social norms; cultural acceptability; sector reputation; democratic system; market conditions; global comparisons; organisational culture

Roles

PA Technician

Strategic Communication

Figure 8.2. Twenty-first century PA practice ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

The type of PA is shaped at the base of the model by a number of structural influences. These are social norms, type democratic system, type of organisation and its culture, type of issue being addressed, market conditions, sector reputation all of which determine the feasibility and acceptability of different PA approaches. The situational nature is evident in the interviews explored in 5.3.2. This then triggers four inter-connected choices of how to deliver PA. What is the motivation for any PA activity? It may be a single issue only relevant to the organisation that perhaps relates to its operations. This will inevitably garner lower levels of wider public interest. It could be an issue that may bring reputational benefit to the organisation, perhaps affects the sector as a whole, or may require public support before any action be taken. This will tend to have higher levels of broad interest.

Depending on the motivation this will affect the choice of target audience and where decisions are located. This could be narrow, only requiring a handful of individuals to be persuaded. Or if wider social legitimacy is required, then a broader set of audiences need to be made aware and galvanized. This then shapes PA tactics. Ultimately these choices may determine whether any PA activity remains quiet or non-public though this does not mean it lacks transparency, or loud involving wide public dissemination and interest. This follows the tradition of Dahan (2009) and the concept of the Four P's of PA in terms of understanding the problem, policies and procedures and the players. These choices then influence the type of PA role undertaken. Some practitioners may focus on being a PA or Regulatory Technician addressing specific detail in a narrow field only engaging with those doing the same from

a policy perspective. Others may be involved in wider lobbying activity on aspects of legislation to bring about or prevent change and build specific relationships with those necessary at any given time. Some PA practitioners are also involved in wider reputation and relationship engagement strategies, helping to create environments that will allow lobbying to be more effective. Whilst others are involved looking holistically and the complexity of the environment of which the political landscape is one and how organisational reputation is best managed. It also tries to show movement in that there seems to be a shift towards a greater focus on strategic communication management when managing change and organisational risk are a core component of the role.

Consequently, this study contributes to scholarship that looks at the role and function of PA by creating a model or representation of UK PA practice.   This model reinforces the view of Windsor (2005) that PA is not unified and this may be becoming more pronounced. Findings, however, suggest that this does not mean the field lacks professional identity. There is evidence of a broad agreement on the skills, behaviours and attributes for effective PA. By synthesising scholarship from organisational studies around multiple identities and cultural hybridity it helps to shed light on the variety of PA practice that allows for cohesion and diversity. It is argued this is to be welcomed as identity stretch may be a necessity in twenty-first century careers. This builds on the recent work of Fleisher (2012) in terms of the challenges facing PA practice and how the role will evolve to become one of mobilising alliances and building networks, incorporating media and digital skills more firmly and

stimulating dialogue and conversations. PA skills are situational dependent on the motivations behind PA activity and the issue, sector and market in which it is conducted. It is the situational nature of PA that it is suggested contributes to confusion in terminology between lobbying and PA.   Findings also reveal that practitioners use both terms loosely to relate to all forms of engagement with political audiences.   As skills expand, there appears to be a distinct management consultancy orientation at more senior levels with PA addressing areas around risk, change and wider reputational issues stretching its remit into a broader strategic setting.

8.4. Identifying the knowledge that underpins practice (RQ2)

Toth (2006) suggests PA theorising in terms of identifying the knowledge roots of the practice is minimal - though she adds that there is a large body of PR literature that is available to support its work. This is debated by Davidson (2015). He argues that within PR scholarship there is insufficient discussion to establish a mature body of theory and knowledge around PA. Indeed, the literature revealed a substantial amount of knowledge areas and debate (Boddewyn, 2012; Fleisher, 2007; Getz, 2001; Oberman, 2008; Toth, 2006; Windsor, 2005) all of whom point to PA having roots in political science, culture and society, communication, organisational studies and economics and much of the detail of this has been elaborated upon.   So, existing scholarship argues that there is a large and complex range of theoretical concepts that could have value to the field.

Additionally, there have been a number of practical studies of PR competencies generally through the work of Gregory (2008) and others. These have revealed confusion and inter-changeability when scholars and practitioners use the terms knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes to define what PR practitioners do and the type of knowledge that supports the field. These also reveal the tendency to produce lists of supposed attributes that lack granularity. PA specific studies through the work of Fleisher (2007), VMA (2012) and Watson-Helsby (2012) also mirror these issues. There is also a considerable cross over of the type of competencies identified between PA and PR.

The findings from this study reinforce the issue of terminological confusion when using the words skills, behaviours and knowledge. However, it did not reveal anything specifically new in terms of knowledge areas, apart from a broadening perhaps of the communication knowledge roots to include theoretical aspects of media and social media thinking. These ideas were explored in 5.4. in relation to the body of knowledge and in responses to Q17 in the survey that asked people to rank statements drawn from knowledge roots that they found helpful in understanding PA. These were in line with previously identified knowledge roots. Instead, findings suggest that the real issue with scholarship is that the literature that is available is disorganized in the sense that it draws from a variety of traditions and incorporate a range of concepts ranging from the theoretical to the practical. This means that it lacks clarity, as pointed out by Meznar (2001). In addition, it appears disconnected to the lived experiences of practitioners. The idea of a body of knowledge

garnered slightly mixed views from practitioners, as suggested at Q16 of the survey whereby 41% of practitioners stating that they neither agreed or disagreed and disagreed completely that PA needed a body of knowledge. It is suggested that in part this is due to a gulf between the language of academia and what scholars suggest might contribute to an improved understanding of what PA practitioners do and the reality of practitioners daily practice. It perhaps too reflects a fear of codification. Findings suggest that this is not a barrier if one can use the language of PA and make theoretical concepts more meaningful. Practitioners recognise the value of knowledge especially from areas that can be readily applied such as stakeholder management, theories of relationships, persuasion techniques and framing for example.

It is argued what is new about this study is that it explicitly synthesises scholarship from the field of PA with scholars whose expertise is in deconstructing and reconstructing of knowledge and links this to PA practitioner views on knowledge. By linking the two fields of scholarship, greater clarity to what constitutes a body of knowledge for PA practice is revealed. It recommends a pyramid approach to identifying the theory and knowledge of PA by using the work of Bogo *et al.* (2013) to establish three levels of PA knowledge: practice, interventionist and explanatory. This creates a basis for meta theorising the knowledge that supports PA. Meta theorising includes many different viewpoints as outlined in the literature, but at its core it involves sorting theories and their components into categories, as argued by Wallace (1992). This allows for the development of overarching

combinations of theory and the development and application of theorems for subsequent analysis, as put forward by Wallis (2010).

This study argues it is optimistic to identify a grand unification theory for PA in line with Schuler (2002) and if so this would primarily be at the conceptual level, but a pluralistic and eclectic knowledge base is possible in line with the thinking of Hillman (2002). This captures explanatory theories or transcendental knowledge, as well as the practical wisdom acquired on the job. It seems apparent that all explanatory and interventionist levels of knowledge support most communication functions including PA and where PA draws its distinction is in its daily practice where there are some specific and distinct areas of difference and where certain theories and knowledge may have more emphasis. This was explored in 5.3. that looked at knowledge areas and as succinctly put by Interviewee 24 PA knowledge is based on *'communication skills obviously'*.

At the pyramid's base is the explanatory or transcendental knowledge. Here concepts such as systems theory, resource dependency and theories of the market from the organisational tradition reside. This is supported by concepts from the cultural and societal traditions – structuration, public sphere, social constructivism. These provide the conceptual and intellectual basis on which PA is predicated. It provides context and a deeper reflective understanding of the field but it is not essential to the delivery of everyday practice and may appear remote to the lived experiences of PA practitioners.

Then there is Interventionist theory and knowledge. From the communication tradition, these include two-way symmetrical communication; one-way asymmetrical communication (persuasion); framing and storytelling; discourse analysis; stakeholder and relationship management; issues management; research, planning and evaluation. Practitioners could readily understand how knowledge of these areas does (often without recognising they are using such knowledge) support how they approach solving PA problems and challenges. It was the statements from this tradition that ranked highest in Q17.

From the organisational tradition, these include ideas around corporate responsibility and ethics, perhaps reflected in the importance of transparency, codes of conduct and demonstrating arguments that have wider societal benefit rather than appearing self-interested. This lends itself to ideas around communitarianism. Often these concepts are being implemented by practitioners without them recognising they are using them or, if they are using them, without recognising there are theories that could help them do it better. With increased education in these areas then the delivery of everyday practice could be improved and new practitioners nurtured. This supports the view of McGrath (2015) that more of what PA does can be taught and Cowen, David and Foray (2000) that too much that is considered tacit knowledge is in fact explicit.

Finally, what is actually visible is PA practice principles or practice wisdom as part of the daily knowledge that is being used all the time. This relates to understanding public policy processes and structures and the political

systems and traditions in which lobbying takes place. It also recognises the importance of the situational nature of PA, not least in terms of how the media and digital activity may impact on PA activity. This will vary between how the sector and organisation itself is viewed by policy makers and the public, as well as the issue under scrutiny and the motivation behind lobbying activity. So, wider societal awareness is important. It also involves how individual practitioners build and use social capital and the relationships and networks they have. If more and more policy formation material is in the public domain then, as previously argued, it is the insight and perspectives that PA practitioners bring that become important and this it is suggested is acquired through social capital. Finally, the ability to relate public policy impacts to business and organisational objectives and to have some degree of commercial acumen is important on the ground, though there does appear to be somewhat mixed views on this. These are the fundamental and practical knowledge that is fully recognized and are essential to practice.
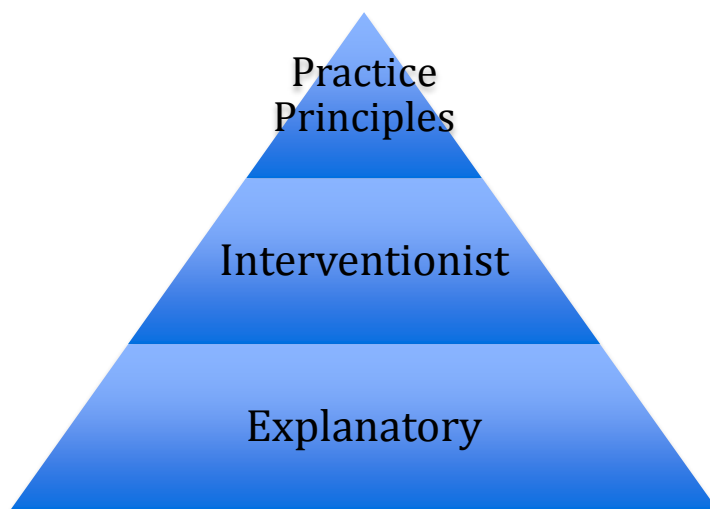
Figure 8.3. Public Affairs Body of Knowledge Pyramid: Tri-partite knowledge architecture ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

By looking at knowledge in this way the issue raised by Fleisher (2007) can be addressed. His concern was that any BoK must reflect the specific PA knowledge and to identify what is core. By providing an architecture, greater clarity in understanding the transversal knowledge that runs across all communication disciplines and the domain specific can be managed. Also, it is suggested these three levels of knowledge operate across the adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Competency typology (2005) that enables a more insightful understanding. This typology provides the intellectual basis that underpins a suggested practical and integrated PA Competency Framework. An example of how aspects of knowledge can be added is illustrated overleaf.

META COMPETENCIES – transversal competencies for 21ˢᵗ century employability

META THEORY OF PA - three levels of knowledge
+ transcendental/explanatory *eg social constructivism*
+ interventionist and practice principles *eg embedded in competencies below*

PR transversal and PA domain competence and competency	**Occupational**	**Personal**
Conceptual	Cognitive competence -Explicit and tacit knowledge	Values competence -Behaviours
	Knowledge Example: issues *management through the public and political lifecycle (explicit); experience of what has worked before (tacit)*	*Knowledge Example: responsible lobbying*
Operational	Functional competence -Tools and techniques	Social competence -Emotional intelligence
	Knowledge Example: framing arguments through effective writing for political audiences; understanding political and legislative process and systems	*Knowledge Example: social capital*

Table 8.1. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Competency Typology (2005:39): A PA adaptation: illustrating a knowledge architecture ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

It is the interventionist and practice principles that operate inside the adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton typology, with the transcendental providing the explanatory context that underpins the practice and that sits around the typology. Also, it is suggested that explanatory and interventionist knowledge are transversal, sitting across all PR and communication disciplines. It is only when they are applied do they become domain specific.   It is practice principles that sit solely in the PA domain.   At the same time, in line with the

thinking of McGrath (2015) these are explicit forms of knowledge that can be taught, and even the tacit knowledge can be referenced in the sense that social capital is necessary and techniques of how to build it outlined, as is the need for a constant monitoring and intelligence gathering of the public policy environment.

The study, therefore, contributes to the scholarship that explores a PA body of knowledge. It integrates the concept of knowledge into a competency typology that recognizes tacit and explicit knowledge, as well as how knowledge supports specific competence (skills) and competencies (behaviours) and how this operates at both a meta and practical level. This provides a conceptual lens to better understand what knowledge means to PA practice. It suggests a specific structure or architecture around which a body of knowledge can be built and given visibility. By doing so it is suggested knowledge conversion can be stimulated. Findings do not reveal any new knowledge areas but they do suggest that there is a curiosity expressed by practitioners to understand more about the knowledge that supports what they do. This architecture provides a useful practitioner-friendly way of understanding that knowledge. Taken together, this contribution focuses on establishing a meta-theory of knowledge PA that can be subsequently tested and explored with practice.

8.5. Exploring what PA practitioners do and the skills (or competence) necessary (RQ3)

Existing scholarship has put forward a range of ideas for the competencies necessary for PA practitioners. Fleisher (2007) points to a range of inter-cultural competencies that blend skills, behaviours and knowledge covering areas such as knowledge of public policy, media channels and language skills, whilst McGrath (2006) talks of listening, observing and relationship building, courtesy, honesty, integrity and credibility. These competencies fall either into behaviours or relate to environmental norms that shape how PA is practiced.   More recent practical studies have focused on functional skills, such as campaigning, issues management and social media, whilst also suggesting specific behaviours around problem solving and networking.

Often the skills and behaviours referenced relate as much to other communication disciplines as they do to PA when these are cross referenced to general PR competency studies, as explored in the literature.   These studies also continue the trend of terminological confusion and inter-changeability and tend to create lists of attributes that ultimately become far too generic to be meaningful.

What is missing and as outlined in the literature is that PA competency discussions lack a firm connection to HRM scholarship that may help bring clarity, understanding and enable conceptual and practical insight to the field. Ideas from competency scholars such as Cheetham and Chivers (1998) or

more recently Soderquist *et al. (2010)* appear to have been ignored. It also often fails to address issues around latest competency thinking, such as strengths-based assessment (Garcea, Harrison and Linley, 2014) and the move to understand ideas around meta competencies and wider twenty-first employability and career planning (Finegold and Notabartolo, 2010).

Practitioners are clear about what they do (as explored in 5.3.) and in many respects this has not changed, but the tools and techniques available to them have expanded and have become more integrated. This supports the views of Fleisher (2012) who points to greater alignment. Based on the findings and reflecting on the discussion chapter, it is suggested that the skills of a PA practitioner need to be clustered under PR transversal competencies that are directly aligned to the concept of meta-competencies (relating to skills) identified for twenty-first century employability, as put forward by the OECD and adapted by Finegold and Notabartolo (2010). This also takes the importance of meta-competencies as suggested by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005) and makes them integral to the process.

At the same time, specific examples need to be provided to make skills detailed and applied to PA in line with the thinking of Campion *et al.* (2011). It needs to be stressed that these are skill tendencies and different PA practitioners may have a particular preference for some rather than others, and different PA roles may have a different emphasis on particular skills more than others based on the issue, sector and location of where PA needs to take place. These can still, however, be placed within the various twenty-first

century competencies. In this sense, competencies need to be viewed as a funnel that starts broad and becomes narrower as it becomes more aligned to the practice.

The three skills-based meta-competency areas that emerge from of the Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) work are: Analytical, Ability to Execute and Information Processing. Each of these will be looked at now and related to what this means for PR/PA generally and then what this looks like for the specific domain of PA. Analytic skills cover critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, research and enquiry. From a PR/PA transversal perspective this relates to the ability to synthesise complex information and come up with cogent arguments and briefings; ability to communicate complex information in writing and verbally, research, plan and evaluate communication strategies. For PA, this is illustrated by the ability to write well and convey persuasive arguments to political audiences. These skills were consistently rated highly as outlined in 5.5. when looking at competencies and in responses to Q11 of the survey.

The ability to execute looks at initiative and self-direction and productivity. From a PR/PA transversal perspective this relates implementing communication strategies using the right mix of tools and tactics. Understanding stakeholders, relationship building, monitoring issues and building coalitions to demonstrate weight of voice are also relevant. From a PA domain, this is about understanding the legislative and public policy landscape, monitoring political trends and wider media literacy. It also

involves intelligence gathering through contacts and connecting this intelligence to the commercial and strategic priorities of the organisation. Again, these ideas were evidenced during exploring the widening of skills at 5.2.3. and in 5.3.1. that flagged the importance of political expertise. It is also revealed in a range of responses to the survey, in particular in response to Q11 of the survey with 92% suggesting listening and processing complex information as essential.

Information Processing addresses areas around information literacy, media literacy, digital citizenship, ICT operations and concepts. From a PR/PA transversal perspective this could relate to areas around understanding how the media operates and it role in shaping and reflecting public and political opinion, as well too as the role digital communication plays in monitoring and understanding issues, as well as a campaigning and communication tool. The ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources, research and interpret date is an important aspect of the role. From a PA specific perspective, this is about interpreting the trends and ebbs and flows of the policy landscape using social capital to bring the additional insight and connecting this to the business and commercial imperatives of the organisation. This links again to similar discussions and evidences emerging from the data sections identified above.

These skills (or competence) primarily sit within the occupational and operational domain of the adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton

Competency typology. An example of how these can be overlain is outlined

below incorporating the three levels of knowledge as illustrated earlier.

**META COMPETENCIES – transversal competencies for 21st century employability
(skills: analytical; ability to execute; information processing)**

META THEORY OF PA - three levels of knowledge
+ **transcendental/explanatory** *eg social constructivism*
+ **interventionist and practice principles** *eg embedded in competencies below*

PR transversal and PA domain competence and competency	**Occupational**	**Personal**
Conceptual	Cognitive competence -Explicit and tacit knowledge	Values competence -Behaviours
	Knowledge example: issues management through the public and political lifecycle (explicit); experience of what has worked before (tacit)	*Knowledge example: responsible lobbying*
Operational	Functional competence -Tools and techniques	Social competence -Emotional intelligence
	Knowledge example: framing arguments through effective writing for political audiences; understanding of political and legislative process and systems	*Knowledge example: social capital*
	Skills example: Analytical (ability to synthesise complex information); Ability to Executive (research, planning implementing and evaluating PA campaigns); Information Processing (using media and digital insight to inform decision making)	

Table 8.2 Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Competency Typology (2005:39): A PA adaptation: illustrating a knowledge architecture and meta-competencies (skills) ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

At the same time, when these are brought together in a competency

framework (as discussed in RQ5 and illustrated in Appendix F.) these skills

can be given more granularity by reflecting role levels, for example: technician (junior/executive); manager; and director in line with the thinking of the Government Communications Competency Framework and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. Each meta-competency can be tracked through PR/PA transversal and PA specific into an example of what that competency looks like at different levels through case studies and practical executions. As such, these meta-competencies can be constantly refreshed and updated with contemporary examples to maintain their currency and relevancy and prevent such a framework from become static and backward looking. This addresses a number of the criticisms of competencies (Iles, 2001; Shippmann *et al.*, 2000).

By synthesising primary and secondary data, this study supports the view of McGrath (2015) who points to PA being part of PR. Findings clearly point to PA using a full range of applied communication skills. These are transversal skills. What is important is ensuring these transversal skills are recognized and made domain specific to demonstrate best practice but also to show how these are transferrable should practitioners wish to move into different communication areas. This helps practitioners improve self-awareness and individual strengths. Additionally, there are some PA domain specific skills that are fundamental such as being able to navigate the public policy landscape and build social capital. By understanding transversal and domain specific competencies these can be cross-referenced to higher-level meta-competencies and the PA role can show how it is underpinned with the type of

competencies that are necessary for twenty-first century careers and opens up career choices.

It also places skills within a competency typology that provides the conceptual lens through which an understanding of PA competencies can be better understood in terms of their complexity and inter-connectedness and moves away from the generation of list like generalisations. Both these related contributions have been achieved by integrating the depth of HRM scholarship more fully into the field of PA. Lack of this synthesis was a key theme emerging from the literature.

8.6. Understanding the behaviours necessary for PA practice (RQ4)

Existing scholarship in respect of PA behaviours emerge from the same literature as those looking at skills and there remains the same issue of lack of clarity between what constitutes a skill, behaviour and knowledge. Also, there is a tendency for list-like attributes that cross over with PR and lack depth. Consequently, as with skills it is suggested that competency (bahaviours) necessary for PA practice needs to be situated within the twenty-first century meta-competencies suggested by the OECD and the Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) adaptation. Again, in gives importance to the concept of meta-competencies that underpin all other competencies as argued by Delamare Le Deist and Winterton (2005). In terms of behaviours these fall into the areas of Capacity for Change (looking at creativity, innovation, adaptive learning and flexibility) and Interpersonal skills (that address communication, collaboration, leadership and responsibility). This then enables the situating

of the PR/PA transversal behaviours that are appropriate. Then PA domain specific behaviours can be flagged that have particular resonance and importance. Specific examples then need to be added to provide granularity and context in line with Campion *et al.* (2011) as previously suggested.

Interpersonal skills address areas around communication, collaboration, leadership and responsibility. From a PR/PA transversal perspective this links to ideas around effective writing, communication skills generally that involve listening, being a team player and reliability, networking and campaigning. Responsibility too links to ideas around honesty and integrity without which forming trusting relationships are difficult. Leadership points to ideas around understanding how PR and PA contribute to overall organisational strategy and ensuring commercial goals are supported. This then directly links to the importance of PA being underpinned by responsible approaches to lobbying, encouraging inclusivity of lobbying approaches if possible and engendering trust. Although perhaps this is less clearly evidenced, the concept of inclusivity in lobbying approaches did emerge as discussed in 5.2.1. and the importance of PA being evidence-based, but also elsewhere when ethics and values were discussed and some of the causes for professionalism strains at 5.3.3. In the survey, however, all practitioners rated accountability as critical in Q19 and the importance of trustworthiness and ethical approaches topped behaviours rating in Q14. By focusing on values, such a competency typology can encourage a virtue ethics approach into practice.

The Capacity for Change meta-competency includes creativity and innovation; adaptive learning or learning to learn and flexibility.   From a PR/PA transversal perspective it is suggested these relate to being open minded and responsive to changes in the environment in which communication takes place – the rise of social media and digital platforms for example – and being able to incorporate these channels into communication strategies.   Other examples might be the ability to constantly use research and insight to create agile communication plans that can be responsive and adaptable.   It also suggests that as PR/PA are at the interface of multiple organisational functions, PR/PA practitioners need to be open minded as to the shape their roles may take. From a PA specific perspective, how to respond to changes in the PA environment is critical in particular changes in how different communication channels are being used by policy makers and being more mindful to the impact traditional media and digital communications is having on the practice of PA. Interestingly, much of PA itself is about trying to bring about or to prevent change so the concept of change itself is an important one to PA practice.   It is this meta-competency too that is important for the practice to keep itself forward thinking and to enable it to constantly refresh itself and its practices to maintain its relevancy.

These behaviours (or competency) as with skills can sit across all of the adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton typology and these are overlain in the diagram overleaf.

META COMPETENCIES – transversal competencies for 21ˢᵗ century employability
Skills: analytical; ability to execute; information processing
Behaviours: interpersonal and capacity for change

META THEORY OF PA - three levels of knowledge
+ transcendental/explanatory *eg social constructivism*
+ interventionist and practice principles *eg embedded in competencies below*

PR transversal and PA domain competence and competency	**Occupational**	**Personal**
Conceptual	Cognitive competence -Explicit and tacit knowledge	Values competence -Behaviours
	Knowledge example: issues management through the public and political lifecycle (explicit); experience of what has worked before (tacit)	*Knowledge example: responsible lobbying*
	Behaviour example: Interpersonal (ethical advocacy)	*Behaviour example: Interpersonal (honesty, integrity, trustworthy)*
Operational	Functional competence -Tools and techniques	Social competence -Emotional intelligence
	Knowledge example: framing arguments through effective writing for political audiences; understanding of political and legislative process and systems	*Knowledge example: social capital*
	Skills example: Analytical (ability to synthesize complex information); Ability to Executive (research, planning implementing and evaluating PA campaigns); Information Processing (using media and digital insight to inform decision making)	*Behaviour example: Interpersonal (show empathy and build trust)*
	Behaviour example: Interpersonal (co-creational approaches to policy formation; Capacity for Change (update PA toolkit and adopt new communication approaches)	

Table 8.3. Delamare Le Deist and Winterton Competency Typology (2005:39): A PA adaptation: illustrating a knowledge architecture and meta-competencies (skills and behaviours) ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

To conclude RQ4, the findings contribute to existing knowledge of PA behaviours (competencies) in two ways. It links behaviours to higher-level meta-competencies around inter-personal skills and capacity for change the key concerns associated with using competencies can be avoided. It also again allows the integration of transversal and domain specific behaviours to be identified. As with knowledge and skills, it places behaviours within a competency typology that provides the conceptual lens through which an understanding of PA competencies can be better understood and moves away from the generation of list like generalisations. As stated earlier, both these related contributions have been achieved by integrating the depth of HRM scholarship more fully into the field of PA. Lack of this synthesis was a key theme emerging from the literature review.

8.7. A competency framework for PA (RQ5)

The literature explored a number of theoretical and practical examples of PA competencies. Yet it is argued none of these take competencies and put them into a competency framework in such a way that provides a professional development tool that can be used by practitioners and the professional body. A framework as suggested by Whiddett and Hollyforde (2003) is a complete collection of clusters, competencies and behaviour indicators. It moves beyond the generation of lists as fully explored in Chapter Four and must contain detail with supporting examples. It is argued existing competency work in the field of PA has been the generation of lists Fleisher, 2007; McGrath (2006); VMA (2012) and Watson-Helsby (2012) which although helpful are perhaps lacking in conceptual depth. Lists are not practical

working frameworks that help elucidate the nature of a particular practice area.

The contribution this study makes is to create a conceptual basis on which to build a detailed PA competency framework in the form of the adapted Delamare Le Deist and Winterton typology that illustrates knowledge and meta-competencies (skills and behaviours) as outlined in Figure 8.6. It then takes this and transforms it into the language of practice, integrating knowledge, skills and behaviours into a suggested PA competency framework that can be used as a personal development tool that is meaningful and usable for PA practitioners. The proposed framework can be found at Appendix F and the discussion here focuses on the purpose and overall design of the framework and how it has been conceived.

The proposed framework aims to capture the breadth and depth of PA practice and the knowledge, skills and behaviours that underpin it. The policy landscape is becoming increasingly complex and this framework aims to throw light on the value and importance of PA to the organisation. It also showcases the attributes that PA practitioners bring to any organisation. The framework is for all those who work in PA at all stages of their professional journey. There is no universal entry into PA and the framework is there to demonstrate the full range of capabilities necessary to be effective and many professionals may be able to show the competencies required for PA in different ways. Alternatively, professionals may be able to recognise where additional training and development may be needed. It aims to address the

move towards new forms of professionalism by articulating competencies transparently so as to open up the practice rather than close it down.

Consequently, it is suggested the framework is built around seven domain areas highlighted below. Five of these relate specifically to the skills (competence) and behaviours (competency) necessary for the role. These five domain areas map explicitly to the five top-level competency areas suggested by Finegold and Notobartolo (2010) and career meta-competencies that are necessary for employability in the twenty-first century as articulated in RQ3 and RQ4. This enables PA practitioners to see their skill-set more holistically and help think about the many different career opportunities that are available.

Additionally, there is a suggested knowledge domain that helps to capture the three layers of knowledge that supports PA practice and also a contextual domain that reflects the situational nature of practice and how different PA roles are shaped by different organisation and societal settings. It is suggested that for each domain area four competency statements can be developed (three for the body of knowledge). These then help to describe the activity that all PA professionals should be able to demonstrate, albeit at different levels of proficiency. It is recognised that for some roles there may be a greater or lesser focus on some competencies than others and that individual PA practitioners themselves may have role preferences to play to particular competency strengths and interest.

The statements outlined in the framework are for illustrative purposes only and have been created by reflecting on the primary and secondary data contained in this study. They would need further testing and consultation.
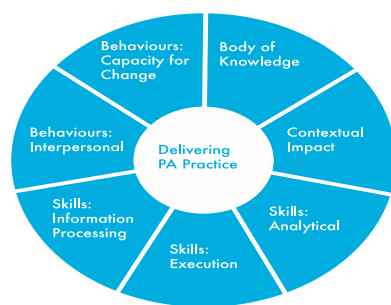
Figure 8.4. A competency framework for PA: The PA competency wheel ©Sarah Roberts-Bowman

This framework is seen as a supportive tool to help PA practitioners better understand themselves and their role. It is a developmental to help with continuous professional development, career progression and planning. Such a framework aims to reflect the traits and tendencies associated with PA practice that can be used to improve self-awareness and personal development. The framework itself is shaped by Campion *et al.* (2011) best practice approaches in terms of analyzing, organizing and using competency information.

Firstly, in terms of analyzing organisational contexts and the importance of a future-oriented view the framework aims to reflect different ways PA operates whilst building in adaptability for future evolution. This helps to allow for greater degree of stratification. Consequently, basing the framework around the five meta-competencies and including a contextual element is important.

Secondly, in respect of organising and presenting competency information, the focus is on establishing an anatomy or language of competency that works for PA practitioners. This incorporates levels of proficiency and also reflects transversal (or cross-job as defined by Campion *et al.* (2011), as well as outlining the PA specific. It provides a structure around which granularity and detail can be added and also integrates the idea of knowledge. It also attempts to illustrate this in a way that makes sense for practice using diagrams, case studies and examples. Again, these have been created based on reflecting on the primary and secondary data and are for illustrative purposes and would need to be further consulted and tested.

Finally, in terms of using competency framework the focus is on encouraging self-awareness, professional identity yet with identity stretch and helping reflection in terms of exploring career pathways and opportunities. In particular, ensuring that competencies remain forward thinking and are not insular and reductive. In this sense, it is to be used to help PA practitioners recognise their strengths, weaknesses and development opportunities.

In terms of how the framework is constructed, it takes some of the presentational ideas of the frameworks explored in Chapter Four and as discussed in Chapter Seven. Of particular relevance, is the way the ACCA framework considers how different sectors may impact on the accountancy role, in other words the importance of the environment. The ICE framework splits competencies into contextual, practice and behaviour enabling greater opportunities to link to knowledge but also to capture situational aspects of the profession. Both of these ideas have been included in the PA framework through the inclusion of a specific body of knowledge and contextual component in the framework. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society and Government Communications approach of linking to levels with clear examples have also shaped this proposed framework.

For simplicity, the graphic illustration used by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society has been adapted to provide the basis on which to articulate the proposed anatomy of PA competencies. The researcher is not a graphic designer and as such felt this provided the neatest way to illustrate the concepts. It does not over complicate yet still provides structure. In terms of the actual detail, this has been informed by the literature drawing on some of the ideas from the competency studies into PR generally, as well as the practical studies into PA. This has been cross-referenced by concepts emerging from the primary data gathered in this study. It aims to be illustrative of what a framework could contain in order to move away from the list like nature of competencies. The examples used at the end of each section are for illustrative purposes only in terms of how a final framework

could look and these would need to be expanded and tested. Some of these are drawn from discussions with practitioners in the qualitative study when they gave examples of PA campaigns and others are from the Connect Communications Awards referenced in Chapter Four. It is this level of granularity that is ripe for further practitioner consultation and indeed such examples can have substantially more detail built around them.

8.8. Implications of the findings on the study and practice of PA

The study always intended to build theory by using a grounded theory approach in the qualitative study, and by incorporating a quantitative component. Consequently, the theoretical contribution of this study to the field of PA focuses on a new model to conceptualise practice, a new architecture to understand the body of knowledge and a conceptual competency typology. The practical contribution is in the draft competency framework that is the result of this theorising.

Although the models and framework above suggest that despite its move from a positivist position the study reflects more of a technocratic or indeed positivist position this is not so. This study is shaped by a critical realist and postmodernist perspective in that these models are suggested ways through which to look at PA practice and to understand the traits (or tendencies) necessary to deliver effectively. The models have been created to help articulate practice but most importantly the focus on meta-competencies builds in fluidity and movement. Traits may change over time and this approach enables this to be reflected. It is recognised the world is complex

and unpredictable and that not all PA roles are the same and the practice is maturing. As such, the metaphor of a compass is a useful way to view this competency framework for PA. It attempts to map the direction of travel but there are various routes on and off the map and the map needs to be agile.

Picking up on the practical contribution of this study, at an individual (micro) level the study helps PA practitioners better understand their own emerging professional identity as strategic communicators who have and can aspire to have a broad set of skills that are relevant to twenty-first century employability. By helping to articulate and make visible the skills, behaviours and knowledge that support PA practice it aims to encourage PA practitioners to take control over their own careers by understanding their strengths and the opportunities that are available them. In one respect encouraging professional identity yet with identity stretch. The APPC has shown interest in the output from this study and it is hoped that work may be continued with them to test out some of the knowledge theorems and competencies and to add more depth and granularity. Reflecting on the SECI model as it relates to PA especially areas around socialisation (tacit to tacit by sharing experiences including observation), and externalisation (tacit to explicit by enountering case studies and stories, new thinking and theory) then a clearer role for any professional body emerges, in particular if connected to new forms of professionalism through the concept of community and networks.

From an organisational (meso) perspective, it helps to put the field of PA into the language of HRM that helps others understand how PA contributes to

organisational effectiveness and how it fits within core organisational competency frameworks. There is scope for in-house PA practitioners to use the framework when discussing their own fit within different organisational structures.   At the same time, PA agencies may be able to use elements from this for their own staff training and development purposes alongside the APPC.

At a macro level by enabling PA to reflect on its own practice and improve its own self-awareness it is hoped this will encourage the professional bodies to look at new forms of professionalism so that trust in PA can be improved. By doing so over time some of the reputational issues that haunt the field can start to be addressed.

8.7 Suggested implications of critical realist perspective on PA practice

Naess (2015) whose critical realism approach to analyzing urban planning aimed to encourage that occupation to think about itself differently, this study wants to do the same for PA.   PA is highly context dependent and practitioners use a range of PA strategies, tools and techniques depending on the nature of the target publics, sector and culture of the organisation.   A critical realist perspective that values tendencies as opposed to certainties makes understanding PA as a stratified practice with cohesion and diversity the norm, thereby opening up new opportunities for reflection on the field both in terms of its growing professional identity but with scope to explore and value multiple identities and cultural hybridity. Striving for one single view of

PA is not problematic when reflecting on the practice through this philosophical tradition and it allows for a greater exploration of PA.

On a practical note, a critical realist approach encourages practitioners to recognize that there are different ways to solve problems and this should be encouraged, along with adaptability and flexibility against a rapidly changing landscape. Often there is not one single right way to solve a PA problem. Different viewpoints and ideas are to be encouraged and welcomed.   As Interviewee 18 said: '*I just think that there isn't a right or wrong way to do PA – there are a lot of things that are absolute given – you must write well, research…unless you have completely misunderstood their (client) needs it is mostly personality that is the winning quality – the differentiator – and that depends on the personality of the people you are pitching to'.*

Also, a critical realist view does not worry about the need for a grand unification theory but instinctively values different knowledge sources and the practical techniques that spring from these. This position reinforces the interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary nature of PA in line with interdisciplinary thinkers (Aram, 2004; Holley, 2009; Lattuca, 2003), and establishes an architecture to help understand knowledge that synthesises different theories and should be seen as valuable. It too provides in an increasingly complicated postmodernist world the ability to see things by drawing on a broad knowledge base and to utilise diverse experiences, including bringing in people to PA from different backgrounds and this could

see PA well placed to take advantage of helping their organisations navigate this space. This means a different approach to professional boundaries.

This reflects some of the thinking about alternative forms of professionalism (Furbey, Reid and Cole, 2001; Kipping, Fitzpatrick and Muzio, 2006) and also Noordegraff (2016) who argues that what is considered professional work (and not specifically professions) is changing in part due organisational and societal pressures. A framework that is agile and adaptable is important.

Other ideas include viewing PA as multiple-goal orientated, rather than a single pursuit of one or a few goals. PA is often about finding an area around which there can be most agreement and this means compromise. This seem to be a growing sense that PA is more about co-creation which although may have a focus requires agile thinking and the ability to provide a solution that is satisficing rather than optimal (Simon, 1957). This reinforces the view that PA involves negotiation, dialogue, conversation, relationships in fluid and changing environments. This requires more of a participatory approach in the policy development process where the needs of different publics are brokered where advocacy, counter discourses and compromise may often play a role in order for legitimate governmental decisions to be made. This requires skills in tune with ideas around emotional intelligence and social effectiveness (Abraham, 2004; Carmelili and Josman, 2006; Cote and Miners, 2006; and Kunnanatt, 2008).

Thinking about PA from a critical realist perspective, however, given the interdependencies between structure (democratic institutions, the organisation and stakeholder bodies involved in policy formation), and individual agency of PA practitioners, it might not be unreasonable to think that PA can ever form a consensus amongst so many groups. The idea of creating alliances, a key public affairs strategy, as identified by Vining, Shapiro and Borges (2005) seems more viable rather than striving perhaps for the unachievable consensus approach as alluded to by the work of Habermas and his Theory of Communicative Action (1984), though that is not to say that dialogue and collaboration is not important to the process of advocacy and policy formation.

This leads to the idea of tendencies that run through the critical realist thinking. PA practitioners can use their skills and knowledge to take a middle space, adhering to Bhaskar's (2008) ideas that there are no absolutes but instead statements about how causal mechanisms tend to operate. This could be used to help refine arguments that are broader in their impact and allow for more scenarios to be discussed which could be seen as a positive contribution to dialogue and discussion. It does, however, move away from arguments that try and use evidence to predict future impacts which may be less persuasive in their appeal. This could be difficult, given the trend in evidence-based policy making.

The idea of tendencies, however, also relates to the nature of PA skills and a critical realist view suggests these should be adaptable and innovative and never static. The importance of recognising that skills evolve and the role of

meta-competencies in encouraging personal development is one that PA should encourage.

8.8. Conclusion – final reflections on areas of contribution and recommendations for future research

In the Introduction, it suggests that this study is important from four perspectives – reputational, intellectual, regulatory and scholarly. For reputation, it is hoped that this study contributes to the external understanding of the discipline and continues in the tradition of Fitzpatrick and Bronstein (2006) and Berg (2012) who argue that advocacy plays a valuable role. By encouraging PA practitioners to better understand their practice through a knowledge architecture and by creating a competency typology and suggested framework that has complete transparency then perhaps the reputation of practice can be enhanced.

Reflecting on the intellectual, it hopes to contribute to providing greater clarity on the theory and practice of PA. By helping to shed light on contemporary PA practice and what underpins it then perhaps practitioners can take greater ownership of the discipline, open up career opportunities and personal agency encouraged. From a regulatory perspective, this study hopes to contribute to a practice that is better placed to articulate what it does and is able to demonstrate responsibility and values embedded into how it operates. If the practice can evoke confidence, then it will be better placed to work with others to shape a workable and relevant regulatory structure.

Scholarly in that it attempts to address a gap in the PA body of knowledge by synthesising insights from complementary fields to provide fresh conceptual and practical value.   The literature revealed a number of themes that this study has helped to develop. In particular, the study synthesises scholarship between PA and HRM in a way that adds depth rather than continues the superficiality of competency lists without reference to competency scholarship. It also links more closely to the work of scholars in the field of knowledge to help devise an architecture through which the body of knowledge that underpins PA can be understood and tries to bring coherence to the multitude of theories and ideas that relate to PA.   It has tried to connect to work around careers and new forms of professional identity and professional status to help provide additional insight.

In terms of future recommendations, the models and concepts explored now need to be further tested with practice.   The model of the contemporary PA field needs to be evaluated as to whether it captures the breadth and depth of practice and to confirm the trend towards an orientation more in line with management consultancy. Within this, there is scope to research in more detail specific types of PA identities and explore narratives and stories that provide insight into PA careers. Additionally, studies should be encouraged that de-construct different types of PA activities to understand the type of conceptual and practical theories at work. Of importance is an investigation of whether defining and understanding excellent PA in the context of 'internal goods' as defined by MacIntyre (1984) is possible, and whether identifying what constitutes the public good is feasible. Investigating these two concepts

against criterion for effective PA would open up opportunities to show how PA supports debate and democracy rather than close it down.

The suggested body of knowledge needs to be explored against whether practitioners believe the architecture works and is robust yet flexible to absorb new knowledge and that situating the domain of PA with PR is acceptable. The competency framework and the typology that underpins it also need to be tested to identify whether it provides the correct anatomy or language of practice and whether practitioners believe that situating their skills and behaviours within a meta-competency approach is useful to them. If such an approach is useful then more work needs to be done to identify the specific examples that support each domain area that will enable granularity and detail. There is a role here for the APPC to take leadership in these areas and to seize the opportunity of creating a twenty-first century profession. In particular, identifying the type of PA infrastructure necessary to support practice. Such an infrastructure – but formal and informal – that encourages identification is an important step in terms of creating a community in which a virtues approach may flourish and one that can support different types of knowledge conversion.

Also, this is a UK study. There is scope to undertake similar studies in other countries to map the field globally and to identify the similarities and differences in practice and to understand how PA is evolving against different structural influences.

Overall it is believed this study has made a contribution to the theory and practice of PA but there is still much research still to be conducted. It is hoped, however, that it has helped to bring a little clarity to Moloney's (2011) assertion that PA is a misunderstood profession.

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How the literature review was compiled

1. Approach to review and synthesis

There has been growing literature on the importance of systematic literature reviews (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003; Dixon-Woods *et al.* 2005) as opposed to simple narrative reviews. The exploration of the literature for this study was based on a systematic approach. As Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) suggests systematic reviews have emerged as an alternative to the traditional "narrative" reviews that often lack thoroughness and rigour. This type of review aims to address the concerns of scholars such as Rousseau, Manning and Denyer (2008:2) who argue that '*literature reviews are often position papers, cherry-picking studies to advocate a point of view'*. It also aims to address problems around the sheer of volume of literature available. As Huff (2009) posits it is impossible and unrealistic for one literature review to capture the outputs from scholarship around the world and that the varying differences in studies synthesised in a sensible way.

Scholars clearly state the need to broadly search for existing evidence before undertaking new research (Huff, 2009; Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003). Higgens and Green (2008:7) make clear that a systematic review aims to gather empirical evidences that 'fits pre-specified eligibility criteria' in order to address a specified research question.

They suggest systematic reviews have five key characteristics:

- A clearly stated set of objectives with a pre-defined eligibility criteria

- An explicit, reproducible methodology

- A systematic search that attempts to identify all studies that would meet the eligibility criteria

- An assessment of the validity of the findings of the included studies, for example through the assessment of risk of bias, and

- A systematic presentation and synthesis of the characteristics and findings of the included studies

The concept of the systematic review has is origins in medical research but is becoming increasing important in the fields of organisation and management studies given its growing published research base which has often been criticised as fragmented and of limited relevance for practice. As Rousseau, Manning and Denyer (2008) and Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) suggest the lack of critical assessment combined with the increase knowledge production has led to fragmentation of knowledge that is trans-disciplinary and independent from advancements in the social sciences. Now scholars such as Boaz *et al.* (2006) suggest that systematic and evidence-based reviews are making important connections linking research, policy-making and practice together. This is now encouraging scholars from other fields to conduct research synthesis and use contrasting methodologies.

Dixon-Woods *et al.* (2005:46) building on the work of Noblit and Hare (1988) argue there are many different types of syntheses. In broad terms, they

suggest there are differences between integrative and interpretive reviews. *'Integrative synthesis is concerned with combining or amalgamating data and involves techniques that require a basic comparability between phenomena'*, whereas interpretive reviews use induction and sees interpretation as a critical component of the research process. Integrative involves summarising and pooling data especially where underlying assumptions and categories to that data are relatively secure and often stated at the outset. With interpretive the focus is on the development of concepts and theories that may integrate them rather than specifying concepts early on. This does not mean interpretive synthesis is free flowing it must be rooted in the data of the studies under review. Dixon-Woods *et al.* (2005) also clearly states that the terminology does not rule in or out types of synthesis, so for example interpretive synthesis is just as valid across quantitative and deductive studies.

Importantly, they do not see these forms of syntheses as stand-alone and distinct. There is overlap though they argue most reviews will tend to lead on one approach in form and process but then often include elements of the other. Critically it is the nature of the research question that will shape the approach and in reality many approaches involve both interpretive and integrative synthesis.

A summary of methods for reviewers based on Dixon-Woods *et al.* (2005) and Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) can be found overleaf.

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Method of Review	Description
Narrative	"selection, chronicling, and ordering of evidence to produce an account of the evidence" and "can account for complex dynamic processes, offering explanations and emphasise the sequential and contingent character of phenomena"(Dixon-Woods *et al.*2005:47)
Thematic	Some common characteristics with narrative. "identification of prominent and recurring themes" in the literature "(Dixon-Woods *et al.* 2005:47)
Grounded	Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and combines inductive and deductive approaches to building theory emerging from the data collected.
Meta-ethnography	Set of techniques developed for synthesising qualitative studies and involve three major strategies "(Dixon-Woods et al 2005:48) • Reciprocal translational analysis (RTA) which tries to translate concepts of studies to one another • Refutational synthesis (RT) which tries to resolve contradictory findings • Lines of argument synthesis (LOA) which tries to generate a general interpretation based on the findings
Meta-study	Provides an overview of theory, method and data and "a critical exploration of the theoretical frameworks that have provided direction to research" "(Dixon-Woods *et al.* 2005:49)
Realist synthesis	Theory driven approach to the synthesis of evidence.
Miles and Huberman's cross case techniques	Here a number of approaches have been identified to look across studies. Meta matrices for portioning and clustering data, summary tables based on content analysis and case or time-ordered displays
Content analysis	Categorisation of data and identified the frequencies of these categories. "content analysis converts qualitative data into quantitative form, making it easier to manipulate within quantitative frameworks should this be appropriate" "(Dixon-Woods et al 2005:50)
Case survey	Allows coding of data from a large amount of qualitative cases for quantitative analysis. Normally a highly closed questions used to extract data which is then converted to quantitative form
Qualitative comparative analysis	"the same outcome may be achieved in different combinations of conditions and that causation must be understood in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions" "(Dixon-Woods et al 2005:50) This technique involved a truth table which shows all potential combinations of the presence and absence of independent variables and the equivalent outcome variable
Bayesian meta-analysis	Quantitative data and evidence is pooled using statistical techniques.

Table 1: Summary of review methods

In terms of determining a method of approach, the researcher outlined a clear strategy as suggested by Boaz *et al.* (2006). Using the aims and objectives

for this research as the starting point, the researcher determined leading on an interpretive synthesis would be best given the exploratory nature of the research supported with some integrative elements to capture patterns across primary research studies. Rousseau, Manning and Denyer (2008) talks about the importance of contextualisation in the medical fields and there is some merit here to management and operational studies by capturing procedural knowledge.

Having determined leading on an interpretive approach to synthesis which tends to relate to relativist epistemologies such as phenomenology as suggested by Rousseau, Manning and Denyer (2008), a mixed method synthesis was considered the most appropriate for the reasons outlined below.

Method of synthesis	Narrative	Thematic	Meta-ethnography
	To understand how the study of public affairs has evolved	To identify from where does PA draw its knowledge and the levels of agreement amongst scholars	To identify schools of thought in public affairs and competency scholarship and practice
	To understand how the study of competency has evolved	To capture the arguments around explicit and tacit knowledge	To search with a broad range of disciplines to bring different perspectives given the creole nature of the public affairs discipline
	To compare different definitions of public affairs and competency		
	To identify studies where public affairs and competency overlap		To use complementary electronic and manual search techniques to ensure that materials are not missed
			(Based on the concept of meta-ethnography purported by Huff, 2009)

Table 2: Review choices

2. Stages of the Review process

The researcher broadly followed a highly structured review process as suggested by Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003). This follows three key stages. Firstly, planning the review that involves the identification of the need for a review, preparation of a proposal for review and the development of a review protocol. Secondly, conducting the review itself that involves identification of research, selection of studies, study quality assessment, data extraction and monitoring progress, along with data analysis. Then finally, reporting and dissemination involving the report writing and recommendations and ultimately getting evidence and knowledge into practice.

The review was planned with input from supervisors though a formal review panel as suggested by the Cochrane Collaboration that provides advice on systematic reviews within the health profession was not adopted. Initially a scoping study was undertaken. As posited by Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) this helps to look at the relevance and size of the literature body and to try and determine limits on the subject area. This is of critical importance at this early stage. This provides a synopsis of the theoretical, practical and methodological history discussions contiguous to the domain under study. A scoping study is a critical first step to allowing a robust systematic review.

The table below adopted from Pilbeam, Denyer and Briner (2008) clearly illustrates the difference between the scoping study and the systematic review. The scoping study allows the researcher to *"map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of*

evidence available" (Huff, 2009:171). It helps to determine the value of the research area and to help refine and determine the feasibility of the research itself.

	Scoping Study	Systematic Review
Aim	To gain a broad understanding of the field	Tightly specified aims and objectives – review questions
Scope	Big picture	Narrow focus
Planning the Review	Unplanned, unfocused, allows creative exploration of the field	Transparent process, audit trail
Identifying studies	Searching is probing – usually involves moving from one study to the next	Rigorous and comprehensive search (citation databases, cross referencing, recommendations from experts in the field)
Selection of studies	What to include is not self-evident – studies chosen by the reviewer	Predetermined criteria for including and excluding studies
Quality assessment	Little critical appraisal at this stage. Reviewers tend to rely on the quality rating of journals	Checklists to assess the methodological quality of studies

Table 3: Scoping and systematic reviews adapted from Pilbeam, Denyer and Briner (2008)

The scoping study revealed two themes. Firstly, there was a rich source of literature around the discipline of public affairs but it appeared to be un-codified lacking structure and form as suggested by Windsor (2005). Secondly, the original question for exploration was based on the concept of individual readiness to enter the professional domain of PA. The concept of readiness was first explored by Menges (1975) whereby he looked at the necessity of individuals to show the right personality traits, knowledge, application of knowledge and performance measures to determine their "readiness" to enter a professional domain. What became clear was the link between readiness and the growing body of competency literature that had taken place over the last 20 years. This together with the embryonic use of

the term competency within the domain of PA itself suggested an area ripe for synthesis and development.   The researcher therefore refocused the study to look more rigorously at what was meant by competency.

From the scoping study, greater clarity emerged for the main aim and objectives of the research, together with a detailed set of research questions. This enabled a clear review protocol to be established as suggested by Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) that outlines clearly the research to be undertaken. In particular, they argue the protocol captures key information necessary for a focused and narrow review including the specific questions to be addressed by the study, the population or sample that is the focus of the study, the search strategy for the identification of relevant studies and the criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of studies. A review protocol is critical to improve objectivity and reduce bias (Van de Voorde and Leonard, 2007).

Aim	To investigate the evolving nature of public affairs in order to establish the contemporary knowledge, skills and competencies for effective PA practice.	
Objective 1	To understand the public affairs BoK necessary for effective PA practice	What is a body of knowledge?
		From where does PA draw its body of knowledge?
		What type of knowledge if required for PA practice – explicit, tacit?
		What agreement is there on any PA body of knowledge?
		How does PA body of knowledge get disseminated?
		How does a PA body of knowledge improve professionalism?
		How does professionalism relate to effectiveness and transparency?
		What is effectiveness in terms of PA?

Objective 2	To capture the competencies required for effective PA practice	What are competencies?
		What competency typologies and frameworks exist?
		What competency frameworks exist for PA?
		What connection do these frameworks have to PA body of knowledge?
		What competencies are required for PA?
		What agreement exists on the competencies required for PA practice?
Objective 3	To devise a competency framework to help deliver public affairs effectiveness and professionalism	What general frameworks exist?
		What competency frameworks are used by other professional bodies?
Population	UK public affairs practitioners	
Studies for Inclusion	Those that draw the ideas of competency and PA and PR together	Those that address the development of competencies
	Those that include PA knowledge	Those that look at the conceptualisation of competencies
	Those that look at PA effectiveness	Those that look at competency best practice approaches
Studies for Exclusion	Limited use of commentary papers with no empirical underpinning	Individual organisational competency studies unless communication role specific

Table 4: Summary of Review Protocol

A systematic search starts with the identification of keywords and search terms which have been identified from the scoping study and discussion with supervisors. As Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) argues a comprehensive and unbiased search is one of the main differences between traditional narrative reviews and systematic approaches. A combination of the following search strings for this study can be found below.

- Cluster 1: Public Affairs, Government Relations, Public Relations, Corporate Political Activity
- Cluster 2: Knowledge, theory, meta-theory,
- Cluster 3: Competency, Competence, Behaviour, Skills, Attributes
- Cluster 4: Professional, profession, professionalism, careers

- Cluster 5: Effectiveness

The researcher drew on four main types of literature as identified by Pilbeam, Denyer and Smart (2008) – theoretical literature, research literature, policy literature and practice literature for the basis of the search strategy. In particular, the researcher was focused on the overlaps between the various domains in order to rule out areas not relevant to the question.

When looking at and reviewing studies in public affairs and competencies the researcher was guided by the suggested key questions identified by Pilbeam, Denyer and Smart 2008) as illustrated here.

- What are the key theories, concepts and ideas?
- What are the key epistemological and ontological grounds for the discipline?
- What are the main questions and problems that have been addressed to date?
- How has knowledge in the topic been structured and organised?
- How have approaches to these questions increased our understanding and knowledge?
- What are they origins and definitions of the topic?
- What are the major issues and debates about the topic?
- What are the key sources?

These questions also helped to shape and inform the themes emerging from the literature review. Analysing major studies is significant challenge for management research (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003). In order to reduce bias, researchers often use data extraction forms. According to the Cochrane Collaboration these forms serve three main purposes – helping researchers stay focused on the research question, they act as a record of

decision making and act as a repository from which analysis will emerge. Although as indicated earlier the Cochrane Collaboration focuses firmly on medical and associated scientific research the principles are applicable across management studies and the social sciences. For the purposes of this research, although formal data extraction forms were not used detailed notes were taken for prominent studies and summaries made of commentary pieces.

In terms of data extraction, particular focus was placed on assessing the quality of studies. According to Rousseau, Manning and Denyer (2008), evaluating evidence involves the following six basic criteria – construct validity, internal validity, effect size, generalizability, intervention compliance and contextualisation. Although this approach has more relevance to medical studies the importance of digging underneath the surface of the data to understand its robustness provided helpful guidance.

In terms of structure, the literature review takes a standard approach of reflecting on the various thematic areas of relevance and synthesising information when appropriate. It has not stuck rigidly to the Pilbeam, Denyer and Briner (2008) approach that has been developed for scientific research studies as it felt this was too rigid. That said, the researcher has used tabulations to summarise literature and has tried to identify what we know, and unanswered questions requiring further research. In addition, the researcher has included a detailed section following the literature review that explores the key schools of thoughts and issues emerging from the

systematic review. This enables a better contextualisation for this study and its relevance at a macro, meso and micro level.

As suggested, systematic reviews have grown in importance in scholarship. "*By enhancing the legitimacy and authority of the resultant evidence, systematic reviews can provide practitioners and policy-makers with a reliable basis to formulate decisions and take action*" (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart 2003:208). There are challenges to systematic reviews in the management field. According to Pilbeam, Denyer and Briner (2008), these are:

- Heterogeneity of data and divergence of questions that make the process of aggregating and combing data rarely possible
- Research design – qualitative studies and theoretical contribution do not easily lend themselves to synthesis
- Context sensitivity – some findings are unique to certain subjects and circumstances
- Complexity – interventions and outcomes are often multiple and competing
- Explanatory/descriptive orientation – often researchers are less concerned with what works and more concerned with understanding management and organisations practices
- Researcher bias – reviews of social science literature will inevitably involve some degree of subjectivity and judgement

So, there are limitations but the researcher believes that by adopting transparency and clarity in the review process these limitations have been minimised in the review process supporting the view of Deyer, Tranfield and Ernst van Atken (2008) who argues that management research has benefitted from a number of approaches that have been developed to deal with non-numerical data and diverse types of evidence.

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Public Affairs and Public Relations Competency Lists: An illustration

Necessary knowledge includes	Necessary skills include
Understanding of business	Written and verbal communication
Corporate strategy	Creativity
Finance and corporate governance	Media relations
Data analysis	Crisis management
Audience research	Issues management
Management of resources and people	Interpersonal skills
	Credibility and integrity
	Flexibility

Source: DTI/CIPR (2003)

Example 1: Department of Trade and Industry and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (DTI/CIPR) (2003). Unlocking the potential of public relations: developing good practice. Extract taken from Theaker, A. (2012: 11). The Public Relations Handbook, Routledge

Necessary knowledge includes	Necessary skills include
Communication and persuasion concepts and strategies	Research methods and analysis
Communication and public relations theories	Management of information
Relationships and relationship-building communication	Mastery of language in written and oral
Societal trends	Problem-solving and negotiation
Ethical issues	Management of communication
Legal requirements and issues	Strategic planning
Marketing and finance	Issues management
Public relations history	
Uses of research and forecasting	
Multicultural and global issues	
The business case for diversity	
Various world social, political, economic and historical frameworks	
Organisational change and development	
Management concepts and theories	

Source: Turk (2006)

Example 2: Turk, J.V. (2006). The professional bond, public relations education in the 21st century, Report of the Commision on Public Relations Education, www.commpred.org. Extract taken from Theaker, A. (2012: 11). The Public Relations Handbook, Routledge

Table 3
A comparison of private and public sector competencies

Private sector	Public sector
Strategic/long-term view	Understanding the bigger picture
Leading and supporting	
Understanding others	Consulting and involving
Maintaining a positive outlook	Managing under pressure
Taking responsibility for high standards	Upholding the reputation of the service
Communicating	Presenting and communicating
Making decisions and acting	Taking action
Networking	Building strong relationships
Investigating and analyzing	
Preparing thoroughly	
	Formulating strategies and concepts
	Persuading and influencing
	Creating and innovating

3. Comparison of private and public sectors

Example 3: A table comparing public and private sector competencies from Gregory (2008:221). Gregory, A. (2008). Competencies of senior communication practitioners in the UK: An initial study. Public Relations Review, 34, 215-223

Table 4
Factor analysis of KSAs.

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Research, planning, implementation and evaluation of PR programs	.41	.40	[a]
PR ethics & legal issues	.40	.42	[a]
Application of communication models and theories to PR work projects	[a]	[a]	.75
Incorporation of business literacy skills into PR duties	.65	[a]	[a]
Management skills & issues	.77	[a]	[a]
Crisis communication management	[a]	.55	[a]
Media relations	[a]	.82	[a]
Use of information technology & new media channels	[a]	.54	[a]
Application of historical knowledge of the field of PR to work projects	[a]	[a]	.82
Use of advanced communication skills	.77	[a]	[a]

Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
[a] Factor loading <.40, dropped for presentation clarity.

Example 4: A list relating to the knowledge, skills and attributes of PR people, Sha (2011: 193). Sha, B. (2011). 2010 Practice Analysis: Professional competencies and work categories in public relations today. Public Relations Review, 37, 187-196

Table 2. Principal component analysis of competencies.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Component 1: External interface management						
Strategically manages client reputation	.726	.139	.102	.050	.281	.150
Manages issues relevant to client reputation	.716	.202	.208	.134	.144	−.01
Manages crisis communication	.672	.156	−.00	.075	.223	.179
Persuasively shapes and delivers communication	.559	.187	.271	.418	−.18	.025
Advises stakeholders on strategic media practice	.516	.198	.174	.247	.008	.149
Component 2: Stakeholder relationship management						
Maintains communication with stakeholders	.214	.735	.098	.042	.158	.333
Manages relationships with key stakeholders	−.03	.711	.219	.224	.295	−.04
Understands and communicates effectively with diverse audiences	.182	.604	.083	.184	.064	.128
Sustains communication with key contacts	.309	.538	.129	.009	.101	.476
Component 3: Lobbying						
Lobbying as advocacy	.126	.058	.819	−.03	.228	.220
Persuades stakeholders to a point of view	.264	.080	.604	.427	−.04	.074
Establishes communication with industry groups and public policy specialists	.101	.298	.472	.015	.265	.396
Component 4: Evaluation management						
Establishes, reviews and evaluates change strategies	.025	.129	.265	.676	.223	.353
Evaluates outcomes	.239	.163	.010	.664	.353	.137
Sets clear, measurable communication objectives	.307	.241	−.06	.620	.046	.191
Analyses information strategically	.338	.159	.082	.440	.361	.133
Component 5: Environmental monitoring						
Monitors environmental stakeholder activity	.140	.117	.237	.225	.698	.114
Scans and monitors the environment	.348	.193	.170	.098	.631	.125
Evaluates environmental information	.242	.109	.256	.252	.586	.356
Identifies key stakeholders	.105	.474	.102	.197	.579	−.06
Component 6: Socially responsible communication						
Employs socially and ethically responsible communication	.085	.073	.010	.328	.074	.650
Uses effective communication across a wide range of settings	.373	.372	.064	.143	.015	.580
Promotes accountability	.194	.187	.220	.285	.347	.536
Facilitates shared ownership of change process	.046	.084	.372	.460	.152	.466
M	4.3	4.4	3.7	4.2	4.1	4.2
SD	.50	.50	.62	.53	.56	.55
R	.83	.78	.80	.83	.80	.75

Example 5: A list of public relations competencies by Jeffrey & Brunton (2011:66). Jeffrey, L.M. & Brunton, M.A. (2011). Developing a framework for communication management competencies. Journal of Vocational Training Education and Training, 63, 1, 57-75

Table 3.   Principal component analysis of personal attributes.

	1	2	3	4
Component 1: Adaptability				
Flexibility	.714	.122	.127	.135
Willing and able to learn	.668	.187	.015	.139
Commonsense	.586	.072	.085	.136
Able to deal with pressure	.543	.056	.227	.396
Empathy	.525	.228	.105	.185
Able to give and accept criticism and direction	.504	.349	.178	.272
Sense of humour	.476	.184	.245	.050
Willingness to accept responsibility	.463	.450	.364	.047
Component 2: Integrity				
Adherence to Code of Ethics	.124	.794	.062	.054
Honesty and integrity	.348	.714	.139	−.132
Loyal	.183	.678	.108	.234
Dependable/reliable	.397	.523	.098	.326
Creative	−.071	.419	.359	.341
Cultural awareness	.260	.387	.306	.141
Client commitment	.243	.387	.278	.297
Component 3: Leadership				
Persuasive	.083	.028	.787	.194
Ability to influence	.180	.105	.780	.236
Willingness to lead	.284	.323	.592	.182
Strategic thinker	.396	.251	.430	.015
Component 4: Ambition				
Drive	.221	.042	.244	.722
Confidence	.252	.026	.218	.718
Personal presentation	.099	.496	.098	.563
Well organised	.284	.388	.088	.526
M	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.1
SD	.42	.46	.51	.51
R	.81	.80	.74	.74

)een successfully used in other professional domains for both identifying competency
'or performance and as the basis for vocational education curriculum (Hunt and

Example 6: A list of public relations personal attributes by Jeffrey & Brunton
(2011:68). Jeffrey, L.M. & Brunton, M.A. (2011). Developing a framework for
communication management competencies. Journal of Vocational Training
Education and Training, 63, 1, 57-75

Professional Competency Frameworks

This section contains extracts from the competency frameworks from the following:

- ACCA

- ICE

- Government Communications Network

- Royal Pharmaceutical Society

ACCA THE GLOBAL BODY FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

COMPETENCY AREA	ACCA QUALIFICATION	LEVEL	BEHAVIOUR	JOB PROFILE	SECTOR

PLEASE SELECT A COMPETENCY HEADING

CORPORATE REPORTING

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY AND INNOVATION

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING

TAXATION

AUDIT AND ASSURANCE

GOVERNANCE, RISK AND CONTROL

STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

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ACCA THE GLOBAL BODY FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

| COMPETENCY AREA | ACCA QUALIFICATION | LEVEL | BEHAVIOUR | JOB PROFILE | SECTOR |

PLEASE CHOOSE A LEVEL BELOW

1   **Level 1 Fundamentals - Knowledge**
Completion of Diploma in Accounting and Business

2   **Level 2 Fundamentals - Skills**
Completion of Advanced Diploma in Accounting and Business

3   **Level 3 Professional - Essentials and Options**
Completion of Professional Level

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ACCA THE GLOBAL BODY FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

| COMPETENCY AREA | ACCA QUALIFICATION | LEVEL | BEHAVIOUR | JOB PROFILE | SECTOR |

PLEASE CHOOSE A SECTOR BELOW

PUBLIC PRACTICE

CORPORATE

PUBLIC SERVICES AND NOT FOR PROFIT

FINANCIAL SERVICES

SHARED SERVICES AND OUTSOURCING

ADVISORY SECTOR

1/1

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CA THE GLOBAL BODY FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

COMPETENCY AREA	ACCA QUALIFICATION	LEVEL	BEHAVIOUR	JOB PROFILE	SECTOR

PLEASE CHOOSE A BEHAVIOUR BELOW

These are behavioural attributes expected of the Complete Finance Professional which support the broad competency areas demonstrated in the exams, the ethics components and in the practical experience requirement. These behaviours are transferable and may apply to more than one competency area and to several components of the qualification, in different contexts.

- ACTING ETHICALLY AND LEGALLY
- COMMUNICATOR
- CREDIBLE
- INFLUENCE/CHALLENGE
- PROACTIVE
- SCEPTICAL

- COMMERCIALLY AWARE
- CONTINUOUS IMPROVER
- EXERCISING PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT
- ORGANISED/AWARE
- PROBLEM SOLVER
- SUPPORTING OTHERS

cyframework.accaglobal.com/Behaviours

CA THE GLOBAL BODY FOR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

| COMPETENCY AREA | ACCA QUALIFICATION | LEVEL | BEHAVIOUR | JOB PROFILE | SECTOR |

PLEASE CHOOSE A JOB PROFILE FROM BELOW

JOB PROFILES   ALL

- EXTERNAL AUDITOR
- INTERNAL AUDITOR
- FORENSIC ACCOUNTANT
- COMPLIANCE / GOVERNANCE OFFICER
- FINANCIAL ACCOUNTANT
- PARTNER
- MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANT
- CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (CFO)
- GROUP ACCOUNTANT
- BUSINESS ANALYST
- FINANCIAL ANALYST
- BUSINESS ADVISER
- TAX ACCOUNTANT
- RISK MANAGER
- TREASURER
- FUNDS MANAGER
- CREDIT CONTROL MANAGER
- INSOLVENCY PRACTITIONER
- GENERAL LEDGER
- PAYROLL
- CASHIER
- FIXED ASSETS - GENERAL LEDGER
- ACCOUNTS PAYABLE
- ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

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The Areas of Professional Competency

Practice Competencies

Contextual Competencies

Behavioural Competencies

Foundation Competencies

Practice Competency
- Knowledge Application
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Organisation and Planning
- Quality Management
- Technology Management
- Information and Knowledge Management
- Resource Management
- Achievement Orientation
- Health and Safety

Elements of Behavioural Competency
- Professional Attitude
- Self Management/Time Management
- Human Resource Management
- Leadership
- Communication
- Collaborative Working
- Teamworking Skills
- Adaptability
- Negotiation and Influence
- Initiative
- Creativity
- Information Seeking
- Assertiveness

Elements of Contextual Competency
- Strategic Thinking
- Organisational Awareness
- Organisational Commitment
- Commercial/Market Awareness
- Finance
- Sustainable and Resilient Approach

3

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The Behavioural Competency Area – Elements and Indicators of Competency

B1	Professional Attitude: The upholding of a professional image cultivated from trust, mutual respect and behaviour becoming of a civil engineer.	
Indicators:		
Personal Attributes – Behaviours, skills, knowledge and attitudes		Score (1-5)
B1.1	Acts in an honest and open manner that earns and encourages the confidence of peers, colleagues and the public.	
B1.2	Respects and complies with all legal requirements and applicable codes.	
B1.3	Encourages others to respect and comply with all legal requirements and applicable codes	
B1.4	Demonstrates tact, control and objectivity, delivering only constructive criticism.	
B1.5	Treats all people and environments with sensitivity and fairness.	
B1.6	Operates with integrity and in a manner that does not embarrass himself/herself, the employer or the Institution.	
B1.7	Readily voices concern and/or challenges behaviour that contradicts an engineer's duty of care.	
B1.8	Provides a responsible and honest representation of all situations while respecting a person's or organisation's right to confidentiality.	
B1.9	Assesses current, varying and future social attitudes and assumes a socially appropriate approach.	
B1.10	Demonstrates a sense of pride, prudence and accountability in own work.	
B1.11	Recognises the value of CPD to the profession. Has a strong desire to learn and actively pursues personal professional development.	
	Total	
	Competency Score (Total ÷ 11)	

Range	Description
1	**None** Competency not demonstrated, or only basic awareness. Needs supervision/assistance.
2	**Low** Low but progressing awareness and demonstration. Would benefit from mentorship or greater experience.
3	**Good** Good awareness and demonstration of competency. Regularly demonstrates many of the indicators, may need to focus on specific attributes.
4	**Informed** Sound awareness, understanding and demonstration of competency.
5	**Model** Exemplary demonstration of competency.

B2	Self Management/Time Management: The ability to effectively manage personal workload and career	
Indicators:		
Personal Attributes – Behaviours, skills, knowledge and attitudes		Score (1-5)
B2.1	Works consistently with persistence and discipline.	
B2.2	Effectively prioritises and monitors own tasks, activities and performance with limited guidance.	
B2.3	Is aware of own learning and communication styles to make the best of strengths and compensate for weaknesses.	
B2.4	Able to manage competing demands without compromising quality, efficiency or focus.	
B2.5	Is aware of the chain of authority and upward communication channels.	
B2.6	Takes ownership for the development of own performance requirements and communicates own potential, values and drivers.	
B2.7	Portrays confidence and constructively identifies and acts upon unreasonable demands on time and resource.	
B2.8	Confidently works autonomously when appropriate.	
	Total	
	Competency Score (Total ÷ 8)	

Range	Description
1	**None** Competency not demonstrated, or only basic awareness. Needs supervision/assistance.
2	**Low** Low but progressing awareness and demonstration. Would benefit from mentorship or greater experience.
3	**Good** Good awareness and demonstration of competency. Regularly demonstrates many of the indicators, may need to focus on specific attributes.
4	**Informed** Sound awareness, understanding and demonstration of competency.
5	**Model** Exemplary demonstration of competency.

B3	Human Resource Management: The ability to effectively manage the workload and career of others through selection, retention, development, assessment, reward and interpersonal understanding.	
Indicators:		
Personal Attributes – Behaviours, skills, knowledge and attitudes		Score (1-5)
B3.1	Demonstrates patience and seeks to understand the motives and attitudes of others you have responsibility for.	
B3.2	Acts as a mentor and role model.	
B3.3	Proactively seeks to define and incorporate individual working, learning and communication styles and media.	
B3.4	Clearly sets and communicates to others challenging but achievable performance expectations.	
B3.5	Effectively matches people to task and takes a proactive approach to the development of others and the promotion of a healthy work-life balance.	
B3.6	Observes progress and performance and provides others with timely and constructive feedback and individual support.	
B3.7	Understands the processes of career development and is able to align individual and organisational goals.	
B3.8	Recognises and rewards initiative and good performance.	
B3.9	Recognises and harnesses the potential in others in line with the organisational strategy.	
B3.10	Manages conflict, moderates disputes and de-escalates situations.	
B3.11	Monitors the job satisfaction and wellbeing of others.	
	Total	
	Competency Score (Total ÷ 11)	

Range	Description
1	**None** Competency not demonstrated, or only basic awareness. Needs supervision/assistance.
2	**Low** Low but progressing awareness and demonstration. Would benefit from mentorship or greater experience.
3	**Good** Good awareness and demonstration of competency. Regularly demonstrates many of the indicators, may need to focus on specific attributes.
4	**Informed** Sound awareness, understanding and demonstration of competency.
5	**Model** Exemplary demonstration of competency.

B4	Leadership: The ability to create and convey vision and strategic direction through empowerment, inspiration and example.	
Indicators:		
Personal Attributes – Behaviours, skills, knowledge and attitudes		Score (1-5)
B4.1	Motivates and facilitates others through the provision of visible strategic direction.	
B4.2	Proactively takes the lead through the recognition and application of the appropriate leadership styles.	
B4.3	Is able to establish buy-in and gain the trust and confidence of others.	
B4.4	Works to make organisational vision and strategy a reality.	
B4.5	Creates and maintains energy and momentum for the achievement of goals and objectives.	
B4.6	Empowers other with advice and support. Lobbies on the behalf of others.	
B4.7	Encourages high performance in others.	
	Total	
	Competency Score (Total ÷ 7)	

Range	Description
1	**None** Competency not demonstrated, or only basic awareness. Needs supervision/assistance.
2	**Low** Low but progressing awareness and demonstration. Would benefit from mentorship or greater experience.
3	**Good** Good awareness and demonstration of competency. Regularly demonstrates many of the indicators, may need to focus on specific attributes.
4	**Informed** Sound awareness, understanding and demonstration of competency.
5	**Model** Exemplary demonstration of competency.

Government Communication
Professional Competency Framework

April 2013

| Government Communication Network

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

How to use this framework

This professional competency framework is designed for all professional communicators in government up to, and including, Grade 6. The framework is designed to help you broaden the range of skills you have and to make integrated working easier.

Professional communicators in the Senior Civil Service should refer to the leadership competencies covered in the Civil Service Competency Framework.

These competencies can be used for:

- **Recruitment and Selection**
  To help determine the job/person specification for roles when recruiting. Applicants will be measured against these competencies together with relevant Civil Service competencies at interview.

- **Performance Management**
  To define standards of performance and skill levels required for different roles.

- **Personal Development Plans**
  To help you plan your development and identify training needs.

- **Career Development**
  To inform the skills and knowledge you will need in your next role.

Introduction

Every day, government communicators deliver great work which supports communities and helps citizens understand their rights and responsibilities.

The challenge for communications staff is to deliver better communications with reduced resources. The opportunity to think creatively, review existing practices, harness the power of digital communications and run cost-effective campaigns should excite everyone who believes in our work.

Central to achieving this is a strong communications profession focused on raising standards and improving quality. Having a shared understanding of the competencies we need will be at the heart of this.

The new competencies for professional communicators complement and will be used in conjunction with the new Civil Service Competency Framework. Together they define not just what we do but how we do it, the skills we need now and those we are likely to need in the future.

I look forward to working with you as we use this framework to create an exceptional communication profession.

Alex Aiken
Executive Director of
Government Communication

How to use this framework

The competencies in this framework have been structured around the four stages of a strategic communication planning process: **Insight**, **Ideas**, **Implementation** and **Impact**.

This framework should be used in conjunction with the Civil Service Competency Framework (pictured right).

Each section starts with a reference to the Civil Service competencies most relevant for communicators, with examples of appropriate behaviours. There might be others relevant depending upon the role.

For each competency, we have identified core skills and knowledge applicable to all communicators.

The framework then includes specialist skills and knowledge specific to four communication disciplines:

- **Campaigns and Marketing**
- **Press and Media**
- **Digital**
- **Internal Communication**

This competency framework is designed to be flexible; the competencies are not exhaustive. There may be some roles and responsibilities within government communication where the framework might need to be supplemented with other specific skills and knowledge.

The competencies are cumulative – for example Grades 7/6 will be expected to demonstrate competencies at their own level as well as all those below.

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Competency 1: **Insight**

Gain an accurate and deep understanding of the issue(s). Use insight to identify target audiences and partners and to inform communication objectives, messages and solutions.

Civil Service Competency Framework

Highlighted below are competencies from the Civil Service Competency Framework relevant to the insight stage of planning communication.

AIOs/IOs (Civil Service Levels 1 & 2)	SIOs (Civil Service Level 3)	Grade 7/6s (Civil Service Level 4)
Are delivering communication activity and developing their career and key skills.	Have responsibility for managing communication strategies, projects and teams.	Are directing and leading larger communication programmes. Inspiring and enabling colleagues to excel.

Setting Direction
Seeing the Big Picture

Keep up-to-date with a broad set of issues relating to the work of the Department.

Gather information from a range of relevant sources inside and outside the Department to inform own work.

Making Effective Decisions

Undertake appropriate analysis to support decisions or recommendations.

Engaging People
Collaborating and Partnering

Demonstrate an interest in others and develop a range of contacts outside own team to help get the job done.

Setting Direction
Seeing the Big Picture

Be alert to emerging issues and trends which might impact or benefit own and team's work.

Develop an understanding of own area's strategy and how this contributes to Departmental priorities.

Changing and Improving

Actively encourage ideas from a range of sources and stakeholders and use these to inform thinking.

Setting Direction
Seeing the Big Picture

Anticipate economic, social, political, environmental and technological developments to keep activity relevant and targeted.

Identify implications of Departmental and political priorities and strategy on own area to ensure plans and activities reflect these.

Bring together views and perspectives of stakeholders to gain a wider picture of the landscape surrounding activities and policies.

Core

Core communication skills and knowledge applicable to all communicators.

AIOs/IOs (Civil Service Levels 1 & 2)	SIOs (Civil Service Level 3)	Grade 7/6s (Civil Service Level 4)

Review existing sources of insight (including previous communication activity) to understand the overall context for communication and audience influences/influencers.

Use insight to identify target audiences and partners, support decision making and help inform the overall communication approach.

Demonstrate an understanding of the communication objectives and how these support the overall policy objective.

Work with policy colleagues in a timely way to examine and define policy issues to be supported. Commission additional research to gain insight into issues, where required.

Develop measurable communication objectives to support the delivery of policy.

Use segmentation and mapping techniques to identify target audiences and potential partners.

Ensure strategies take into account the recommendations and lessons learnt from evaluations of previous campaigns.

Provide robust and deliverable communication advice to ministers and policy colleagues.

Promote and encourage the early integration of strategic communication and policy development.

Examine ministerial priorities to identify the role for communication and translate those priorities into measurable communication objectives.

Ensure communication objectives complement and support policy/ business objectives.

Build ongoing relationships with key stakeholders/ advocates/partners, to gather intelligence and build awareness of the overall context for communication.

Civil Service Competency Framework continued...

AIOs/IOs (Civil Service Levels 1 & 2)	SIOs (Civil Service Level 3)	Grade 7/6s (Civil Service Level 4)

Setting Direction
Making Effective Decisions

Identify a range of relevant and credible information sources and recognise the need to collect new data when necessary from internal and external sources.

Recognise patterns and trends in a wide range of evidence/data and draw key conclusions.

Engaging People
Collaborating and Partnering

Actively seek input from a diverse range of people.

Setting Direction
Changing and Improving

Effectively capture, utilise and share customer insight and views from a wide range of stakeholders to ensure better policy and delivery.

Making Effective Decisions

Weigh up data from various sources, recognising when to bring in experts/researchers to add to available information.

Draw together and present reasonable conclusions from a wide range of incomplete and complex evidence and data – able to act or decide even when details are not clear.

Engaging People
Collaborating and Partnering

Actively build and maintain a network of colleagues and contacts to achieve progress on objectives and shared interests.

Communication disciplines

Additional skills and knowledge applicable to a specific communication discipline.

AIOs/IOs (Civil Service Levels 1 & 2)	SIOs (Civil Service Level 3)	Grade 7/6s (Civil Service Level 4)

Campaigns and Marketing

Interpret quantitative and qualitative data to identify stakeholder and audience insights.

Develop a strong understanding of customer/audience insights and how these can drive behaviour change.

Draw on behavioural insights to provide strategic advice to ministers and policy colleagues on campaigns.

Understand the extent of the role communication can play in supporting behaviour change, and the benefits/risks of alternative approaches (such as legislation).

Press and Media

Maintain an awareness of the news agenda and emerging news events.

Understand how to optimise audience reach through a mix of media channels, including news aggregators.

Review communication and media plans to ensure activities reflect policy developments and the emerging news agenda.

Understand and interpret the emerging news agenda and factors which will affect this agenda.

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INTRODUCTION

While clinical leadership is not a new concept, the need to optimise leadership potential across the healthcare professions and the critical importance of this to the delivery of excellence and improved patient outcomes, is now increasingly echoed by clinicians, managers and politicians within the UK and internationally. The Government's Health and Social Care Bill published in January 2011 signals a time of significant change for the NHS in England, with unprecedented levels of power and responsibility being devolved to clinicians. To enable this change to take place successfully and to support clinicians in this very important role we will need to further develop the leadership capacity within the system.

The Secretary of State for Health Andrew Lansley said recently, "Leadership in the Health Service cannot be about one person at the very top. It needs leaders at every level, in every institution and in every profession. And the people that I believe, first and foremost, should be leading the NHS are clinicians: GPs, hospital doctors, nurses, pharmacists, allied health professionals, scientists. We need people in every area to step up to the plate and lead. No profession can be left out if we are to deliver truly integrated, high quality healthcare for everyone in the country".

We wholeheartedly support this view and believe that pharmacy professionals already make a strong contribution to the delivery of patient care across the whole NHS, in primary care, secondary care, in education and research, and in the pharmaceutical industry. However, the pharmacy workforce has the potential to take on greater responsibility for optimising the use of medicines, promoting public health and wellbeing, and contributing to new clinical services, which will ultimately deliver better care for patients.

Opportunities exist to improve the education and training of pharmacy professionals and develop career pathways so that practitioners, from the point of registration and beyond, have the ability, confidence and skill-set to deliver more efficient, safer and higher quality care to patients and the public.

This Leadership Competency Framework for pharmacy professionals (LCFP), is based on the Medical Leadership Competency Framework[2] and is congruent with the Clinical Leadership Competency Framework[3] being used by the other clinical professions in the UK and the new NHS Leadership Framework[4], which applies to all staff working within the NHS.

It consists of five domains supported by a range of pharmacy based examples in practice, learning and development opportunities that will help pharmacy professionals to acquire the leadership competence required to meet the challenges described. As a model it emphasises the responsibility of all practising clinicians to seek to contribute to the leadership process and to develop and empower the leadership capacity of colleagues.

This document is designed to be read and used in conjunction with relevant professional, service and corporate documents such as policy, curricula guidance, standards and frameworks related to education and training, learning and development activity and performance assessment tools.

Helen Gordon
Chief Executive,
Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Paul W Long
Project Director, Clinical Leadership
Competency Framework Project,
NHS Institute of Innovation and Improvement

Professor Peter Spurgeon
Project Director, Enhancing
Engagement in Medical Leadership,
NHS Institute of Innovation and Improvement

1 Launch of Report from The King's Fund Commission on the Future of Leadership and Management in the NHS, May 2011.

2 NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (2010) Medical Leadership Competency Framework. 3rd ed. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement Coventry.

3 Department of Health (2011) Clinical Leadership Competency Framework. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement Coventry.

4 Department of Health (2011) NHS Leadership Framework. NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement Coventry.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR PHARMACY PROFESSIONALS

Leadership and pharmacy professionals

Leadership is a key part of all clinicians' work regardless of their professional sector and setting. In the complex world of healthcare the belief that a single person is the leader or manager is far from reality. Leadership is a competency-based behaviour that has to come from everyone involved in healthcare.

Pharmacy staff work in multidisciplinary environments focused on the needs and safety of patients and where collective leadership is the responsibility of the team. Whilst there is a formal leader of the team who is accountable for the performance of the team, the responsibility for identifying problems, solving them and implementing the appropriate action is shared by everyone. Within a shared leadership model, leadership passes from individual to individual along the patient's pathway of care.

The statutory body with responsibility for regulation of the pharmacy professionals is the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), which has the lead role in ensuring practitioners are fit for practise and thus able to be registered. Behaviours that all pharmacy professionals should demonstrate are described in the various policy, guidance, standards of proficiency, standards of education, codes of conduct and ethical behaviour set down by the GPhC. For more information please visit **www.pharmacyregulation.org**

While the primary focus is on pharmacy professionals' practice all pharmacy professionals work in systems and within organisations and they have a direct and far-reaching impact on patient experiences and outcomes. Pharmacy professionals have a responsibility to contribute to the effective running of the organisation in which they work and to its future direction. The development of leadership competence needs to be an integral part of a pharmacy professionals' training and learning.

The Leadership Competency Framework for Pharmacy Professionals is built on the concept of **shared leadership** where leadership is not restricted to people who hold designated leadership roles, and where there is a shared sense of responsibility for the success of the organisation and its services. Acts of leadership can come from anyone in the organisation, as appropriate at different times, and are focused on the achievement of the group rather than of an individual.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Leadership Competency Framework for Pharmacy Professionals applies to all pharmacy professionals at every stage of their professional journey: from the time they enter formal training, become qualified as a practitioner and throughout their continuing professional development as experienced practitioners.

There is no universal or common pathway followed by all pharmacy professionals, hence the way they demonstrate competence and ability will vary according to the career trajectory and their level of experience and training. Nevertheless, all competences should be capable of being achieved at all career stages, dependent on the context of their role and practice. Within the various developmental routes for each profession some core processes have been identified and are used throughout the Leadership Competency Framework (LCFP). These are as:

STUDENT – pre-registration entry level formal education

PRACTITIONER – qualified or registered professional

EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER – practitioner with greater complexity and responsibility in their role

Using this spectrum as a guide, examples are given throughout the framework to provide users with context in which they are able to relate their practice. All domains and elements of the framework are dynamic and apply to all students, pharmacy professionals in training, experienced practitioners and consultant practitioners. However, the application of and opportunity to demonstrate, the competences in the leadership framework will differ according to the career stage of the pharmacy professional and the type of role they fulfil. The context in which competence can be achieved will become more complex and demanding with career progression.

All students will have access to relevant learning opportunities within a variety of situations including:

* peer interaction
* group learning
* clinical placements
* activities and responsibilities within the university
* involvement with charities, social groups and organisations

All of these situations can provide a pharmacy student with the opportunity to develop experience of leadership, to develop their personal styles and abilities, and to understand how effective leadership will have an impact on the system and benefit patients as they move from learner to practitioner.

Practitioners or qualified pharmacy professionals are very often involved in work relating to patients, customers and other staff and are the ones who are experiencing how day-to-day healthcare works in action. They often undertake more education, training and professional development opportunities to further consolidate and develop their skills and knowledge in everyday practice. They are uniquely placed to develop experience in management and leadership, effective relationships with other people, departments and ways of working; and to influence how patients experience healthcare alongside improving processes and systems of care delivery. Specific activities such as clinical audit and research also offer the opportunity to learn leadership and management skills. With all this comes the need to understand how their practice and focus of care contributes to the wider healthcare system, along with the evidence base to support them.

Experienced practitioners hold more complex roles and have greater responsibility. Pharmacy professionals need to understand how each area of the wider healthcare system plays its part in care delivery. Experienced pharmacy professionals develop their leadership abilities through delivery of services and practices, by working with colleagues in other settings and on projects. Familiarity with a specific focus of care enables them to work beyond their immediate setting and to look for further ways to improve healthcare for patients and colleagues. As established members of staff, area teams, company or Trust directors or as pharmacy owners and partners, they are able to develop their leadership abilities by actively contributing to the running of the organisation and to the way care is provided in complex systems and populations.

DESIGN

Delivering services to patients, service users, carers and the public is at the heart of the Leadership Competency Framework for Pharmacy Professionals. Practitioners work hard to improve services for people. The word 'patient' is used generically to cover patients, service users, customers and all those who receive healthcare. The word 'other' is used to describe all colleagues from any discipline and organisation, as well as patients, service users, carers and the public.

There are five **domains** highlighted below. To deliver appropriate, safe and effective services it is essential that any pharmacy professional is competent in each of the domains. Within each domain there are four **elements** and each of these elements is further divided into four **competency statements** that describe the activity all pharmacy professionals should be able to demonstrate (outlined in this document).

1. DEMONSTRATING PERSONAL QUALITIES
1.1 Developing self awareness
1.2 Managing yourself
1.3 Continuing personal development
1.4 Acting with integrity

2. WORKING WITH OTHERS
2.1 Developing networks
2.2 Building and maintaining relationships
2.3 Encouraging contribution
2.4 Working within teams

3. MANAGING SERVICES
3.1 Planning
3.2 Managing resources
3.3 Managing people
3.4 Managing performance

4. IMPROVING SERVICES
4.1 Ensuring patient safety
4.2 Critically evaluating
4.3 Encouraging improvement and innovation
4.4 Facilitating transformation

5. SETTING DIRECTION
5.1 Identifying the contexts for change
5.2 Applying knowledge and evidence
5.3 Making decisions
5.4 Evaluating impact

Each section of this document starts with an overview of the domain. Each domain has four elements, and each element is further described as four competences to be attained.

4. IMPROVING SERVICES

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians showing effective leadership make a real difference to people's health by delivering high quality services and by developing **improvements to services**. To do so, they must demonstrate effectiveness in:

- Ensuring patient safety
- Critically evaluating
- Encouraging improvement and innovation
- Facilitating transformation

4.1 ENSURING PATIENT SAFETY
- Identify and quantify the risk to patients using information from a range of sources
- Use evidence, both positive and negative, to identify options
- Use systematic ways of assessing and minimising risk
- Monitor the effects and outcomes of change

4.2 CRITICALLY EVALUATING
- Obtain and act on patient, carer and service user feedback and experiences
- Assess and analyse processes using up-to-date improvement methodologies
- Identify healthcare improvements and create solutions through collaborative working
- Appraise options, and plan and take action to implement and evaluate improvements

4.3 ENCOURAGING IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION
- Question the status quo
- Act as a positive role model for innovation
- Encourage dialogue and debate with a wide range of people
- Develop creative solutions to transform services and care

4.4 FACILITATING TRANSFORMATION
- Model the change expected
- Articulate the need for change and its impact on people and services
- Promote changes leading to systems redesign
- Motivate and focus a group to accomplish change

4.1 Ensuring Patient Safety

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

STUDENT	PRACTITIONER	EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER
Taking part in patient safety or other clinical audits or other similar safety related activity	Taking part in clinical and/or other governance processes related to safety within the organisation	Developing systems to measure risk, and practices to diagnose and quantify risk
Identifying infection control policies and procedures while on clinical placement	Training others in safe working practices and a culture that facilitates safety through consultation with patients	Contributing to the development of clinical governance strategies and practices, and learning from relevant national collaborative projects
Taking part in risk assessment	Undertaking a risk assessment of a clinical service area	Developing and implementing audit tools for managing risk
Critically analysing significant events/ critical incidents to identify the effect on patient outcomes	Presenting risk-reduction proposals to multidisciplinary teams/departments	Developing strategies for promoting a safety culture within the service or organisation
Ensuring (personal) safe practice within clinical guidelines	Working to develop systems that are safe and reliable, and prevent harm from occurring	

EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE

STUDENT	Hospital pre-registration student G is on their ward rotation. One of the wards has had an outbreak of C.difficile and all staff on these wards must adhere to strict infection control regulations. They must wash hands thoroughly before entering the ward and again on leaving the ward. They are recommended to clean their hands with alcohol gel before and after visiting each patient and are advised to stay off the ward if they are pregnant, suffer from a low immune system or are showing signs of illness. These processes not only ensure they do not contract anything that can further spread around the hospital but also protect the patients on the ward from contracting additional illnesses/viruses brought in by the staff. The lead pharmacist for that ward has given the student responsibility to ensure that all staff members adhere to the policy.
PRACTITIONER	Pharmacist T has just joined a busy small chain pharmacy. The company is committed to providing a full range of essential and advanced services, with expectations for each pharmacy to meet weekly targets for Medicines Use Reviews, Stop Smoking interventions and NHS health checks. Pharmacist T decides that her pharmacy team is mismatched to the expected workload, and discovers the promotion of an experienced pharmacy technician to another pharmacy in the group. This absence has compromised the ability of the team to deliver the full range of extended services safely and effectively. With little done to develop the pharmacy workforce as a team in the past, she suggests to the superintendent pharmacist that she be given backfill for two days to write a development plan recognising the departure of a colleague as an opportunity to develop individuals within the pharmacy, and to confirm the case for recruitment. The plan includes basic leadership and management skills training for herself, sourced through the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC), and personal development plans for individual members of staff, resulting in improved skill-mix in the pharmacy, a more motivated and engaged workforce, reduced staff churn, targets were appropriately adjusted and improved turnover for the business. As a result, Pharmacist T is asked by the superintendent to advise her on generalising the approach across the chain.
EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER	Z is a senior pharmacy technician (education) whom was commissioned to lead the development of an on line training and competency tool for delivering medicines reconciliation services - with a focus on areas that do not have pharmacy input. This had been identified as a Strategic Health Authority issue as part of a patient safety partnership with the ABPI. The technician developed the face to face teaching package utilised for Medicines Management technicians, with the support of an external IT contractor. This required developing much greater understanding of the role of other clinical professionals involved in patient care in community hospital settings and mental health teams - Z shadowed nursing and other staff to develop a greater understanding of this. The on-line package required extensive testing and was then launched by Z, in front of the SHA Chief Executive - and the package is now commercially available.

4.2 Critically Evaluating

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

STUDENT	PRACTITIONER	EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER
Taking part in a service improvement project	Evaluating the outcome of changes following clinical audits or other audit activity	Supporting more junior colleagues to lead a service improvement project
Leading on a student union initiative, e.g. to improve student facilities	Generating ideas for service improvement for discussion within multidisciplinary teams/ in multi-agency settings and with patient groups	Working with healthcare colleagues and patients/service users and their representatives to establish the most appropriate means of collecting and analysing patient and carer feedback
Identifying factors affecting the delivery of a particular service using patient feedback	Using proven improvement techniques to develop service improvement proposals	Supporting colleagues to evaluate and audit the outcomes of healthcare improvement projects
Taking part in or leading an extracurricular initiative	Working with managers to support service change/improvement	Ensuring that protocols and policies are established and - followed consistently
Giving feedback on educational activities	Using patient reported outcome measure to inform potential improvements	

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Summary of Interview Respondents and Interview Guide

Transcript/ Interview	Name Code (removed for this thesis)	Sector	Style
1		Medical	F2F
		In-House	Notes
2		Health	F2F
		In-House	Notes
3		Trade Association	F2F
		In-House	Notes
4		Recruitment Consultant	F2F
			Notes
5		Freelance	F2F
			Notes + Email follow-up
6		Freelance	F2F
			Notes
7		Charity	Telephone
		In-House	Record + Notes
8		Agency	F2F
			Notes
9		Agency	F2F
			Record + Notes
10		Financial Services	F2F
		In-House	Record + Notes
11		Agency	F2F
			Record + Notes
12		House of Lords	F2F
			Notes
13		Trade Association (utility)	Telephone
		In-House	Record + Notes
14		Regional Assembly Member	Telephone
			Record + Notes
15		Motor Industry	Telephone
		In-House	Record + Notes
16		Freelance	Telephone
			Record + Notes
17		Trade Association (agriculture)	F2F
		In-house	Record and Notes
18		Agency	F2F
			Record + Notes
19		Agency	F2F
			Record + Notes
20		Agency	F2F
		(Internal Comms focus)	Notes

21	Freelance	Telephone Record + notes
22	Agency	F2F Record + Notes
23	In-House (education)	F2F Record + Notes
24	In-House (media)	Telephone Record + Notes
25	In-House (education)	F2F Typed Notes Error on Tape
26	Civil Servant	F2F Typed Notes
27	Freelance (motor industry) + academic	F2F Notes
28	In-House (defence)	F2F Record + Notes
29	Freelance/Councillor	F2F + Notes Error on Tape
30	Agency	F2F Record + Notes
31	In-House/Human Resource Management	Telephone Record + Notes

Interview Guide

Interview Questions (core)	Supporting RQs
Tell me your thoughts on the state of PA practice in the UK today? *Probe: How is it evolving if at all?*	RQ1
How would you sum up what PA practitioners do? *Probe: What sort of skills are necessary?*	RQ3
What sort of issues do you think affect PA practice?	RQ1
What are your feelings about PA as a profession and the concept of professionalism?	RQ1,2,3,4,5
What makes PA effective and what do you think effectiveness means to PA? *Probe: How does transparency fit into this?*	RQ1,2,3,4,5
What sort of things do you feel a PA practitioner needs to know? *Probe: Where do you feel a PA practitioner gets their knowledge from? Day to day knowledge (practical) and the knowledge that*	RQ2,3

explains the what and why of PA.

Probe: How is some of this shared or taught?

How should PA people behave?   RQ4

Probe: What about trying to bring together some of the behaviours,

skills and knowledge?

The questionnaire typology is below. This outlines the survey question, its type and from where derived, together with which thesis RQ it supports. Where the term All is used, it relates to attribute information which can be used to understand any patterns – for example between sectors or gender - relating to the five RQs. A code to the terms used can be found at the end of the table.

Question	T	C /O	Derived	RQ
1. How long have you worked in PA?	C	C	VMA Attributes	All
2.Which of the following best describes your work?	C	C	VMA Attributes	All
3.Which of the following best describes your job title?	C	C	VMA Attributes	All
4.Which of the following best describes the sector within which you work?	C	C	VMA (adapted) Attributes	All
5.What gender are you?	C	C	VMA Attributes	All
6.What age are you?	C	C	VMA Attributes	All
7.Rank where you spend most of your time undertaking PA work?	R	C	VMA (adapted) Attributes	All
8.How is PA viewed and understood by the senior management/board of your organisation? (combined with rating)	M	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	1
9.Rank the challenges facing PA industry in the coming years?	R	C	VMA (adapted)	1
10.Do PA practitioners need an agreed skill-set?	Ra	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	3
11.What skills are important to PA practice and how well do you feel PA practitioners perform these skills? (combined with	M	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	3

rating)

Question				
12.Are there any other skills that you feel are missing from the list? Add your suggestion here.	-	O	Original, Investigate and Opinion	3
13.Do PA practitioners need an agreed set of behaviours?	Ra	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	4
14.What behaviours are important to PA practice and how well do you feel PA practitioners perform these skills? (combined with rating)	M	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	4
15.Are there any other behaviours that you feel are missing from the list? Add your suggestions here.	-	O		4
16.PA practice needs its own body of knowledge eg theories and concepts that support what it does?	Ra	C	Original, Investigative and Opinion	2
17.Which statements below do you think help us understand what PA does, how it works and its role in society?	Ra	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	2
18.Some people believe that PA is a profession. Do you?	C	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	5
19.Which items below are important to PA being considered a profession?	Ra	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	2,3,4
20.Whether PA is a profession or not it still needs to be professional. Which elements below are important to practitioners delivering professional PA?	Ra	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	3,4
21.If there are any other ideas around delivering professional PA you would like to add do so here.	-	O	Original, Investigate and Opinion	3,4
22.Would PA benefit from a framework that brings together knowledge, skills and behaviours?	C	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion	2,3,4,5
23.Transparency is the topic of the moment but what does it mean practically speaking to delivering PA? Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?	L	C	Original, Investigate and Opinion Also requested by APPC specifically.	

T=Typology
- L=List (respondent offered a list of items any of which can be selected)
- C=Category(respondent only allowed to select one response)
- R=Rank(respondent asked to place something in order)
- Ra=Rate(respondent asked to use a rating device)
- M=Matrix(respondent to answer two or more questions together)

C/O=Open or Closed Questions

My name is Sarah Roberts-Bowman and I am a former public affairs and public relations practitioner now turned academic. I currently run the MA Public Relations at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts. This survey is part of my PhD research investigating the knowledge, skills and competencies for effective public affairs practice.

I am pleased to say that all the professional bodies (APPC, CIPR and PRCA) are kindly supporting me in distributing this survey and in carrying out this research. All information provided is confidential and anonymous. There are 23 questions (sounds awful I know) but trust me it should only take around 10 minutes of your time. There are a few ranking questions where you need just to concentrate on the numbering but apart from that I think it is fairly straight forward.

This survey opened towards the end of April as I thought some of you maybe enjoying purdah whilst watching the general election pan out. I am, however, keeping the survey open a few days longer as I know some people want to still participate even though as PA people post election will be incredibly busy. So if you could kindly grab a cup of tea and spare a few minutes to fill it in I would be incredibly grateful. If you want to contact me on any aspect of the survey, or just to talk about public affairs, then I can be found on s.roberts-bowman@lcc.arts.ac.uk. Thank you.

Public Affairs Competency Research

1. How long have you worked in public affairs? (Tick one)

○ Less than 1 year

○ 1-2 years

○ 3-5 years

○ 6-10 years

○ 11-14 years

○ 15 + years

2. Which of the following best describes where you work? (Tick one)

○ In-house private sector

○ In-house voluntary/NGO sector

○ In house public sector (including Quangos)

○ In-house trade associations

○ Agency

○ Freelancer

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

Public Affairs Competency Research

3. Which of the following best describes your job title? (Tick one)

○ Officer/Account Executive

○ Manager/Account Manager

○ Head/Director/Account Director

○ Senior Vice President/Director/MD

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

4. Which of the following best describes the sector within which you work or mark N/A if in agency (Tick one)

○ Not-for-Profit/Charity/Social Enterprise

○ Public Sector (central government, NHS, education)

○ Public Sector (local government)

○ Transport

○ IT/Technology/Telecoms

○ Retail/Wholesale

○ Utilities (inc. electricity, water)

○ Construction/Materials

○ Manufacturing

○ Travel/Leisure/Hospitality

○ Financial Services/Banking/Insurance

○ Pharmaceuticals

○ Professional Services (eg accountancy, legal services etc)

○ Not Applicable - Work in Agency

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

Public Affairs Competency Research

5. What gender are you?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Don't wish to say

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6. What age are you? (Tick one)

○ Under 25

○ 26-30

○ 31-40

○ 41-50

○ 51-60

○ 60+

7. Rank where you spend most time undertaking public affairs work? 1=high 5=low or mark N/A if you spend no time working in that location.   Drag and drop answer choices in order of preference with where you spend most of your time at the top. Numbers will automatically appear in the drop down menu.

[▼]	London (Westminster/Whitehall)	☐ N/A
[▼]	Devolved Institutions - Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Assembly	☐ N/A
[▼]	European Institutions (Brussels etc)	☐ N/A
[▼]	Local Government	☐ N/A
[▼]	Domestic governments of other countries	☐ N/A

8. How is public affairs viewed and understood by the senior management/board of your organisation? Use the drop down menu for answer choices.   Question not applicable if work in agency.

	Viewed	Understood
Your Organisation	[▼]	[▼]

Public Affairs Competency Research

9. Rank the challenges facing the public affairs industry in the coming years? 1=most important to 10=least important. Drag and drop answer choices in order of preference with the most important at the top. Numbers will automatically appear in the drop down menu.

▼	Reputation of the industry/lobbyists by the public
▼	Reputation of the industry/lobbyists by the media and policy makers
▼	Trust and integrity
▼	Regulation
▼	Complexity of policy making
▼	Changing skills required to do the job
▼	Measuring and evaluating public affairs
▼	Showing public affairs value
▼	Demand for greater management and leadership skills
▼	Demand for greater business and commercial understanding

Public Affairs Competency Research

10. Public Affairs practitioners need an agreed skill-set. Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

11. What skills are important to public affairs practice and how well do you feel public affairs practitioners perform these skills? Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

	Importance	Performance
Ability to communicate ideas (writing and verbally)		
Listening and processing complex information		
Building coalitions and working collaboratively		
Media understanding and its usage		
Social media understanding and its usage		
Problem solving		
Commercial understanding/how business works		
Issues management		
Project/Campaign research and planning		
Legislative knowledge		

12. Are there any other skills that you feel are missing from the list? Please add your suggestions here.

Public Affairs Competency Research

13. Do public affairs practitioners need an agreed set of behaviours? Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

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14. What behaviours are important to public affairs practice and how well do you feel public affairs practitioners perform these behaviours? Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

	Importance	Performance
Skilled influencer (inside the organisation)		
Skilled influencer (outside the organisation)		
Personal credibility (eg reliable, trustworthy, ethical)		
Collaborative and adaptable		
Resilient, motivated and energetic		
Socially aware and intuitive		
Intellectual curiosity		
Courage to challenge		
Decisive thinker		
Able to get on with a wide variety of people		

15. Are there any other behaviours that you feel are missing from the list? Please add your suggestions here.

16. Public affairs practice needs its own body of knowledge eg theories and concepts that suport what it does. Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

Public Affairs Competency Research

14. What behaviours are important to public affairs practice and how well do you feel public affairs practitioners perform these behaviours? Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

	Importance	Performance
Skilled influencer (inside the organisation)	▾	▾
Skilled influencer (outside the organisation)	▾	▾
Personal credibility (eg reliable, trustworthy, ethical)	▾	▾
Collaborative and adaptable	▾	▾
Resilient, motivated and energetic	▾	▾
Socially aware and intuitive	▾	▾
Intellectual curiosity	▾	▾
Courage to challenge	▾	▾
Decisive thinker	▾	▾
Able to get on with a wide variety of people	▾	▾

15. Are there any other behaviours that you feel are missing from the list? Please add your suggestions here.

16. Public affairs practice needs its own body of knowledge eg theories and concepts that suport what it does. Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.
▾

Public Affairs Competency Research

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17. Which statements below do you think help us understand what public affairs does, how it works and its role in society?

	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not Helpful
How persuasion is used to develop arguments eg facts, figures, case studies	○	○	○
How people create different realities and have different takes on the same situation	○	○	○
The role of debate, discussion and dialogue and how people make sense of things	○	○	○
The way resources get allocated in society	○	○	○
The way society creates different systems of governance and policy formation	○	○	○
How issues and crises emerge, grow and are shaped	○	○	○
The role of media and social media in society and its impact	○	○	○
The role of business and organisations generally in society	○	○	○
An understanding of different ethical traditions and ideas	○	○	○
How individuals and organisations build relations and ideas of stakeholder engagement	○	○	○

Public Affairs Competency Research

18. Some people believe that public affairs is a profession. Do you?

○ Yes

○ Don't Know

○ No

19. If you answered yes to the above question, which items below are important to public affairs being considered a profession. If you answered no go to the next question.

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Qualifications	○	○	○
Certification (eg accreditation by a professional body)	○	○	○
Membership of a professional body	○	○	○
Being accountable for the advice given	○	○	○
Being valued by wider society eg seen as a positive thing for democracy	○	○	○
Visible planning, research and evaluation	○	○	○
Having career pathways and options	○	○	○
Having an agreed body of knowledge	○	○	○
Having an agreed set of skills and behaviours	○	○	○

Public Affairs Competency Research

20. Whether you feel public affairs is a profession or not it still needs to be professional. Which elements below are important to practitioners delivering professional public affairs.

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Providing appropriate advice (even if it means saying something the client/management don't want to hear)	○	○	○
Objective setting focused on goals (eg attitudinal change, legislative goal)	○	○	○
Objective setting focused on process (eg number of MPs met)	○	○	○
Planning, research and evaluation	○	○	○
Using best practice approaches to communication	○	○	○
Exhibiting an agreed set of skills	○	○	○
Exhibiting an agreed set of behaviours	○	○	○
Delivering organisational value	○	○	○
Being effective (eg getting the right things done)	○	○	○
Networking and contacts	○	○	○

21. If there are any other ideas around delivering professional public affairs you would like to add do so here.

Public Affairs Competency Research

22. Would public affairs benefit from a framework that brings together knowledge, skills and behaviours?

○ yes

○ no

23. Transparency is the topic of the moment but what does this mean practically speaking to delivering public affairs. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below all of which start with the words Transparency means....... Use the drop down menu for your answer choice.

Level of Agreement

Public Affairs agencies clearly stating the names of clients they work for	[dropdown]
Organisations clearly stating that they do conduct public affairs activity	[dropdown]
Having public affairs objectives that you are happy to make available	[dropdown]
Having all public affairs activities including meetings, papers and letters made available	[dropdown]
Having all public affairs activities made available as above but detail deemed commercially confidential withheld	[dropdown]
Abiding by the Transparency of Lobbying Act (applicable to consultant lobbyists)	[dropdown]
Adhering to professional codes of conduct (eg APPC, CIPR, PRCA)	[dropdown]
Listing meetings with all policy advisors and makers (civil servants and ministers) but nothing else	[dropdown]
Abiding by agreed set standards of advocacy when engaging with those in public life (honesty, visibility, truthfulness)	[dropdown]
Not doing anything you wouldn't want made public	[dropdown]
Sometimes being in conflict with the principles of confidentiality	[dropdown]
Sometimes being in conflict with delivering effective public affairs	[dropdown]
Always being professional	[dropdown]

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A Public Affairs Competency Framework

Introduction

This is a proposed competency framework to capture the breadth and depth of PA practice and the knowledge, skills and behaviours that underpin the field. The policy landscape is becoming increasingly complex and this framework aims to throw light on the value and importance of public affairs to the organisation. It also showcases the attributes that public affairs practitioners bring to any organisation that can be directed accordingly.

Who is it for?

The framework is for all those who work in public affairs at every stage of their professional journey. There is no universal entry into public affairs and the framework is there to demonstrate the full range of capabilities necessary to be effective and many professionals may be able to show the competencies required for public affairs in different ways. Alternatively, professionals may be able to recognize where additional training and development may be needed.

Design

The framework has been built around seven domain areas highlighted below. Five of these relate specifically to the skills (competence) and behaviours (competency) necessary for the role. These five domain areas map explicitly to the five top-level competency areas suggested by the OECD and

competency experts that are necessary for successful careers and employability in the 21st century. This enables public affairs practitioners to see their skill-set more holistically and help think about the many different career opportunities that are available to them. One domain helps to capture the body of knowledge that supports public affairs practice, whilst the other relates to the context of practice and how different public affairs roles are shaped by different organisational and societal settings. Each domain area is supported by four competency statements (three for the body of knowledge) that provide more depth. These statements help to describe the activity that all public affairs professionals should be able to demonstrate, albeit at different levels of proficiency. It is recognized that for some roles there may be a greater or lesser focus on some competencies than others and that individual public affairs practitioners themselves may have role preferences to play to particular competency strengths and interest.
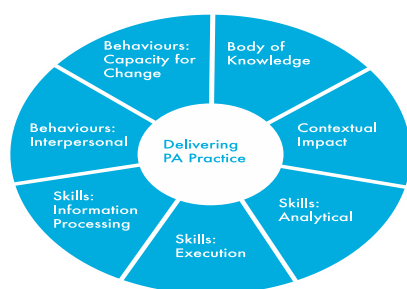
Application

This framework is seen as a supportive tool to help public affairs practitioners better understand themselves and their role. It is a developmental to help with continuous professional development, career progression and planning.

1.Body of Knowledge
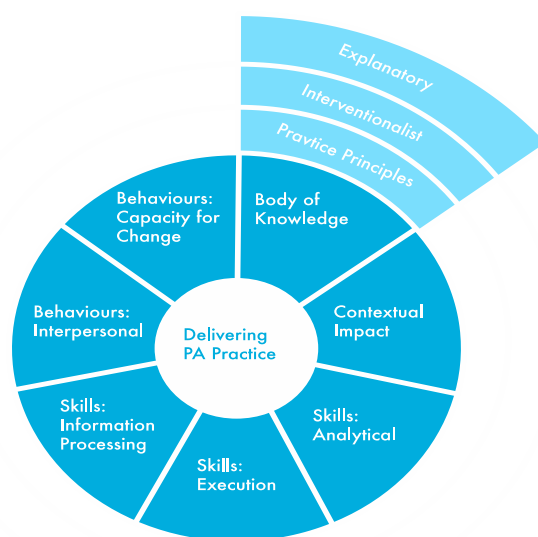
1.1.   Practice Principles Knowledge
- Understand the public policy landscape including the people, processes and procedures involved
- Ability to get the organisational and public policy world to make sense of each other
- Appreciate how to build, nurture and build social capital (links to Inter-personal competency)
- Commercial and operational acumen to connect public policy and the organisational world

Examples of Practice Principle Knowledge

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Understand the process of how a policy concept becomes law	Ability to identify the pressure points to influence policy based on political landscape	Bring past experience to understand how the political debate may evolve and the key players involved, their thinking and openness.

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Be able to write an Early Day Motion
Practitioner/Manager	Be able to write a policy paper that outlines the type of arguments necessary at various interventions of the political process
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Identify trends in the landscape, political priorities, scenario plan

1.2. Interventionist Knowledge

- Knowledge of communication theories including concepts of sender, message, receiver, channel; framing and all forms of discourse and dialogue
- Knowledge of persuasion theories and their application and the importance of ethical frameworks to inform thinking
- Knowledge of issues and crisis management tools and techniques and how to apply them
- Knowledge and application of stakeholder mapping, engagement and theories of relationships

Examples of Interventionist Knowledge

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Basic application of stakeholder identification for briefing purposes	Apply stakeholder mapping principles Use issues management models	Use appropriate framing and persuasive tools and adapt accordingly

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Generation of contact list for briefings and events around a given issue – knows how to research and identify individuals with an interest in a given subject
Practitioner/Manager	Prioritisation and categorization of individuals to create a bespoke contact programme and devise appropriate messaging.
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Brief and engage in dialogue with key players re-framing and adapting arguments according to the conversation

1.3. Explanatory or Transcendental Knowledge

- Sociological perspectives of social constructivism and structuration theories to understand society and how it operates and how public affairs is shaped and informed by this
- Organisational perspectives of systems theory to understand why organisations interact with their environments and the importance of public affairs
- Political perspectives through interest group theory and pluralist approaches to society that underpin why public affairs occurs and its importance to democracy

Examples of Explanatory Knowledge

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Be engaged with the wider political and society world.	Understand the importance of PA in societal context	Sound grasp of the corporate responsibility

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Reads five national newspapers and follows a minimum of six political trends blogposts
Practitioner/Manager	Digests a variety of sources of information and is able to identify the arguments and interest groups associated with a particular issue
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Heightened awareness of how societal and organizational issues connect with the political environment and takes responsibility for devising appropriate actions

2.Contextual Impacts
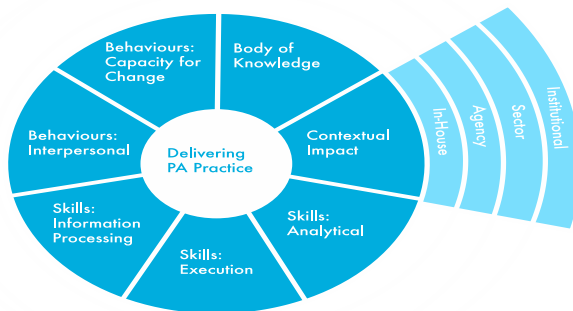
2.1. In-House
- Understand the organisation, its objectives and market in which it operates
- Appreciate organisational culture and the style of public affairs that is most effective
- Ability to influence inside the organisation (links to inter-personal competency) and to build consensus

Examples of In-House contexts

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Understands how role fits into departmental and business unit activities	Be able to create PA plans that match organisational need with the political world	Contributes to organizational strategy by bringing external perspectives to the board room

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Identification of political audiencies that have an interest in the organisation and its various business activities
Practitioner/Manager	Be able to prioritise political audiences and make connections to organizational priorities
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Ability to connect senior management with key political figures to discuss key organizational priorities

2.2. PA Agency

- Ability to research and understand multiple client issues, challenges and opportunities
- Appreciate the organisational culture and style of public affairs that is most effective for different clients
- Ability to influence and build confidence with clients (links to inter-personal competency) and to build consensus
- Understand requirements of new business and service requirements

Examples of agency contexts

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Be able to respond equally to the demands of different clients	Be able to pitch ideas and plans to clients	Be able to provide strategic advice and work collaboratively to achieve client objectives Identify new business opportunities

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Research the client, its issues and connect these to the legislative and public policy agenda
Practitioner/Manager	Devise strategies and tactics to deliver client objectives
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Future proof client needs and convert propositions to new business

2.3. Sector

- Recognize different public affairs challenges and opportunities presented by the public, private and not-for-profit sectors
- Understand which sectors and issues lend themselves better to public (loud) or non-public (quiet) public affairs activities
- Appreciate which sectors are more effective when working collaboratively in alliances rather than single entity

Examples of sector contexts

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Be able to research and identify the different political trends and policy issues affecting different sectors	Be able to connect different trends to organisational strategy.	Uses past experience to add additional insight, and uses relationships to enhance issue understanding.

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner has been asked to research a new client in the housing sector. He identifies the key policy players (think tanks, membership bodies) and is able to highlight the key issues and trends.
Practitioner/Manager	Manager is able take client issues and connects these to the issues and trends emerging from the housing secondary research and is able to devise a strategy and set of tactics to meet client objectives.
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Works with Manager to add in-depth relationship insight to the plan devised for the housing client by providing information that is not publically available through desk research.

2.4.   Institutional
- Understand the type of democratic system in which lobbying operates and the impact this has on lobbying actions
- Recognize the impact of regulatory authorities and other non-governmental bodies in shaping public policy
- Appreciate the power of civil society and public opinion in different democratic systems
- Be mindful to the relevant legal requirements in different countries and contexts

Examples of institutional contexts

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Understands the ethics and role of lobbying in the country of operation.	Able to identify and understand the role of the various institutions and the influence of civil society in lobbying in the country of operation.	Able to compare and contrast the different institutional impacts of lobbying in different countries and to deliver best practice approaches

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Able to identify the key bodies involved in lobbying on any particular subject in the country of operation and understand the relevant codes of conduct
Practitioner/Manager	Able to prioritise the key bodies involved in lobbying on a particular subject and the importance of civil society and public opinion regarding particular issues
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Able to bring past experience of working across borders and cultures to shape lobbying strategy

3. Skills: Analytical
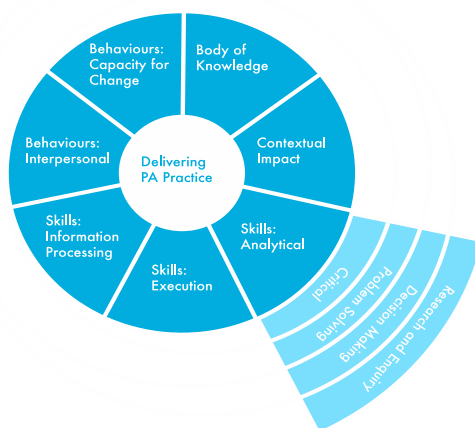
3.1.   A critical approach

- Conceptualize, analyze and evaluate a wide variety of information to identify reputational and operational issues derived from the public policy environment
- Show clarity and accuracy of thinking and communicate this clearly in writing and verbally
- Draw on a wide variety of information sources including observation, experience and empirical data to provide sound evidence

Examples of critical approaches

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Demonstrate an ability to question all sources of information researched and its provenance	Ability to prioritise and identify primary and most relevant sources of information to build arguments	Bring past experience in resolving issues and identifying opportunities to solving contemporary problems

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Show awareness of the difference between primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information; the role quantitative and qualitative data and the pros and cons of both when identifying issues
Practitioner/Manager	Ability to use authorative sources and discount others to construct persuasive arguments and be able to tackle counter-arguments. Use evidence appropriately
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Take evidence and make stronger by adding additional insight based on relationships and past experience of what will work

3.2. Problem solving

- Identify and define public policy risks and opportunities that will impact on the organisation
- Generate alternative public affairs solutions for consideration and discussion
- Evaluate and select public affairs solutions through consultation and negotiation
- Implement public affairs solutions identifying relevant resources and appropriate public affairs tools and techniques and getting commitment to delivery

Examples of problem solving

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Thinks around specific PA tactics generating a range of alternatives	Logically assess the current situation and devise appropriate PA aims and objectives	Capable of problem solving by applying critical thinking and by leveraging past experiences and networks

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Come up with a range of specific options (cost, quality, timings) against given PA tactics
Practitioner/Manager	Devise a range of PA tactics for consideration to solve particular issues
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Evaluate a range of PA options, take action and reflect on solutions post implementation to inform actions for the future

3.3. Decision-making

- Take decisions based on reason and evidence yet recognize that intuition and experience plays a part in public affairs strategy
- Base decisions on ethics and values that underpin a professional approach to public affairs
- Communicate decisions openly and transparently with relevant stakeholders

Examples of decision making

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Contribute ideas to PA decisions on strategy and tactics	Make timely, logical, informed and evidenced-based PA decisions. Aware of personal biases	Takes responsibility for team decision making and execution and recognizes wider impact.

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Demonstrate through time, cost and quality a specific PA tactic can be implemented and make a recommendation
Practitioner/Manager	Create PA strategies that have clear aims and SMART objectives that are based on evidence and research
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Sign-off and agree all public affairs strategies and plans creating powerful arguments to get buy-in from internal stakeholders

3.4. Research and Inquiry

- Undertake research using a variety of on and off line sources, databases and other channels such as newspaper articles and parliamentary records
- Show a systematic and methodical approach to intelligence gathering and environmental scanning
- Ability to recognize the difference between primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information
- Understand and conduct quantitative and qualitative research approaches

Examples of research and inquiry

New entrant/Junior Practitioner
Be able to identify and pull together the most appropriate sources of information on public policy issues

Practitioner/Manager

Synthesise information and be able to provide an overview of viewpoints on any given subject

Experienced Practitioner/Director
Determine gaps in information and commission appropriate public policy and market research activities

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner

Show awareness of the difference between primary, secondary and tertiary sources of information; the role quantitative and qualitative data and the pros and cons of both when identifying issues

Practitioner/Manager

Ability to make sense of complex information and convey it simply

Experienced Practitioner/Director

Take simplified information and add insight based on past experience

4.Skills: Execution
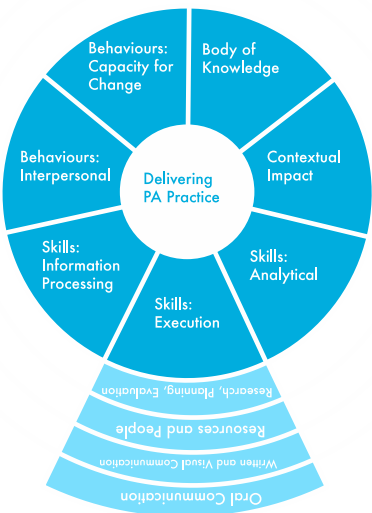
4.1. Research, Planning and Evaluation

- Identify and use appropriate research and environmental scanning techniques in order to devise a strategic approach to communication campaign planning that supports organisational objectives
- Implement using planning frameworks involving objectives, messages, target audiences, strategy and tactics and formative and summative evaluation
- Devise plans against a range of different scenarios including proactively managing issues and reactively mitigating crises
- Actively use stakeholder mapping techniques to support implementation processes

Examples of research, planning and evaluation

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Demonstrate understanding of the planning process including objective setting and messaging	Devise plans that can be segmented against different audience categories	Oversea how different plans can be leveraged to maximum benefit, avoid duplication and over-targeting of audiences

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Recognises the components of effective plans including objectives, messaging, audiences, tactics, evaluation
Practitioner/Manager	Ability to implement the components of effective plans and how these are aligned
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Evaluate and make adjustments to plans depending on the changing political and organizational landscape

4.2. Managing resources and people

- Understand the resources (people, equipment, suppliers and other assets) necessary to implement a public affairs strategy for relationship building and campaign specific activities
- Ensure budgets are accurately devised and controlled by putting in place appropriate monitoring systems
- Sequence public affairs activities within appropriate timescales relevant to on-going relationship or campaign specific activities
- Get the best out of suppliers, colleagues or direct reports by adopting a commitment to quality and continuous improvement

Examples of managing resources and people

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Be able to work with a wide variety of people including suppliers	Ability to get the best out of others by encouraging contributions	Nurturing and development staff and enabling professional development

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Communicate effectively with suppliers so they know what they have to deliver
Practitioner/Manager	Listen to others when devising plans and curate best ideas; ability to deliver plans on time and on budget
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Representing views of the team to senior management and beyond; sharing best practice by nurturing and developing new entrants

4.3. Written and visual communication
- Ability to communicate ideas clearly, informatively and persuasively using language relevant to the audience
- Understand the role of visual tools to convey ideas and encourage engagement and when it is appropriate to use them
- Recognize cultural, community and societal issues involved in communication and to be sensitive to these

Examples of written and visual communication

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Can write clearly, grammatically and in the appropriate tone	Can produce a range of different material appropriate to different audiences	Ability to add value by bringing additional insights to arguments

Examples in Action

|	
New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Can write an Early Day Motion; draft a letter to a Member of Parliament; write an article for the agency blogpost about a particular policy
Practitioner/Manager	Can write policy briefings for government ministers and convey key arguments and evidences in writing
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Can hold face-to-face meetings with government ministers and convey key arguments and evidences verbally

4.4. **Oral communication**
- Ability to communicate ideas verbally to a wide variety of people using the most appropriate tone and language style
- Confidence to present ideas verbally in both a public and private setting
- Demonstrate empathy and understanding by modifying language to the situation

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Can express themselves clearly in a variety of settings, in particular with colleagues	Can convey arguments to junior and middle-ranking policy and decision makers	Ability to add value by bringing additional insights and to convey arguments at the highest level

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Speaks confidently at team meetings; ability present ideas to the team using powerpoint or other visual tools
Practitioner/Manager	Can hold face-to-face briefings with junior and middle ranking government ministers and civil servants and convey key arguments and evidences
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Can hold face-to-face meetings with the most senior figures in government and the civil service and convey key arguments and evidences verbally

5.Skills: Information Processing
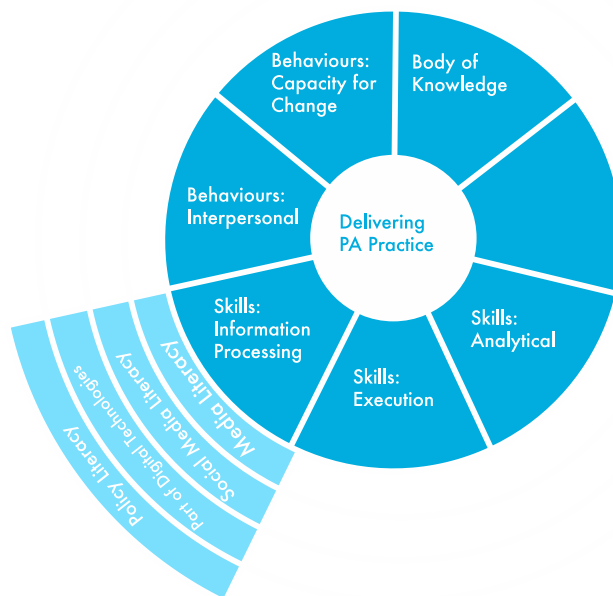
5.1. Media literacy
- Understand the range of media channels, their audiences and their needs
- Use the media as a source of information and gauge of public opinion
- Recognize role media play in agenda setting and shaping public policy
- Integrate media relations as part of public affairs activity if appropriate

Examples of Media Literacy

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Understand the breadth and depth of the British media and their respective media agendas	Use the media to identify trends and patterns in thinking and how to use the media as an agenda setting tool as part of a PA plan	Bring additional insight based on past experience and previous campaigns to ascertain the value and importance of the media in any given situation

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Ability to read a range of media reports and generate a news digest of key issues against a given subject
Practitioner/Manager	Ability to identify the appropriate media platforms to integrate into a PA strategy
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Determine whether media should form part of a PA strategy

5.2. Social Media literacy

- Understand the range of social media channels, their audiences and how to use as an engagement tool
- Use social media as a source of information, analyze data, identify trends and to gauge public sentiment
- Recognize the role social media plays in agenda setting and shaping public policy
- Integrate social media activities as part of public activity if appropriate

Examples of Social Media Literacy

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Understand the range of digital activity in respect of any given subject	Use online tools to identify trends and patterns in thinking and how to use digital platforms as an agenda setting tool as part of a PA plan	Bring additional insight based on past experience and previous campaigns to ascertain the value and importance of the media in any given situation

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Ability to use a range of different digital platforms
Practitioner/Manager	Ability to identify the appropriate online platforms to integrate into a PA strategy
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Determine whether integrating a digital component is appropriate to the subject of a PA campaign

5.3.   Understanding of impact of digital technologies

- Recognize the changed digital landscape and the new forms of communication challenges and possibilities
- Understand how the public affairs function may be impacted by new technology
- Use data management techniques to help improve efficiency of the public affairs function

Examples of impact of digital technologies

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
To use technology to maintain appropriate databases of key contacts and information	To understanding the implications and management of various data software packages	To ensure that all client information is held appropriately and safely

Examples in Action

|	
New entrant/Junior Practitioner	To update all key contact and client information manually and electronically
Practitioner/Manager	To review periodically all contact and client information manually and electronically to ensure all data protection guidance is applied
Experienced Practitioner/Director	To be responsible for all data safety policies

6.Behaviours: Interpersonal
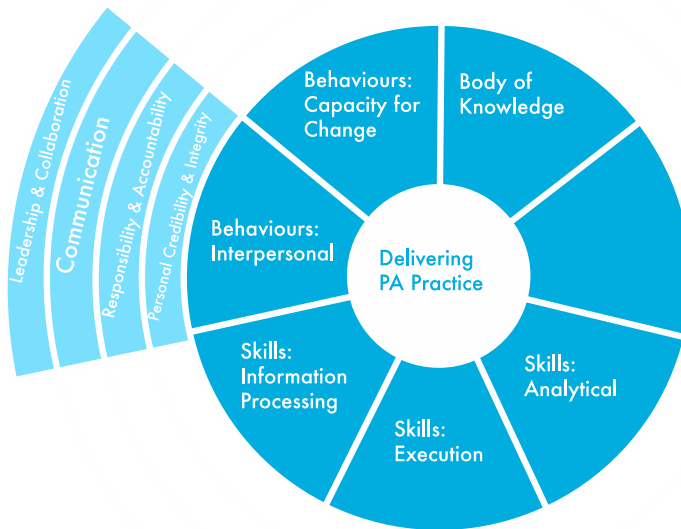
6.1. Personal Credibility and Integrity
- Act honestly and truthfully being sensitive to wider organisational, societal, cultural and individual beliefs
- Ensure public affairs practice is shaped by personal and professional ethics and values in accordance to the Code of Conduct of the APPC, CIPR and PRCA but more importantly individual values
- Demonstrate a responsible approach to lobbying by being transparent, providing accurate information and an understanding of wider stakeholder interests
- Be the conscious of the organisation and act to remedy and speak out against inappropriate actions

Examples of Personal Credibility and Integrity

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Able to articulate professional codes of conduct	Ensure responsible approaches to lobbying are embedded into PA strategies and campaigns	To ensure that all people operate within the guidance of professional values and ethics

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Act in an open and transparent manner when conducting PA activity – act honestly and legally. When in doubt will ask. Be open to taking on a position of responsibility.
Practitioner/Manager	Ensure all PA activity is shaped by transparency and openness and can stand up to external scrutiny. Take part in strategy reviews. Act as a mentor.
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Act on information that could cause the PA team or strategy to be regarded as acting unethically; and act on all information that can improve daily operations. Identify suboptimal practice and take corrective action.

6.2.   Responsibility and accountability

- Embed the concept of responsibility into all public affairs activities by recognizing a duty of care to oneself, other individuals, the organisation or client and society
- Speak out if values and ethics that underpin responsible lobbying are being compromised and organisational reputation is threatened
- Recognize national, regional and local cultural and legal differences

Examples of Responsibility and accountability

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Ensure actions do not put yourself or team members in harm	Ensure actions do not harm the team or organisation	Ensure all PA deliver takes into account national, regional and cultural differences. Be

	mindful to wider sensitivities.

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Have confidence to speak out if asked to do something that it is believed will cause harm to the individual
Practitioner/Manager	Ensure that PA implementation is not compromised and to raise conflicts of interest due to legal, cultural, national differences of execution
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Determine whether PA delivery is compromised in terms of responsibility and accountability and to take appropriate action

6.3. Communication

- Connect with a broad range of people showing emotional intelligence and empathy
- Write and speak effectively in a variety of settings using a style appropriate to the audience
- Build and maintain relationships with those inside and outside the organisation
- Skilled influencer inside and outside the organisation

Examples of Communication

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Ability to voice ideas at team meetings	Supporting and nurturing others by sharing learning and being empathetic to their needs	Build wide range of networks to enhance social capital inside and outside the organisation

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Be able to write and speak in a variety of PA settings – team meetings, preparation of written material such as EDMs
Practitioner/Manager	Speak effectively to a wide range of people changing style as appropriate. Demonstrate the value social capital by bringing in additional insight.
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Be able to operate effectively at board level. Demonstrate the value of an extensive network of contacts to help bring insight to the policy landscape.

6.4. Leadership and Collaboration

- Work collaboratively in a variety of team settings by contributing and encouraging the contribution of others
- Be able to set direction and take decisions appropriately
- Lead by example in managing public affairs activities underpinned by values and ethical approaches
- Demonstrate sound judgment and be able to operate

Examples of Leadership and collaboration

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Be comfortable working in an individual and group setting. Capable of delivering work in both settings.	Able to devise PA strategies through collaboration and bringing in the views and ideas of others, yet still establishing a firm direction	Motivates and facilitates others through the provision of strategic vision. Able to adapt leadership style.

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Being prepared to take on different roles in order to learn and develop
Practitioner/Manager	Be able to determine the best roles for different team members in order to devise the best PA solution
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Able to take on wider organizational or agency roles to broaden remit of PA including operational and financial responsibilities

7.Behaviours: Capacity of Change
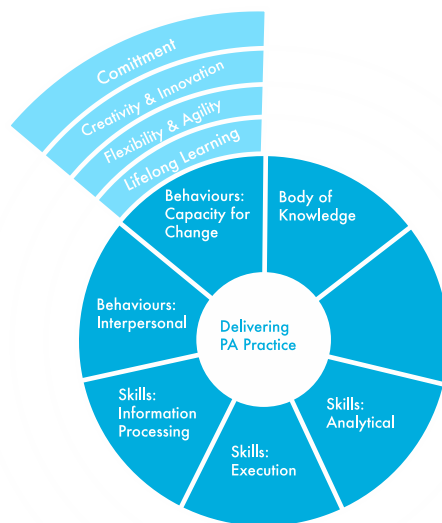
7.1. Lifelong Learning

- Commits to continuous professional development and lifelong learning in order to be responsive to changes in demands placed on public affairs
- Take ownership of career pathways and opportunities by improving self-awareness
- Recognize public affairs as part of strategic communication and reputation management and the opportunities this presents for personal and professional development

Examples of Lifelong Learning

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Develop cross sector or organisational experience by going on placement	Seeking feedback on performance and opportunities to learn from other fields. Review own practice.	Running and taking part in senior management mentoring programmes.

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Identify a peer to organise a job share
Practitioner/Manager	Refresh skills by attending training and development sessions
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Identify industry mentors and commit to building business knowledge

7.2. Flexibility and Agility

- Able to change direction quickly in response to a change in circumstances whether from within the organisation or from the wider environment
- Readily adapts thinking, behaviour and skills to new or unfamiliar environments
- Systematically evaluates the impact of change and views change as an opportunity
- Feels comfortable with changing expectations

Examples of Flexibility and agility

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	**Practitioner/Manager**	**Experienced Practitioner/Director**
Identify how different PA tactics can be used in different settings	Ability to modify PA plans quickly in response to changes in the policy landscape	Identify external threats to the organization and when necessary work with senior management on change programmes both inside and outside the organisation

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Attend brainstorming sessions in other parts of the organization or agency to identify opportunities and to share ideas
Practitioner/Manager	Consciously work in a different area of the organization to boost skills
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Become a member of the change communications team or other organizational or agency wide initiatives

7.3. Creativity and Innovation
- Embed creativity and innovation across all aspects of public affairs practice
- Strives to think in an original manner and remains open to original thought
- Looks to other disciplines and sectors for inspiration

Examples of creativity and innovation

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Read widely and bring different examples of campaigns, approaches or trends to the table for discussion	Be prepared to pilot and test different PA approaches and not be afraid if some tactics fail (adopt the 80:20 rule)	Draw on past experience and knowledge to evaluate creative approaches and encourage senior management of their value

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Suggest a tactic used in a consumer campaign that can be adapted for organizational or client use
Practitioner/Manager	Identify at least one 'different' type of tactic per PA strategy to test viability and impact
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Create a culture where 'calculated' risk is encouraged and ideas welcomed

7.4. Commitment
- Manage yourself by showing a commitment to improving skills and adopting appropriate PA behaviours
- Commit to continuous professional development
- Demonstrate a healthy approach to managing the pressures of working in PA building resilience
- Manage deadlines and act with integrity

Examples of creativity and innovation

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Practitioner/Manager	Experienced Practitioner/Director
Be punctual, courteous and show respect for	Manage personal and team deadlines and	Create a culture that ensures the pressures

| others. | deliver against time, cost and quality. | of working in PA is recognized and that staff are supported and nurtured. |

Examples in Action

New entrant/Junior Practitioner	Come prepared to meetings. Handle negative feedback positively viewing this as an opportunity for development
Practitioner/Manager	Learn from each PA strategy and client and evaluate what works and what works less well and share this learning
Experienced Practitioner/Director	Put in place a training and development programme to build the competencies of the team