

M.A. Thesis

Accounts of PR Practices and Challenges by Senior Managers: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Small nonprofit organizations are faced with limited resources and budgets for setting and reaching their goals. Some are nevertheless able to mitigate these challenges and achieve success. This thesis examines how this can be done. Organizations with excellent public relations programs have been found to be successful in achieving their goals (Grunig et al., 2002).

Through the lens of the excellence model, this thesis analyzes, using in depth, semi-structured interview data, how senior managers of seven successful small nonprofits account for their success and address challenges as well as how their practices reflect the excellence model. This thesis does not test the excellence model in the context of small nonprofits, but rather attempts to establish recommendations for communication and PR success for small nonprofits based on what is learned from a small group of successful organizations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Successful organizations have been found to emphasize the value of public relations (PR) and effective communication by integrating them into strategic management in the pursuit of satisfying organizational goals (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). These goals exist in an organization's mission statements, mandates, and communication approaches. They take into account internal (those invested in the organization such as employees) and external (their key publics) stakeholder perceptions and influences about what the organization's values and activities should be and why (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). Success in organizations can be measured in profit margins, market share, and sometimes how efficiently money is used (Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014; Sawhill & Williamson, 2001). In nonprofit organizations (NPO), success has been conceptualized by Sawhill and Williamson (2001), and defined in a set of questions: "Are we making progress toward fulfilling our mission and meeting our goals? Are our activities achieving our programmatic objectives and implementing our strategies? and Do we have the resources—the capacity—to achieve our goals?" (Sawhill & Williamson, 2001, p. 372). These are three essential questions that all organizations should ask themselves. Nonprofits exist to fulfill a mission and must set goals, develop strategies to achieve that mission, and obtain resources to achieve it. Success does not have to be more complicated. In a broad sense, this definition conceptualizes nonprofit success more concretely than, for instance, money raised.

Topic & Background

Overview of the nonprofit/charitable sector. In order to provide context and to understand small nonprofit organizations better, an overview of their sector and how nonprofits have been evaluated will be given here. As the second largest sector in the world per capita, nonprofits play a role in the every day lives of most Canadians (Hall et al., 2005a) and therefore

hold great significance to the economy. There are approximately 161,000 nonprofits currently in Canada (Holoday & Veldhuis, 2013) so it can be difficult for potential donors to cut through the pack and find an organization to support. With such a large number of organizations seeking funding for their programs, it is easy to see why so many struggle to achieve the support they require. As Worth (2009) said “[n]onprofits cannot ignore the reality that they operate in a competitive environment, even if they do not compete directly against each other” (p. 212). The most recent comprehensive survey of the Canadian nonprofit and voluntary sector was produced in 2005 by Statistics Canada (i.e. Hall et al., 2005a) and it demonstrates one facet of the imbalance of influence and resources when comparing small and large organizations. A number of interesting findings about the sector’s share of the economy, prevalence, and reach within Canadian society came out of that report. The most important and relevant finding to this thesis represents the distribution of revenue based on an organization’s size:

The 1% of organizations that have annual revenues of \$10 million or more receive 59% of all revenue. Almost three quarters of all volunteers are engaged by the 6% of organizations that have volunteer complements over 200. The 13% of organizations with revenues over \$500,000 receive 41% of all volunteer hours... Generally, the larger the organization is in terms of revenues, the more likely it is to report increased revenues, a growing number of volunteers, and a higher number of paid staff in 2003 than in 2000. Smaller organizations, however, are more likely to report unchanged or declining revenues over the same period, fewer volunteers, and stable levels of paid staff. (Hall et al., 2005a, p. 11)

In sum, the large get larger while the small stay the same or struggle to survive. Therein lies a key trend that challenges the ability of smaller organizations to move over the proverbial hump and expand their reach to offer services or membership to a wider population while attracting

greater support at the same time. As well, the larger organizations secure more government funding, which is 49 per cent “of all revenue reported” by nonprofits (Hall et al., 2005a). This means that there is an even smaller pot of money for small organizations to compete for.

In a separate comparative survey of the Canadian and international nonprofit sectors conducted in partnership with the Canadian government, Johns Hopkins University, and Imagine Canada, researchers Hall, Barr Easwaramoorthy, Sokolowski, and Salamon (2005b) highlighted several challenges specific to funding for nonprofits that included less funding available for shorter periods of time, funding being earmarked for specific projects rather than general support, and the fact that more organizations must compete for it.

A 2008 Government of Canada study quoted a *Muttart Foundation* survey from 2006 that found 93 per cent of Canadians say charities are important to them, while 86 per cent believe charities generally improve our quality of life, and 76 per cent believe “charities understand the needs of Canadians better than the government does,” (Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), 2008, p. 32). These figures indicate that charities and nonprofits have an important role to play in Canadian society. Given this, there are still many challenges they face to survive, perhaps unknown to the general public.

Identifying successful nonprofit organizations. Both in an effort to sum up and to highlight the activities of some of the most successful and active nonprofits in Canada, *The Globe and Mail*, *MoneySense Magazine*, and *charityintelligence.ca* produce lists of nonprofit organizations they find to be successful, while the *Fraser Institute* hands out annual awards for the most well run nonprofit organizations.

In terms of size, *The Globe*'s list contains organizations that range in size from 1000 to 38,000 employees (with three organizations out of 100 falling below that general range with 726,

435, and 43 respectively). The ranking is also solely based on money earned as reported to the CRA. On the *MoneySense* list, the vast majority of organizations are large and have more than 30 employees. However, their ranking system takes into account overall charity efficiency (i.e. “Money spent on charitable programs and money donated to other charities was added up and divided by the total expenses”); fundraising efficiency (i.e. “Fundraising costs were divided by the total of money raised through tax-receipted and non-tax receipted donations and money raised through fundraising”); governance (evaluated on answers to 18 questions about the organizations policies, financial oversight by its board, etc.) (MoneySense, 2014).

Another, lesser-known source of nonprofit/charity ranking is *charityintelligence.ca*. This organization produces a list of the “Top Ten” largest charities in Canada which, in 2013, included *World Vision*, the *Canadian Cancer Society*, and the *Salvation Army* as the three largest. *Charity Intelligence Canada* also rates charities by awarding between zero and four “stars” based on criteria including: “transparency and accountability, need for funding, and operating efficiency” (Charity Intelligence Canada). As of November 2014, 107 charities were given a four-star rating, including many regional branches of organizations such as *United Way*, *SPCA*, and *Big Brothers and Big Sisters* located throughout the country that counted as four-star charities independently of their respective head offices (Charity Intelligence Canada, 2014).

Seeking to identify the few very “best-run non-profit social service agencies” each year, the *Donner Canadian Foundation* (through the *Fraser Institute*) selects 21 organizations as finalists in various categories of organizational type and one winner from the three in each category that are each awarded a share of \$60,000 for their success. More than 450 organizations were considered in 2013 (Holoday & Veldhuis, 2013). With the submissions from nonprofits, the *Fraser Institute* compiles a performance report on the nonprofit sector each year. In the 2013

report, the *Donner Canadian Foundation* found the performance of nonprofits to be “relatively high” based on their objective scoring scale of 0–10 points attributed for categories such as financial management, income independence (possessing a wide range of donors rather than continuously counting on the same ones), strategic management (strategies and goals focused on a common objective or mission of the organization), board governance (possessing an active board in working toward financial stability and other activities that advance the organization’s mission), volunteers, staff, innovation (being adaptive to internal and external change as a organization), program cost, outcome monitoring (self-evaluation of activities), and accessibility (ensuring programs can serve as many as possible (Holoday & Veldhuis, 2013)). The *Donner Canadian Foundation* points out that it is one of the few sources that objectively evaluates the nonprofit sector in Canada, since most evaluation of nonprofit performance is largely subjective or based on size and/or income. This foundation concluded that very few organizations achieve perfect or near perfect scores in any category and that, although the sector is healthy and performing well, there is room for improvement across the board (Holoday & Veldhuis, 2013).

Similarly, *smartgiving.ca* helps Canadians seeking to donate to charity select an organization based on criteria including its financial need, its financial efficiency, the programs it delivers, its size, and its transparency (Blumberg, 2014). This organization does not rank or award performance indicators to charities, but provide advice on how to find a “good charity”, what to look for in one, and how to maximize one’s contribution (Blumberg, 2014).

The importance of communication/public relations to nonprofits. The 2008 CRA report delved into the unique challenges of rural and small nonprofits in their operations and communication activities. It stated that small and rural charities generally rely more on aging communication technologies such as telephone and mail rather than new ones. They also stated

that these charities struggle to create and maintain networks with other organizations within their sector. Organizations can use these relationships to mutually benefit each other and learn about what others are doing and how they are doing it. However, this report states that they “do not have the resources to maintain these types of relationships, and they may be geographically isolated from charities providing similar programming” (Canada Revenue Agency, 2008, p. 10).

Some common themes emerge out of this report and the two previously mentioned reports: high cost of making money, the importance of relationship building, the need for efficiency, and the need for communication/public relations expertise in small nonprofit organizations. Making money costs money for nonprofits. They spend large portions of their budgets on fundraising and in many cases on salaries of employees dedicated to going after funding for their organization. Relationships can help an organization in positioning with other brands, offer mutually beneficial situations, and engage more with interested stakeholders, among other things. Efficiency is key for small organizations as they have little time and resources to waste. Communication expertise may be difficult to obtain when a limited number of positions with small NPOs are available and call for a more diverse skill set.

Communication, and specifically public relations, is an essential component to the planning process and execution of organizational goals and ongoing activities (Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014). It aids in a number of ways including relationship building, messaging, and identifying and articulating organizational objectives. Without effective communication, an organization cannot convince the public of its legitimacy and worthiness of support (Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014). However, the importance of public relations and marketing strategies may be undervalued by nonprofit organizations (Pope, Isley, & Asamo-Tutu, 2009). In fact, Pope et al. call for a nonprofit-specific set of guidelines to help nonprofit organizations better

reach their “target markets” or stakeholders and suggest that “while developing new marketing strategies is a difficult task for any business, NPOs lack the resources and expertise, making the process all the more complicated” (Pope, et al., 2009, p. 195).

The *HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector* delivered an assessment on the shortcoming in the skills of those working in nonprofit sector in Canada. Out of it came some of the key issues that were highlighted as needing further research. Specifically, the report called for examination of professional development tailored to nonprofit sector employees and how and where to invest in professional development, the need for better access to best practices information and a better strategy of information sharing and networking among nonprofits (HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2011). In sum, without essential expertise and skills in communication/PR, small NPOs are more likely to fall short of success.

Theoretical Framework

Grunig’s *Theory of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, which resulted from a study conducted by James Grunig and his colleagues (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, et al., 2002), suggests that success in PR is achieved by applying the characteristics of the excellence theory of communication to organizations. In sum, the more these characteristics are reflected in an organization’s practices, the more successful or excellent that organization will be. Excellence in public relations is summarized as “the ideal state in which knowledgeable communicators assist in the overall strategic management of organizations, seeking symmetrical relations through management of communication with key publics on whom organizational survival and growth depends” (Grunig, et al., 2002, p. x). Organizations seeking support may use this model to find the best way to communicate with potential supporters.

This model works well for organizations with large budgets, staffs, and resources because it was developed through studying them. These kinds of organizations have the ability to allocate more resources to accomplish goals and benefit from more perspectives and expertise in decision-making. There were 327 organizations examined in the original study that produced the excellence model. Because participation required a “major commitment of organizational resources” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 37), organizations with fewer than 16 employees did not participate in the study and the model is thus not able to completely reflect their realities.

Excellence theory offers a number of specific characteristics that determine the extent to which an organization is successful in public relations and these characteristics are separated into three levels: the *program level*: “how excellent public relations is planned, implemented, and evaluated at the level of individual communication programs aimed at such stakeholders as the media, employees, communities, customers, or investors” (Grunig et al., p. 8). This level represents the outward product of the organization’s communication and how it communicates with stakeholders. Secondly, the *departmental level*: “how public relations departments are organized and managed” (Grunig et al., p. 8) refers to how the PR department can help the organization by the way it is structured and managed. It delves into the specifics of what makes an excellent communication department and why it is important for an organization to make use of it. Finally, the *organizational level*: “the organizational and environmental context most likely to nurture excellent public relations,” (Grunig et al., p. 8) refers to the broader consideration of organizational activities, mission, and mandate and how communication/PR should fit into the organization.

Despite the fact that the model was not developed taking into account small organizations, most characteristics of the model are transferrable but need to be adjusted to a

smaller scale. Specifically, all organizational and program level characteristics are present but the public relations department might consist of a single employee (likely the public relations manager) in this case. Echoing this stance, Grunig et al. (2002) say that the “essential elements of excellent communication” are transferable to all types of organizations but no variation of the list of specific characteristics have been developed to consider the unique realities of small nonprofits explicitly.

The Canadian Cancer Society and the Red Cross are examples of large nonprofit organizations that are considered well established and that possess a large budget and structure (including a public relations department within the organization) (Hall et al., 2005a). Small organizations with limited resources are competing for the same pool of support, and it can be more difficult to achieve widespread support or even reach the goals that are necessary to deliver their services or programs, and convey consistent, strategic, and fresh messaging (Kline Henley, 2001; Pope et al., 2009) without multiple experts trained in public relations influencing strategic management as the excellence model requires (Grunig et al., 2002).

Purpose of the Study

Some small nonprofits achieve success despite the challenges of a lack of resources. The central objective of this thesis is to explore the communication and public relations practices and strategies of successful nonprofit organizations using Grunig’s excellence model as a conceptual analytical lens. The model itself will not be tested. The thesis aims to identify the unique challenges that small nonprofits face and to propose best practices for other small NPOs.

Research Questions

The main research questions this study seeks to answer are:

1. How do senior managers of small nonprofit organizations with limited administration,

management, and budgets account for their success in achieving their public relations goals?

2. What public relations challenges do senior managers of small nonprofits face and how do they address these challenges?

Methodology

Borrowing from Creswell (2013), this thesis takes a collective case study approach in the form of a comprehensive analysis focusing on seven unique cases of small NPOs that have experienced success under challenging circumstances. The thesis will analyze the practices of seven Canadian small nonprofit organizations using Grunig's model as a conceptual framework to guide semi-structured qualitative interviews with the senior manager of each of these organizations and to examine their annual reports, websites and some communication material for context and reference. This method is appropriate for this context as it allows for an in depth look at what strategies these organizations practice, how they achieve what they do, and why they are successful in their organizational goals. Specifically, this thesis explored the organizational structures, goals, values, strategic planning, and execution of PR practices reported by the senior managers.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of six chapters. In chapter two, along with outlining the theoretical framework for this thesis in detail, the literature review explores the following areas: the existing research on public relations for nonprofit organizations in terms of how the practice of PR in nonprofits is similar to and dissimilar from other sectors, and the challenges that small nonprofits face from an organizational and public relations standpoint. Chapter three lays out the research design and methodology of the collective case study approach and explains the strengths and rationale for using qualitative semi-structured interviews. It will also give a detailed profile of

each organization being studied. Chapter four will simultaneously present and discuss the results, or findings, that emerged from the in-depth interviews and examination of each case (or organization) and attempt to demonstrate implications between the research questions and the themes that emerge from the data. The final chapter, the conclusion, will summarize the key aspects of the research, discuss limitations in the study, and discuss the implications for research and practice that they present.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review will begin with a description of the theoretical framework being used as a conceptual lens in this study: Grunig's excellence model. Within that discussion, I will begin by describing the model, review the work of other scholars using the model, and then discuss how the model has been used in the context of nonprofit organizations. A review of the state of the nonprofit and charitable sector and the challenges that exist for small nonprofit organizations will follow in order to offer context into the area being studied. Finally, the literature on nonprofit public relations will be discussed, including a review of current and previous trends of practice and tactics, the types of PR avenues that have been effective for nonprofits, and the public relations practices particularly of small nonprofits.

Theoretical Framework

As defined by Grunig et al. (2002), in the broad sense public relations can simply be defined as: "management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 2). Grunig's model of excellence in public relations (or excellence theory) is a benchmark for success in public relations (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002) as well as one of the most cited paradigms in the public relations literature (Huang & Lyu, 2013). The model helps to define excellent/effective public relations and demonstrates why and to what extent it contributes to producing "effective organizations" (Grunig et al., 2002):

Public relations contributes to organizational effectiveness when it helps reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies...(by) building quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies. Public relations is most likely to contribute to effectiveness when the senior public relations manager is part of the dominant coalition where he or she is able to shape the organization's goals and to

help determine which external publics are most strategic (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 10).

As mentioned in the Introduction, the excellence model is characterized by three levels and the subsequent effects of those levels. The characteristics of the broader levels set out how excellent public relations is attained in the organizational setting and form the theoretical framework for this study. Firstly, the program level: “how excellent public relations is planned, implemented, and evaluated at the level of individual communication programs aimed at such stakeholders as the media, employees, communities, customers, or investors” (p. 8). This level represents the outward product of the organization’s communication and how they go about communicating with stakeholders. Secondly, the departmental level: “how public relations departments are organized and managed” (p. 8) refers to how the PR department can help the organization by the way it is structured and managed. It delves into the specifics of what makes an excellent communication department and why it is important for an organization to have make use of it. Finally, the organizational level: “the organizational and environmental context most likely to nurture excellent public relations,” meaning this level is the broader consideration of organizational activities, mission, and mandate and how communication/PR should fit into the organization. (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 8). As a result of satisfying the characteristics in the above levels, there are three specific effects. The characteristics are as follows:

Table 1	
Level	Description of characteristic
Program Level	1) PR is “managed strategically”, meaning the organization strategically builds relationships with their key publics through public relations programs.
Departmental Level	2) There is “a single or integrated public relations department” devoted solely to public relations and managing relationships, 3) The department is “separate from marketing”, 4) The department has a “direct reporting relationship to senior management”, 5) The “two-way symmetrical model” of communication is used to balance the

	<p>interests of internal and external stakeholders,</p> <p>6) The “senior public relations person is in a managerial role” within the organizational decision-making.</p> <p>7) The senior PR person has the “potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by: a) knowledge of symmetrical model, b) knowledge of managerial role, c) academic training in public relations, d) professionalism” (i.e. able to keep up to date with latest professional practices),</p> <p>8) There is “equal opportunity for men and women in public relations” in the organization.</p>
Organizational Level	<p>9) The “worldview for public relations in the organization reflects the two-way symmetrical model” as agreed upon by both the department and the senior managers,</p> <p>10) “The public relations director has power in or with the dominant coalition” (i.e. with the highest decision making group within the organization).</p> <p>11) There is a “participative rather than authoritarian organizational culture” (i.e. employees are able to debate and contribute to operational discussions).</p> <p>12) A “symmetrical system of internal communication” is used.</p> <p>13) An “organic rather than mechanical organizational structure” exists, meaning employees have more freedom to take initiative and contribute in different ways.</p> <p>14) A “turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups” creates a challenging culture in which organizations have to lean on a well developed public relations function to survive.</p>
Effects of Excellent Public Relations	<p>15) “programs meet communication objectives,</p> <p>16) reduce costs of regulation, pressure, and litigation,</p> <p>17) job satisfaction is high among employees.”</p>

(Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, pp. 9)

Excellence theory presents two-way symmetrical communication as the ideal approach that organizations must take to reach their goals and become excellent. It also appears under all three levels as the backbone of excellence in communicating both internally and externally. Two-

way symmetry is defined as individuals, organizations, and publics using “communication to adjust their ideas and behaviour to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 156). That process serves both the stakeholders and the organization but the organization still “advocates” its own interests through that process by balancing it with the stakeholders’ interests (Grunig et al., 2002). This approach opposes the persuasion approach of telling stakeholders what they should believe, how they should act, and what they should feel toward an organization (Brown, 2010). Kang and Norton (2004), in their study of whether nonprofits use websites to accomplish organizational goals, found that as of 2004 the largest nonprofits in the United States generally were not engaging in two-way communication with stakeholders through their official websites.

Borrowing from Grunig’s excellence theory, Kim and Ni (2010) applied the behavioural, strategic management perspective as a conceptualization of excellent practice in PR in which public relations “bridges gaps of interests and stances on problems between an organization and its environment by communicating interactively and proactively and with balancing efforts for distinct interests” (pp. 49-51). Kim and Ni suggest that this effort to build quality relationships is not an easy or quickly attainable goal and they conclude that it is necessary to be proactive as an organization in this effort.

In Gower’s (2006) assessment of the theoretical base of public relations, she names the concepts of two-way symmetry and relationship building taken from excellence theory as the most well-developed paradigm today, indicating that most agree it is the ideal way to practice public relations. To contribute to the application of the model, Laskin (2012) attempted to advance the excellence model with the development of public relations scales to measure an organization’s activities and impact.

Critiques of the excellence model. Considerable academic debate has surrounded whether there is one superior model of communications/public relations/marketing excellence (Brown, 2010; Hutton, 2010). Quoting the work of Kolter and Mindak (1978), Hutton (2010) says “suggesting that no one model is best in all circumstances and that marketing and public relations should align themselves in whatever fashion is most conducive to accomplishing the organization’s objectives” (p. 512). Likewise, Fawkes and Moloney (2008) reject Grunig’s symmetry model in favour of a view of PR as power relations amongst social groups.

Critics of two-way symmetry come from a number of schools of thought (not just the field of public relations), all basically disagreeing that there cannot be only one way of practicing the most effective public relations (Brown, 2010). Roper (2005) sees symmetrical communication not as a more ethical approach to communicating with stakeholders and the public, but a way for organizations to continue serving the “self-interest” of the organization through its relationship with the public. The compromising and balancing of interests of two-way symmetrical communication “...in the long term, favor[s] the corporations much more than their critical stakeholders in civil society and can serve to dilute the negotiating power of those stakeholders. Negotiations of this nature are rarely, if ever, truly collaborative. Nor are they based on democratic principles of open debate regarding the public good, with special interests put aside” (Roper, 2005, p. 84).

Excellence theory has evolved over time and been improved upon by its original developers and by other scholars. One addition to the model is proposed by de Bussy (2013), who suggests that instead of strategic public relations management being the sole purview of senior management and those who hold the public relations responsibility, it is “the responsibility of organizational leaders at all levels and from a variety of disciplines,” (de Bussy,

2013, p. 79).

New media and excellence. In keeping Grunig's belief that excellence theory is ever evolving and adapting, Duhé and Wright (2013) apply its concepts – and specifically two-way symmetry – to the “digital media age” and arguably the most influential tool within that age: social media. Social media is believed to have the potential of two-way or one-way communication, depending on how the communication practitioners use it and how they view the role of public relations within an organization (Duhé & Wright, 2013). Using social media solely for publicity and conveying the organization's messages and interests to the public would be one-way communication aimed at persuasion instead of using it as a means of building relationships through interacting with and balancing stakeholder interests with those of the organization, as Grunig advises (Duhé & Wright, 2013). However, social media easily fits with two-way symmetrical communication because it is available to anyone with an internet connection to engage with an organization on equal terms and influence the organization's goals (Duhé & Wright, 2013).

Given the argument that social media supports two-way communication, many scholars have argued that the two-way symmetry model now applies more than ever to public relations (e.g. Bronstein, 2006; Frohlich & Scholler, 2012; Kim & Ni, 2010). Previously, true two-way symmetry was considered an “ideal.” However, in support of social media as a means to creating two-way symmetry, Ekachai and Brinker (2012) point out that Grunig has argued if social media are used to their “full potential” they can offer a more global reach and strategic communication for organizations (Ekachai & Brinker, 2012).

In discussing Twitter, Smith (2010) contributes to theory with his argument that “Interactivity is a driving force of Twitter use, and involvement seems dependent on

technological facilitation (functional interactivity) and interdependent messaging (contingent interactivity). Furthermore, Tweets can fulfill or impede public relations efforts as messaging activities are distributed to publics with little or no stake in organizational success” (Smith, 2010, p. 332). Smith’s potential contribution to public relations theory is in pointing out that we may need to account more for the social media age: “socially distributed public relations are online, retrievable communication activities which reflect on an organization, facilitated by communication technology and dependent on recognition of the social stake a user or group may risk in communicating a message publicly about an organization or cause” (p. 334). This means anyone has the ability to communicate his or her views of an organization while, at the same time, an organization is able to communicate about itself. Being talked about one way or another can offer legitimacy to either party: the organization and the public (Smith, 2010). In a way, Smith is thinking about and discussing the world online rather than translating public relations theories and notions to the online realm. Theory may not be directly transferable to this relatively new realm (Smith, 2010).

Excellence theory applied to nonprofit organization. The excellence study suggested that despite being generally small, the nonprofit organizations included in the study practiced excellent public relations even though their PR departments were much smaller than the average departments of corporations. Grunig et al. (2002) thus concluded that it was not necessary to have a larger, complex department to be successful. Building on the excellence study, Bronstein (2006) believes the concepts of relationship building, strategic communication, and two-way symmetrical communication are ideal for nonprofits because of the position of these organizations as agents for positive work rather than for profits, while Wiggill (2011) writes that “strategic communication management by NPOs is still rooted in the excellence and relationship

management theories, because it emphasizes the importance of engaging with stakeholders to build strong relationships, which will assist the organization in achieving its goals” (p. 234). Training and/or expertise in strategic communication management (a key component of the excellence model) is still commonplace in nonprofit organizations, although more resources are needed there in order for NPOs to access the same level of expertise as the other two sectors (Dyer, Buell, Harrison, & Weber, 2002). Despite this, most literature pertaining to excellence theory in the context of nonprofits deals with two-way symmetrical communication.

In keeping the principles of two-way communication and the perceived benefits of an organizational worldview that makes use of it, Bruning, Dials, and Shirka (2008) suggest that the “one size fits all” relationship-building model is insufficient while the dialogic approach (i.e. “where an organization and a public exchange information”) (Bruning et al., 2008, p. 26) can be tailored to each individual situation. In fact, in their study of how public dialogue and relationship attitudes affect the perception of an organization, these authors conclude that “organizations facilitate relationships best through a dialogic process. A dialogic approach requires that the organization engage the public during communication” (p. 29).

Challenges for Small Nonprofits

There are many reasons as to why small nonprofits struggle to meet their goals. In this section, the challenges that might prevent these organizations from achieving excellence will be shown. In the case of many nonprofits, the ability to grow is a difficult struggle and is even more challenging for small nonprofits and is thus arguably their main hurdle. Focusing on delivering programs and services is at the core of why nonprofits exist, yet Worth (2009) argues that the lack of focus on capacity building (i.e. an organization’s efforts to address shortcomings that influence whether or not it is able to reach its goals) in these organizations is reinforced by donor

behaviour because donors fail to provide support for capacity building. Worth debates whether an organization can be considered “effective” because of its success in capacity building (Worth, 2009). Further to that challenge, Robinson (2005) says “many small yet worthy causes may be overlooked by strategic corporate giving” (p. 254), meaning partnerships with smaller organizations is less appealing because of their lack of recognition. This means that smaller organizations may have to turn away from corporate sources toward personal sources (Robinson, 2005). Robinson also suggests that it could be beneficial for smaller organizations to partner with larger organizations that have similar causes or interests in order to increase their impact.

Fristenberg (2009) acknowledges the high cost of public relations activities such as advertising for nonprofit organizations, especially those of smaller size. But, since their budgets may not allow for many or any ad-buys, these organizations have to strategize about other techniques as a substitute for the recognition advertising can offer (e.g. influencing the mainstream media to cover their activities) in order to communicate their missions and draw attention to themselves.

Recognition and connection to an organization is said to positively influence the success of an organization in the pursuit of its goals (Earl & Waddington, 2012). But for smaller nonprofit organizations or those that are more locally based and do not have national or widespread recognition, it is difficult to compete for recognition with those that do (Stebbins & Hartman, 2013). These authors argue that key for the smaller nonprofits they examined (ones without substantial marketing budgets) is “differentiating” from other organizations and conveying their uniqueness and personality compared to others. Organizations “can start by defining which traits of emotional engagement (exciting, fun, heroic, and inspiring); voice (ambitious, authoritative, and bold); or progression (empowering, pioneering, and transforming)

most closely align with the organization's mission and identity" (Stebbins & Hartman, 201, p. 213). In other words, organizations can create a distinct personality for themselves and show how their personality clearly differs from other organizations. However, the authors did not address exactly how these traits could be developed in a small nonprofit setting and did not acknowledge the potential gap in expertise as well as the lack of diversity of opinions and experience among staff in a small nonprofit setting versus a larger organization.

There is also a human resources gap for small nonprofit organizations. By their very nature they have less employees to draw on as well as less ability to help employees to acquire skills they may need to help the organization pursue its goals (HR Council of Canada, 2008). In its 2008 study of the nonprofit sector and the employees within it, the HR Council of Canada concluded that the "areas of greatest satisfaction for small nonprofit employees" were influence on decision-making, recognition, amount of responsibility, and relationships with supervisors and colleagues (p. 3). Where nonprofit employees were least satisfied was in the area of training and professional development (HR Council of Canada, 2008). In sum, those working for small nonprofits generally like the fact that small organizations enable a closer professional relationship between all employees, providing the opportunity for open dialogue and discussion on important decisions that affect the organization. However, the size and limited resources of these organizations hinder professional growth or advancement. Finally, the report also stated that organizations are likely to put more responsibility on their employees, pass work onto the shoulders of volunteers, or hire a less qualified candidate if they are unable to recruit one that fits their needs (HR Council of Canada, 2008).

Nonprofit Public Relations

In their review of 206 academic articles published about nonprofit PR in a span of 60 years

in four leading public relations journals ending in December 2012, Sisco, Pressgrove, and Collins (2013) found “recent growth in the number of articles published, but an overall paucity of research specifically about nonprofit public relations” (p. 239). Using Ferguson’s (1984) classification system for research, these authors also noted that there were considerably fewer articles contributing to *theoretical development* (i.e. “advancing or proposing public relations theory,” p. 286) compared to those identified as *introspective* (i.e. describing aspects of public relations as a profession). Sixteen articles included discussion or use of the excellence model or other models of public relations, while 10 were labeled as containing a framework of “organization-public relationship” and 10 others as “dialogic communication” framework. They conclude by encouraging more attention in future research to the “vast differences in types of nonprofit organizations studied” (p. 294).

As has been stated, nonprofits must prioritize efforts to influence the public in order to make the best use of resources at hand. Messner et al. (2013) argue that the impact of a nonprofit organization can be “limited by two primary factors: money and access to its stakeholders and constituents” (p. 122), meaning that nonprofits have to engage with their stakeholders in order to make an impact and those two factors are not necessarily completely intertwined. Conversely, Bronstein (2006) states: “Prior research supports the contention that public relations efficacy is inextricably tied to economic resources and, as a result, well-financed corporate and government elites tend to exercise greater influence over the norms and values established in long-term media discourses” (pp. 71-72). In other words, NPOs with limited financial resources are less likely to hold public relations efficacy and thus struggle to shape discourse in the media with the same impact as government, the private sector, large NPOs.

In asking for support, and in particular money, an organization has to be seen as

trustworthy (i.e. not out to deceive the public but to work with it in an ethical way) (Bronstein, 2006). This requires public relations efficacy. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate trustworthiness is through effective communication. Excessive administration expenditure is a key factor impacting a donor's trust in a charitable organization (Burt, 2014). If an individual is donating money to an organization, we might assume that the donor knows, or expects to know, something about that organization. Burt (2014) suggests that clear, transparent, and focused communication can aid in both attracting donors and demonstrating the worth of the organization. Specifically, "effective communication is a two-way process" (Burt, 2014, p. 45), in that organizations can immediately show appreciation for a donation by articulating where the donation goes and how it helps the organization reach its goals. Also, the organization can provide opportunities for feedback from donors as a part of an open process that can help the organization discover what messages and information are out there about them as well as finding out what strategies are working in their efforts to solicit information (Burt, 2014).

As Burt (2014) showed, putting donors first and involving them in a two-way process can lead to trust in an organization. Along that vein, Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) state "there is significant potential for improvement through the adoption of a customer-centered, market oriented approach" (p. 288) rather than an organization-centred approach (i.e. one that seeks to understand what the "market" wants and how). Often nonprofit organizations need to communicate why there is a need for their existence and the extent of that need. This approach is similar to Grunig's (2001; 2006) concept of strategic public relations management through relationship building where interaction with stakeholders is the focus but still considered a strategic method of gaining support replacing strategic persuasion (which is more focused on one-way communication – the organization to the stakeholder).

Marketing strategies that have been developed and used for years in the for-profit sector have been adopted by nonprofit organizations. Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009) conducted a survey of marketing practices used by 136 nonprofit organizations in the UK, USA, and Australia and also sought to determine how those organizations conceptualized marketing in their own organizational context. These authors concluded that many of these organizations “demonstrate a distinct lack of understanding of what the principles of marketing are and largely focus their efforts on sales and promotional activities” (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009, p. 288). In fact, they found that “only a small proportion in this sample engaged in any kind of marketing, including market research,” (p. 288). They speculated that the main reason for this was that only one in five staff responsible for marketing among the organizations studied had formal marketing-specific education. They found that these nonprofit’s potential had not been reached because of a lack of effective marketing strategies.

Aside from the question of whether nonprofits have the expertise to carry out effective public relations practices, Pope et al. (2009) further the literature on developing strategies for nonprofits specifically rather than adapting those that are designed for for-profits. These authors highlight “obtaining funding, reaching out to a diverse clientele, and effectively utilizing good volunteers” (p. 197) as the three cornerstones of nonprofit public relations and argue that more emphasis should be placed on these efforts in order for non-profits to reach their goals. These three cornerstones align with the excellence model in that they focus on attaining goals and developing beneficial relationships with internal and external stakeholders in order to achieve success. For smaller organizations, even those without full-time staff, Pope et al. (2009) suggest taking advantage of all available online platforms for communicating their missions such as websites and other interactive communications tools. Databases containing information on

similar organizations can also allow them to more easily connect and build relationships.

Those online platforms are an important place for an organization to work on developing both its image and reputation. Separating the concepts of an organization's image and reputation, Bennett and Gabriel (2003) found: "A charitable organization needs to tailor its marketing communications around the projection of an image based on representations of being caring and compassionate, non-political, dynamic (but in an idealistic way), and of devoting its resources to beneficiaries rather than spending on administration" (p. 286). This is in keeping with Bennett and Gabriel's suggestion that charitable organizations possess positive discernible human traits that they can use to their advantage in marketing communications. Bennett and Gabriel also suggest that reputation, although a different concept, is within the organization's control because it is influenced by how well an organization constructs its image.

Some see nonprofits as being naturally more "trustworthy" than other types of organizations such as for-profit corporations (Bronstein, 2006). Bronstein (2009) argues that nonprofits are given more leeway in the way they operate in the eyes of the general public and that if they harm, for instance, a donor's trust they are more likely to be forgiven. Trust in an organization can also be fragile based on how the organization uses the money donated and how they go about raising more. Trust violations can easily come to light (Sargeant, Jay, & Lee, 2008) and thus become a problem for the organization in its efforts to build solid, reliable trust.

As has been established, a nonprofit organization may have trouble getting noticed. Because being noticed is the first step for organizations in establishing themselves as relevant causes, they need to find unique ways for themselves and their cause or programs to get noticed. Using stunt marketing is one way to do that. "[It] grabs attention by something novel; achieves some good social purpose; provokes a positive emotional response, such as curiosity or laughter;

reaches the target audience; comes early in the product life cycle; is simple and elegant” (Robinson, 2006, p. 253). A successful stunt can be as simple as a unique event that attracts media or viral attention to an organization such as the *Ice Bucket Challenge* of 2014 for ALS.

In Italy, public relations efforts of nonprofit organizations compete well with the government and private sectors in terms of expertise and relationship building. Valentini and Sriramesh (2013) studied organizations from the three sectors and found that those who have the most experience with public relations tend to use it as a strategic function for the organization. Also, nonprofits seemed to value PR more than organizations in the other two sectors (government and private) but, unlike the excellence model suggests, PR did not have a prominent place in organizational decision-making (Valentini & Sriramesh, 2013).

How are nonprofits practicing PR? NPOs have evolved in their PR/communication practice, but there is still much variation in practice and in theory about how it should be carried out in the context of NPOs. Lack of experience, negative experiences, attitude problems, and inexperience are the four main reasons that Bonk et al. (1999) give to explain “why nonprofits resist effective communications tools” (p. 3) in their approach to strategic nonprofit communication. Bonk et al. describe “lack of experience” as the belief that smaller organizations cannot compete with the expertise and resources of larger ones or large corporations. However, they believe “no group is too small or too strapped financially to be media-smart” (Bonk et al., 1999, p. 3). These authors refer to “negative experiences” as experiences in which an organization has gone through bad publicity or a crisis and, as a result, no longer attempts to repair its image in the media after the crisis has passed. “Attitude problems” refer to how a PR team within an organization may think about a media strategy or, more specifically, that PR practitioners do not feel they have to be proactive about getting their message heard and instead

wait for attention to come to them. “Inexperience” is straightforward in that an organization just does not know how to go about dealing with media in an effort to further its goals (Bonk et al., 1999). In response to inexperience, Bonk et al. argue that the path to more success in communication for nonprofits includes the following: a clearly worded mission; simple, specific, and targeted goals; proactively pursuing media coverage; making communications/PR a high priority; meeting as an organization to discuss communication plans; and making the commitment of money and staff to PR initiatives (Bonk, et al., 1999). In sum, effective communication requires a broad, proactive plan, an evaluation of where an organization’s shortcomings are in terms of communication, and a discussion about why they have resisted effective communication tools in the past.

Echoing the need for a unified and clear plan for communication and marketing within nonprofit organizations, Worth (2009) stresses the importance of a communication plan and suggests that it is much more effective than the practice of continuous periodic communication coming out of the organization with little pattern behind it. He writes that this plan must be “rooted” in the mission and goals of the organization to be successful. Borrowing from Bonk et al. (1999), Worth lays out a “strategic communications planning guide” in simple terms. It includes identifying goals, the basic elements to be used (i.e. identifying target audiences, developing messages, etc.), and ongoing activities such as pursuing media coverage, advertising, etc. (Worth, 2009). The author states that a communications plan cannot be successful without all elements that are laid out in the guide.

Continuing with the belief that nonprofits contribute to civil society in a unique way, Taylor (2010) writes of how nonprofit organizations are increasing in numbers and make use of “tangible and intangible mobilizing resources” to attract support (p. 12). She refers to “tangible”

resources as means of attracting monetary support such as fundraising events, while “intangible” resources, such as the Internet, are used to disseminate information in the hopes of attracting new supports and bringing awareness to the organization and its cause (Taylor, 2010).

Considering communication theory applied to NPOs, Waters and Jamal (2011) examined nonprofits’ use of Twitter designed to effectively cultivate relationships with their publics. Considering two-way symmetry theory and relationship cultivation theory, these researchers concluded most organizations in their study did not have an organizational worldview that included two-way communication. Similarly, Messner et al. (2013) found, in their study of health-related nonprofits in the United States, that these organizations were not using these tools to their full relationship cultivation potential. In their review of the literature on nonprofit public relations, Sisco et al. (2013) identified examples of how to apply symmetrical communication and relationships to achieve organizational goals, through new media (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012), video (Waters & Jones, 2011), and interactive websites (Ingenhoff, & Koelling, 2009; Kang & Norton, 2004).

Nearly all NPOs have their own website and use it as a part of or an extension of their identity. Some organizations use their website for traditional public relations purposes, catering specifically to journalists by providing information tailored to their needs. “Press room” pages, as they have been referred to, offer information on organizational goals, missions and practices as well as ongoing news and projects. While being used extensively by profit-based organizations, this approach has been given less prominence by nonprofits, according to Yeon, Choi, and Kiouisis (2005). This practice can help get the right message and most accurate information out when the dissemination of that message is not from the organization itself through its own communication channels. Yeon et al. suggest that nonprofits give more

prominence and effort to satisfying relationships with donors rather than journalists or volunteers. Most organizations studied “located the highest number of interactive communication features on the donor related pages, and they put both receiver control and two-way communication features together most frequently (95.6%) on those pages for donor relations...as well as with prominence of location” (p. 78).

Many organizations deal with issues that may not be in the general public’s consciousness or there may be debate about whether the issue is valid or the cause of any real problem. For instance, there are several organizations that exist to promote good mental health and public awareness at the same time aiming to help those who are affected seek help; however there can be varying opinions on the scope of the problem and its seriousness. It is up to the organization to demonstrate why its issue or cause matters and is worthy of support. Climate change could also be considered one of those issues. As Jun (2011), her study of how climate change organizations utilize their websites revealed, “many climate change organizations (CCOs) failed to identify their key publics and provide a communication space targeting each public group, particularly for communities and current donors/volunteers. Attempts to share messages interactively with publics were also limited” (p. 248). The research points to a need for CCOs to build relationships with key publics and concentrate on the messages they send. Jun also argues that the best way to do this is on an interactive online platform and that only one third of CCOs take that tack. Some organizations concerned with the environment in general seem to be following that advice of building relationships in order to be heard and seen as worthwhile causes: “they (nonprofit organizations) are increasingly using social technologies to build networks of collaborators, to grow their constituencies and to foster a new era of creativity and symmetrical communication between message and senders and receivers” (Greenberg &

MacAulay, 2009, p. 73).

Word-of-Mouth. Negative word-of-mouth about an organization can reduce support in nonprofits, while positive word-of-mouth can be just as powerful in attracting support (Williams & Buttle, 2013). Word-of-mouth in the context of public relations is “[d]efined as informal person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver about a brand, a product, a service or an organization” (Williams & Buttle, 2011, p. 85). Word-of-mouth can be an important tool for advancing organizational goals and objectives (Robinson, 2006). “Public relations activities seek to promote word of mouth and increase media mentions. The long-term goal of any successful public relations activity is to encourage positive consumer perceptions...” (Robinson, 2006, p. 249). In sum, if no one is talking about an organization or spreading positive feedback about it, public relations efforts have not succeeded. So there is no doubt that word-of-mouth about a cause or organization influences support in many ways within the context of nonprofit organizations (Williams & Buttle, 2013).

There are several models that point to the importance of word-of-mouth as a tool for gaining wider recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of the general public when used as a public relations tool. For instance, Williams and Buttle’s (2013) model identifies eight “pillars” of word-of-mouth that nonprofit organizations should concern themselves with: 1. Donors. 2. Services/products/brands. 3. Communication. 4. Key-influencer network. 5. Referral network. 6. Supplier/alliance partner network. 7. Employee network. 8. Organization. Each of these eight pillars is the source of positive or negative word-of-mouth and an avenue NPOs can use to better their organization’s public perception. However, it has been found that there is a lack of understanding about exactly how to use and influence word-of-mouth and whether PR efforts are resulting in positive word-of-mouth or influencing it at all (Williams & Buttle, 2013). In sum,

nonprofits could be missing a strategic opportunity here. The best place for organizations to start would be tapping into their own donors' networks to spread positive word-of-mouth as this seems to be the simplest approach and it may offer the most potential to increase support for an organization (Williams & Buttle, 2013).

Part of many NPOs mission is to draw more people in to understand and connect with their mission. Most of the time, this requires some educating and awareness raising. "Human beings tend to resist changing their beliefs...a minimum goal of communication is to continually reinforce the positive attitudes that your friends may hold, positively affect those of individuals who have been previously indifferent, and do nothing to further strengthen the negative attitudes of those who may already hold them" (Worth, 2009, pp. 221-222). Worth goes on to say that board members who are respected members of the community, for example, can make a valuable contribution to spreading positive words about the organization. But as an organization, building on the positive messages being said about the organization to the point where the public holds positive perceptions toward the organization takes strategic communication. That is perhaps a precursor to moving those same people to action in accordance with the organizational goals. Action such as donating money, spreading the word about a campaign, or volunteering, but positive perceptions of an organization may not necessarily lead to organizational support automatically (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007).

Word-of-mouth directly affects reputation, which has been found to be "an important factor in attracting donors" (Meijer, 2009, p. 40). Based on a sample of charities in the Netherlands, Meijer found the better the reputation of those charities, the more donors it brings in. But Meijer did not find charities to make more money based on their reputation. It should also be noted that Meijer's study only examined large organizations and therefore did not account for

the possibility that a charity's reputation may also be influenced by its capacity to build support throughout society (Meijer, 2009). In contrast to the findings of Meijer's study, Bennett and Gabriel (2003) found that donors were influenced by a charity's reputation and that, as a result, charities need to "tailor marketing and communications around the projection of an image based on representations of being caring and compassionate, nonpolitical, dynamic (but in an idealistic way), and of devoting its resources to beneficiaries rather than spending on administration..." (p. 286).

In today's digital environment, nonprofit organizations can take the opportunity to use perhaps the most effective tool for spreading word-of-mouth, the Internet, to make up for a lack of wide-spread name recognition and to better get their messages heard and remembered (Baker & Search, 2014; Bronstein, 2006). A strong web presence must be cultivated by organizations as a key part of their public relations activities (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012). For small nonprofits, this is positive and can potentially level the playing field with larger organizations. To use these online tools to their fullest, potentially as their primary communication tool, would no doubt help relationship-building, positive word-of-mouth, and attracting new supporters (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

In partnership with *CanadaHelps.org* (a popular online fundraising platform for registered Canadian charities), *Good Works* (a philanthropic PR agency) produced a report on how charities use their websites and whether they are employing "best practices". They found that, overall, organizations in Canada are not using their websites to their full potential and are not implementing compelling strategies to get people to their website and satisfy people's expectations once they do (Green, Wagg, & Jamieson, 2014). Despite that, these authors argue that the situation can improve since half of their respondents are using online donating platforms

and half are using social media integrated into their websites. Other positives they found included the fact many organizations' websites were user-focused, more than half are using storytelling to communicate with visitors, and many websites are mobile-friendly or working toward it (Green et al., 2014). By stressing a better, more focused web strategy, as well as more of a commitment of human resources, and integrating all regularly used online tools with offline activities, the authors believe the situation can improve for most organizations (Green et al., 2014).

Social media is one of those online tools mentioned as having potential for impact if effectively integrated into strategy, and it continues to gain legitimacy as illustrated above. In October 2011, Hill & Knowlton Canada, a PR, public affairs and strategic communications agency, studied the social media influence of the top 40 nonprofits in Canada (based on money earned). The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation was found to be the most "influential" with the Art Gallery of Ontario second, although the period studied, October, is Breast Cancer Awareness Month (Hill & Knowlton, 2011). Their definition of "influential" was based on a combination of the organization's number of Twitter followers, Facebook likes, and Klout score (an analytics tool that measures one's influence on various interactive web platforms). The rest of their measures looked at which organizations had the most Twitter and Facebook followers, who communicated the most messages, and which sectors within their sample tended to be the most influential with "cultural organizations" and "disease/research organizations" being one and two respectively (Hill & Knowlton, 2011). This demonstrates that many NPOs in Canada are active in the social media environment and are making an impression. However, it is the larger ones that are making the biggest impression.

Small NPOs. The state of public relations in small nonprofit organizations is still in need

of more attention, as the literature specific to small nonprofits is very limited. However, there are some researchers who have focused specifically on small nonprofits and this literature review has touched on issues specific to nonprofit organizations throughout. Ashcroft (2010) maintains that “[g]ood PR does not require high expenditure. Financial resources do not have to be great for a promotional campaign; much can be done with little” (p. 92). Ashcroft concludes that the main consideration for NPOs is developing a relationship with the media and that timing is important to success. Another element of impact with limited budgets is staff, who “are a vital resource and their enthusiasm can make a big impact, as can a warm and welcoming image” (Ashcroft, p. 95).

Baker and Search (2014) say an “integrated communication and marketing strategy” is the best way for a nonprofit organization to be “cost-effective” in communication efforts. This is particularly applicable to small nonprofits as they are constantly put in the position of finding the most cost-effective strategies. Integration means that ideas, goals, mission, messages, images, etc. all work in harmony and affect one another. This process also requires having a “marketing and communication strategy expert” within the organization (Baker & Search, 2014). Another cost-effective method suggested by Baker and Search (2014) is “cause marketing,” or partnering with a business to raise money and, at the same time, shine a positive light on a business because of its association with the cause (Baker & Search, 2014; Liston-Heyes, Liu, 2013).

Summary

This literature review has explored the state of the nonprofit sector and examined the place of small organizations within it. It has also shown the gaps in how nonprofits practice public relations compared to government and private sector organizations in that communication practices are not at the same level and small nonprofits require more work to fill those gaps. It

has demonstrated the opportunities that small nonprofits can seize to better accomplish their goals. It has pointed out the lack of research specifically on small nonprofits and how they may be able to compete more effectively with large, well-established nonprofits. Grunig's excellence theory has been presented as a leading benchmark in public relations theory and the conceptual lens used in this thesis to analyze the practices of small nonprofits who have been deemed successful.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the research methodology used in this thesis as well as the justification for choosing this particular method and how it aids in answering the research questions. Data collection and analysis procedures will be explained and a profile of each organization included in the study will come at the end of this chapter.

Borrowing from Creswell (2013), this thesis takes a collective case study approach in the form of a comprehensive analysis focusing on seven unique cases of success in nonprofit organizations under challenging circumstances. Examining the practices and goals of seven Canadian small nonprofit organizations, the study consists largely of interviews with the senior manager of each of these organizations. Grunig's *Theory of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, which resulted from a study conducted by James Grunig and his colleagues (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002) is used to understand the specific characteristics of success in public relations as they apply to small nonprofit organizations and also applied to these seven cases.

The original excellence study looked at organizations with large management structures and separate departments of people devoted fully to managing public relations for that organization (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002). The organizations examined here are not of this size. They are organization where, at most, one or two individuals are in charge of public relations, marketing, and communications or where those responsibilities are spread through the few employees who also balance communication work with other organizational duties.

Rationale

The strength of using this collective case study method is that it allows comparison of the roots of success over several different cases. By their nature, case studies are limited in scope

because of the relatively narrow view they pursue in practice (Creswell, 2013). However, given the diversity of the nonprofit sector, both geographically and economically, it was necessary to study a wider range of organizations rather than just one, effectively doing six case studies. This approach showed a snapshot of perspectives and approaches within the nonprofit sector as a collective (or multiple) case study is intended to do (Creswell, 2013). Examining the practices and goals of seven Canadian small nonprofit organizations, the study consists of interviews with the senior manager of each of these organizations and uses their annual reports, websites and some communication material for context and reference. The use of other methods such as surveys or focus groups would not provide the same richness of data that a one-on-one in-depth interview offered to this study. As the collective case study approach allowed, the ability of these senior managers to speak freely and at length about their organization offered more insight into nonprofit success.

Selection and Recruitment

The objective of this study was to analyze the communication and PR practices of small but successful nonprofit organizations. To be classified as “small”, participating nonprofit organizations were defined, following the HR Council for the Nonprofit sector’s classification, as those with 10 or fewer employees. As stated in the literature review, since there exists no list of the most successful small Canadian nonprofits (both with and without charitable status), the participating organizations solicited for this study were selected from both *Imagine Canada’s* list of “Accredited Organizations” under their “Standards Program” as well as from *Charity Intelligence* and *The Fraser Institute’s* annual awards for excellence in delivery of social services. This approach enabled the identification of organizations that have already been found to be successful from another source using an in-depth evaluation system. Since it is difficult to

determine externally if an organization is successful without close examination and inside access to the organization's activities, goals, and outcomes, using these sources greatly facilitated the selection process.

To understand the credibility of these lists, here is a brief overview of how they are created. *Imagine Canada* accredits nonprofits based on 73 criteria broken into five categories: board governance (e.g. the board helps develop and implement a continuously strategic plan, all due-diligence is taken on matters of oversight of the organizations activities, etc.); financial accountability and transparency (e.g. audited financial statements are publicly available, the cost-effectiveness of activities is examined, etc.); fundraising (e.g. policies exist on ethical donor relations, fundraising methods and practices are disclosed, etc.); staff management (e.g. human resources policies are agreed upon by employees and meet or exceed industry standards, etc.); and, volunteer involvement (e.g. appropriate screening is done, training and orientation meets the needs for the organizational roles, etc.) (Imagine Canada Standards Program, 2012).

Other sources were consulted in the search for participating organizations for the benefit of diversity and reach as only a small number of nonprofit organizations have gone through the accreditation process. *Charity Intelligence* is a website that rates Canadian charities. To date, they have awarded between zero and four stars to more than 600 charities in an effort to demonstrate the most efficient and impactful organizations within the nonprofit sector. Charity Intelligence's ratings are made up of *social results reporting* (40%): "the public reporting of their activities, outputs, and outcomes"; *financial transparency* (20%); *program cost coverage* (20%): "a financial ratio tool for assessing a charity's need for funding"; *fundraising costs* (15%); and *administrative costs* (5%) (Charity Intelligence, 2014).

The annual *Donner Canadian Foundation Awards for Excellence in the Delivery of Social*

Services seek to identify the few very “best-run non-profit social service agencies” each year. They select 21 organizations as finalists in various categories of organizational type and award one winner for each category as well as an overall winner (Fraser Institute, 2014). They evaluate organizations based on criteria from the following categories gathered in their application form: “financial management; income independence; strategic management; board governance; volunteers; staff; innovation; program cost; outcome monitoring; accessibility” (Canadian Donnor Awards Foundation, 2014).

From these sources, representatives were contacted from organizations that fit the selection criteria of size and were included in the study based on a first response basis until seven organizations had agreed and scheduled a time to participate.

Data Collection

To gain inside knowledge of how senior managers account for their small non-profit’s success, the primary data collection activity consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with the individual responsible for the organization’s operation management and pursuit of its goals (i.e. its senior manager or executive director) or a senior employee who could speak to the questions being asked in consultation with the senior manager. The participating organizations were selected because of their perceived success so it was assumed they had insight to offer into the questions being asked. They were selected from the lists identified above after a brief examination of their publicly available financial information and organizational website. They were then contacted by email and sent the solicitation letter and asked to participate via phone interview or in person depending on their location. Those who responded first were used in this study. Interviews were audio-recorded. Participants were asked to reflect on and articulate why they believe their organization is successful in achieving its goals and how public relations has

played a role in this. As the senior manager of their organization, participants were asked to identify how they perceive public relations practices, what is the value of those practices to the organization, and how these practices fit into the goals, strategic planning, and decision-making process. They identified who bears the day-to-day responsibility of managing public relations for the organization and what background, training, or expertise that individual possesses.

Participants described the techniques or strategies that seem to work for their organization.

Through this examination, this thesis takes into consideration the way in which these organizations attempt to reach out to the public and how they frame their identity and messages intended to convince others to support them in the ways they desire. The websites, annual reports, and available communication pieces of each organization were also used as complementary information/data source to further explain the organizations' activities and success.

Two interviews were conducted in person and recorded using the *Voice Memos* app on the primary researcher's *iPhone*. The other five interviews were conducted over the phone at a mutually agree upon time and recorded using a call recorder *iPhone* app. All audio files were then transferred to the primary researchers laptop.

Data Coding and Analysis

The responses were transcribed and printed. Key words or related concepts that appeared in the responses of multiple participants were noted to demonstrate the similarity, or dissimilarity as the case may be, in the communicative strategies and practices of these six organizations. A coding scheme (Appendix B) was then developed based on the initial examination of the data and the consideration of the research questions and the excellence model. Four overarching themes emerged: *Role/Value of PR*, referring to the emphasis organizations put on public

relations/communication. Sub-themes included *PR as a Voice in Decision-Making* and the organizations' *Philosophy about PR/Communication*. The next theme was *Resource Challenges*, describing what challenges a small nonprofit organization faces as it pertains to its internal resources. Sub-themes included, *Size and Scope* and *Budget*. The third theme was *Environment*, referring to the physical, economic, and social environment in which an organization exists. Sub-themes included *Organizational Environment*, *Placement in Society*, *Competition (economic)*, and *Location (geographic/physical)*. The final theme was *Mobilization Strategies/Tactics* referring to the specific strategies and tactics that respondents find have contributed to their success. Sub-themes included *Tools for Maximizing Efficiency*, *Desired Tools and Strategy*, *Offloading*, and *Piggybacking*.

Validation. All transcripts were examined by the research supervisor following transcription and were checked for inaccuracies, clarity, errors, and misrepresentations. These themes, sub-themes, and their definitions were developed and discussed by the primary researcher and research supervisor prior to final data coding. Each overarching theme was given a colour and responses that fit into those categories were highlighted with the corresponding colour during the second and third examination of the data. The research supervisor also reviewed the coded data to ensure highlighted responses matched the descriptions of each theme and sub-theme.

Analysis. The data was then assembled into the four themes and presented in the results section of this thesis. Similarities and differences of responses were shown and further analyzed in the discussion section. The excellence model served as a guiding principle of measurement in data analysis and served as a method of developing the interview questions that were asked of senior managers. In use of the theory itself as a comparative tool to examine these organizations,

this study takes into account the size and scale of these organizations and acknowledges that not all of its elements can apply here. The data was also examined to determine how the practices and strategies these organizations describe fit or align with the principles and specific characteristics of the excellence model. Not all the characteristics of the excellence model are required to be present in an organization for it to be considered excellent. However, the more characteristics an organization is found to have, the more excellent that organization is expected to be (Grunig et al., 2002).

Role of the Researcher

The primary research, Matthew Sheriko, holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and communication from an exclusively liberal arts university and therefore has been taught to constantly evaluate how organizations present themselves and the messages they are disseminating through all means of communicating. He comes from a background of two years experience working in the communication/media relations department at a Canadian university. Its central goal is to attract new students through web/social media and print materials, promote the university among the public, communicate to current students, staff, and faculty, as well as promote and cover events. There he gained experience and insight into developing multiple brands and communicating complex messages. In addition, he continues to serve as Assistant Director of a registered Canadian charity and is partly responsible for communicating, developing, and advancing its brand. From that he brought an element of anecdotal research and experience to this study. This clarification of bias helps to ensure the validity of the results of this study and demonstrates how it may shape this thesis.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board prior to the commencement of this study.

Profiles of Organizations in this Study

Partners for Mental Health

Location: Ottawa, ON

Reach: National

Number of employees: Seven

Finances (2014):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Spent on Charitable Programs	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$2,045,313	\$2,028,653	12%	5%	82%	\$218,133

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “The genesis for Partners for Mental Health came from the Mental Health Commission of Canada, which was established in the fall of 2007. The Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada, issued by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, identified an opportunity to catalyze a social movement in support of transformative change for mental health in Canada and the concept of Partners for Mental Health was formed. In November 2010, Partners for Mental Health became an independent registered charity in Canada. Partners for Mental Health operates independently of the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) and has its own Board of Directors and employees” (PFMH, 2014).

Mission: “[T]o act as a catalyst for change; to inform, engage, recruit, mobilize and partner with people and organizations to foster a social movement to improve mental health in Canada” (PFMH, 2014)

Vision: We are working toward the day when Canadians live in a society that values and promotes mental health and helps people living with mental health problems and mental illness

to lead meaningful and productive lives” (PFMH, 2014).

Ongoing programs: *Right By You, Not Myself Today*

Recognition: Accredited by *Imagine Canada*’s Standards Program.

Epilepsy Ontario

Location: Markham, ON

Reach: Provincial

Number of employees: three (full-time), three (part-time)

BN: 118900844RR0001

Finances (2013):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Spent on Charitable Programs	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$647,040	\$646,628	8%	55%	37%	

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “In 1956, a group of parents from the Toronto area rallied together to form a voice for epilepsy in the province. The seed they planted eventually grew to become a registered health charity – Epilepsy Ontario... Today, Epilepsy Ontario has 16 epilepsy agency affiliates and partners. Of these, 13 have boards of directors while the remaining three operate through volunteer contacts” (Epilepsy Ontario, 2014).

Mission: “Epilepsy Ontario is dedicated to promoting independence and optimal quality of life for children and adults living with seizure disorders. Through a network of local agencies, contacts and associates across the province, Epilepsy Ontario reaches out to people with epilepsy and their loved ones” (Epilepsy Ontario, 2014).

Vision: Epilepsy Ontario is a collaborative organization that seeks to partner with associations, governments, NGO’s, corporations and individuals that support its mission and purpose... [Also] seek positive, collaborative relationships with the agencies to expand its reach and effectiveness

and seek to provide services without cost where possible (Epilepsy Ontario, 2014).

Ongoing programs: client services (including counselling and referrals), information, education, and advocacy services.

Recognition: Accredited by *Imagine Canada's* Standards Program.

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario

Location: Toronto, ON

Reach: Provincial

Number of employees: Seven (full-time), two (part-time)

Registration number: 133412197RR0001

Finances (2014):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs (of expenses)	Fundraising Costs (of expenses)	Spent on Charitable Programs	Professional/consultant fees
\$848,069	\$819,391	15%	11%	74%	\$97,871

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “Hospice Palliative Care Ontario (HPCO) was formed in April 2011 when the memberships of The Hospice Association of Ontario (HAO) and the Ontario Palliative Care Association (HPCO) voted to join together and create HPCO. The integration of the two associations began as an idea discussed by the boards of both associations in 2007/2008 has been welcomed by a wide range of stakeholders in Ontario. The joining of HAO and OPCA was a significant achievement for hospice palliative care in Ontario, unifying the sector’s voice to strengthen hospice palliative care for the people of Ontario” (Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, 2014).

Mission: “[T]o provide leadership on behalf of our members by informing policy and promoting awareness, education, knowledge transfer and best practices in the pursuit of quality hospice palliative care in Ontario” (HPCO, 2014).

Vision: “To be the unified voice of collaborative, quality hospice palliative care in Ontario”

(HPCO, 2014).

Recognition: Accredited by *Imagine Canada's* Standards Program.

The Vancouver Friends for Life Society

Location: Vancouver, BC

Reach: Local

Number of employees: Three (full-time), four (part-time)

Registration number: 138277728RR0001

Finances (2013):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Spent on Charitable Programs	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$1,585,785	\$1,569,945	9%	28%	63%	N/A

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “Vancouver Friends for Life Society began delivering massage and hot meals to people with HIV/AIDS during the epidemic in the 1990’s. In 1995 Friends for Life opened its doors in the Diamond Centre For Living in Vancouver’s West End where it has provided a warm “home-like” environment and a safe haven to over 2800 people. Today, Friends For Life is North America’s only comprehensive wellness centre providing complimentary services to people living with different illnesses. Friends For Life recognizes the connection between the mind and body. We nurture the whole person, rather than just focusing on treating the illness” (Friends For Life, 2014).

Overview: “We enhance the wellness of our clients living with cancer and other life-threatening illnesses by providing complementary and alternative health and support services. We offer approximately 50 different therapies, including Naturopathic and Chinese Medicines, individual support and counselling, group and social support, body and energy therapies, nutrition programs and in-home support for individuals in the palliative stages of illness. All of our services are provided on a complimentary basis to our clients and are donated by our volunteer team of over

200 health practitioners” (Friends For Life, 2014).

Recognition: Listed on *Charity Challenge* (winners of Institute of Fundraising Awards)

Educational Program Innovations Charity Society (EPIC)

Location: North Sydney, NS

Reach: Local

Number of employees: one (full-time), 22 (part-time)

Registration number: 892149964RR0001

Finances (2014):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Spent on Charitable Programs	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$143,409	\$148,586	1%	0%	99%	N/A

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “EPIC was founded in Nova Scotia in 1996 by Barry Waldman... Because he was in daily contact with marginalized learners, he saw not only their individual challenges, but also opportunities lost due to lack of funding for specific programs. He identified the need for a community-based and funded charitable organization that could respond flexibly and quickly to financial and educational initiatives; an organization that could—because of its basis in volunteerism and focus on learners’ needs—fill in gaps between local, provincial and federal governmental agencies. Barry’s solution to all this was to found Educational Program Innovations Charity Society,” (EPIC, 2014).

Mission: “The mission of Educational Program Innovations Charity Society is to advance marginalized learners through innovation, empathy, volunteerism, diversity and partnership” (EPIC, 2014).

Ongoing programs: “*Youth Peer Program* - a daily after-school program for at-risk youth ages 8-18. *Breakthrough Program* - a weekly evening program supplementary to *Youth Peer* targeting high-risk youth ages 14-28. *Parents PEACE Program* - weekly parenting sessions to improve

relationships between troubled parents and their children at risk” (Canada Revenue Agency, 2014). Other programs include scholarships and volunteerism awards.

Recognition: Donner Canadian Foundation Award for Excellence in the Delivery of Services for Children (2009 - 2013); Peter F. Drucker Award for Non-Profit Management (2012).

Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada

Location: Mississauga, ON

Reach: National

Number of employees: four (full-time), one (part-time)

Registration number: 119267862RR0001

Finances (2013):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Spent on Charitable Programs	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$637,867	\$731,039	14%	28%	59%	\$13,782

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2014)

History: “In 1976, two families met by chance and discovered that they both had sons affected by something called Tourette Syndrome or TS. Looking to find more on this disorder, they discovered that information concerning TS was disseminated to the public only by the patients fortunate enough to have a family doctor or neurologist familiar with TS. Mr. Iverson and Mr. Steinberg recognized the great need in Canada for an organized group whose primary purpose would be to supply the Canadian public, government and medical community with information about TS... TSFC became fully chartered nationally in April 1976” (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada, 2014).

Mission: “The Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada is a national voluntary organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for those with or affected by Tourette Syndrome through programs of: education, advocacy, self-help and the promotion of research” (TCFC, 2014).

Vision: “All people who have Tourette Syndrome will lead quality lives as accepted and valued members of an informed, tolerant society” (TCFC, 2014).

Ongoing programs: “Programs of education and public awareness include but are not limited to the following: Annual conference for families, individuals and health care professionals; dissemination of information about the disorder; newsletters; videos; brochures; books; social gatherings; workshops; scholarships; counselling services; volunteer recruitment and training” (Revenue Canada, 2014).

Recognition: Accredited by *Imagine Canada*’s Standards Program.

Pancreatic Cancer Canada

Location: Ottawa, ON

Reach: National

Number of employees: Two (full-time), one (part-time)

Registration Number: 848701967RR0001

Finances (2013):

Total revenue	Total expenses	Administration Costs	Fundraising Costs	Gifts to Other Charities	Spent on Marketing/Promotion
\$1,099,817	\$752,156	8%	9%	52%	\$36,691

(Canada Revenue Agency, 2013)

History: Founded in 2006 in the memory of Dick Aldridge, former Toronto Argonaut. They later became Pancreatic Cancer Canada, the only national charity of its kind. Started in Toronto, head office was moved to Ottawa in 2009 where their operations take place but continue to maintain an office in the Toronto area.

Mission: “...committed to improving pancreatic cancer survival and creating hope through awareness, education, patient support and research. Our focus continues to be: Raising awareness and advocating for increased funding; providing support and resources to patients and their

families; supporting research into early detection, effective treatment options and ultimately, finding a cure.” (Pancreatic Cancer Canada, 2014)

Vision: “We believe there can be a future without pancreatic cancer. This coming year, thousands of Canadians will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and told there is little hope for survival. It is our hope that through increased awareness and funding, scientists will discover a means to detect pancreatic cancer at an earlier and more treatable stage; thereby significantly improving the survival rate for patients living with pancreatic cancer.” (PCC, 2014)

Ongoing programs: *Purple Lights Campaign, Pansies for Pancreatic Cancer, World Pancreatic Cancer Day.*

Recognition: *Charity Intelligence* rating

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter will present the results as a set of four overarching themes that emerged from the data.

Theme One: Role/Value of Public Relations

Generally, this theme represents responses that demonstrated the value that participants placed on public relations and the role of public relations within the organization and its strategic plan. Indicators of this theme were when: respondents explicitly stated its value and role in decision-making; respondents referred to whether or not the organization made it a priority in their activities and as a seat at the table, i.e. if the organization's leadership had a background in public relations and/or if their formal role included public relations practices; when respondents described the extent to which they practice public relations, i.e. whether they make a serious effort to include it in their daily workflow.

Sub-theme: PR as a voice in decision-making. This sub-theme represents how public relations/communication influences organizational decision-making, and if management has placed PR at the table by making it part of the responsibility of a high level employee. As highlighted in the excellence model, having the person in charge of public relations as part of the "dominant coalition" – the top decision-makers – is part of the mix of being an excellent organization (Grunig, 2002).

Six out of the seven organizations examined had either a top-level staff member or an employee reporting directly to the top, with a role that included or focused on public relations. Three out of seven had formal education/training in public relations/communications/marketing. In just two cases, it was the president or executive director of the organization himself or herself, and in one organization (Partners for Mental Health or PFMH) both the president and director of

marketing had a background in PR/communications/marketing, while another director within the organization looked after PR-related activities such as volunteer mobilization and stakeholder relations.

Sub-theme: PR/Communication philosophy. This sub-theme represents how public relations/communication is viewed within the organization and what value it has to the organization and to what level of value PR is to the organization's activities (i.e. how the organization thinks about and plans their PR/communication).

Every research participant interviewed stated that he or she goes through some form of regular strategic planning for their organization, to varying degrees of formality and extensiveness. Within the strategic planning process, most participants stated that public relations/communications/marketing is a part of that plan, or is at least considered, in some way. In the following example, Partners for Mental Health (PFMH) demonstrates its commitment to a regular strategic planning process with PR/communications/marketing having an important and equal voice at the decision-making table:

[W]e'll put forth our plans and what our recommendations are strategically and then, since we're a small group, we review it all together and decide the strategic direction we want to take and what plans support that. We go through multiple iterations of the annual plan and then as the year goes on we make adjustments to the plan based on results and learning and budget. (PFMH)

The participant from Vancouver Friends for Life Society (FFL) stated that although they had no concrete organizational plan for communications, they were making an effort to improve their communications planning and make it a priority:

[O]ur PR in regards to our fundraising stance is very strong and very necessary. But our

PR is primarily project based... We have a separate communications committee. It's one of our overarching goals for our 2014-2015 strategic plan is to increase our external and internal communication. (FFL)

To varying degrees, PR comes into play in these organizations. For some, it has been found to be more important than others:

PR, the way I understand it, we're talking about the information, engagement of our various audiences. So PR is crucial. Basically, in order to carry out our strategies, we have to have a high level of engagement with our stakeholders... It's been very important (in our success) and I think it's made a significant difference in how we've made our public policy agenda. (Hospice Palliative Care Ontario - HPCO)

I really wouldn't say we have a PR strategy. I see PR as a personality thing. It really comes down to how good are you at promoting yourself... My feeling is we can't afford someone who's competent at that. (Educational Program Innovations Charity - EPIC)

Well I would say it's added greatly. It's helped raise the profile of the organization but more than anything it's helped to build credibility for the organization. (Epilepsy Ontario - EO)

In these three examples, the two with a view that PR is of great importance are larger in scope than the other, EPIC, and serve a wider base as provincial organizations. These organizations are trying to build credibility on a wider level and thus must place more attention on PR to achieve and maintain that goal as the more effort they put into PR, the greater their recognition.

The following organizations offer different perceptions and conceptualizations of what PR is and how it is practiced in their individual organizations:

It's usually the key players sitting around the table and having a conversation about, 'what is it we're trying to achieve? How can we achieve it? And then, what are the PR pieces?'

Then we'll come up with strategies for each. (HPCO)

It actually has a number of different facets, I guess, both from a national and a local perspective. From a national perspective, public relations incorporates informing people both about the disorder and about the services that we offer. (Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada - TSF)

Our organization and our brand position is very much about wanting to be bold and do things differently. We kind of have to shake people out of their complacency. (PFMH)

Theme Two: Resource Challenges

This theme describes an organization's lack of financial and human resources as well as a lack of knowledge or expertise about public relations as a way of describing the challenges they have overcome to become a successful organization.

Sub-theme: Size/Capacity. This sub-theme indicates how a lack of human resources (or staff) has affected the operations and goals of the organization. Every respondent mentioned their size as a small organization with a small staff, as a common, ongoing challenge. This was anticipated, as was the lack of plentiful financial resources, before the data collection was undertaken. The nature of the kind of organizations selected for this study meant that they are bound to have these challenges. Nevertheless, there was a wide range between organizations in how human resource challenges affect their operations. This theme and subtheme goes further in depth to demonstrate what this challenge really means. In the general sense, it means these organizations have had to incorporate many different responsibilities into fewer positions, in contrast to larger institutions, where entire departments look after one part of the responsibilities

that the employees do in these small nonprofits. The following examples touch on this:

Most of our larger counterparts that are government funded and massive in their size have full-time social media staff, for instance. (HPCO)

Our organization is a small, sort of boutique charity that has a very strong base of supporters and people who are aware of our organization. Outside of this community, it's not an incredibly well known entity. (FFL)

I'm the executive director, so in a small organization that means I do basically whatever's needed. (TSF)

This challenge stretches the organization thin and, as in one case (PCC), means that employees work after hours to get their work done and volunteer a lot of time. Although not specifically echoed by the other respondents, most mentioned that their lack of human resources makes it difficult to accomplish all tasks within regular working hours.

Sub-theme: Budget. This sub-theme represents how the budget, or lack of financial resources, of the organization has limited its activities and pursuit of its goals. Each participant cited budgetary constraints as a leading challenge in reaching their goals, but to varying degrees.

Lots of the larger organizations out there, if they wanted to take on specific issues within our sector, they'd put a project team together, they'd hire a communications and a PR person, they'd craft the messages, they'd purchase the delivery channels and off they'd go. We don't have that ability and that's the thing that constrains us. For example, a single page ad in a Toronto daily newspaper can cost you upwards of \$60,000/\$70,000. (HPCO)

You have to be really creative and everything comes under the microscope in terms of evaluation... So when you have a limited budget and you want to try new things that

aren't tested it's a harder sell because you're investing money into something that's not proven. (PFMH)

These responses illustrate the ability of large organizations to explore more options in planning strategy and to have the freedom to take more risks to see what will pay off for them in a number of activities including fundraising, campaigns, and attracting attention from the general public. In a similar vein, one respondent (Pancreatic Cancer Canada – PCC) commented on how donors are not interested in supporting small organizations with a large portion of their budget devoted to staff salaries as opposed to research or delivery of services, for example. TSF brought to light the fact they are more of a reactive rather than proactive organization because of their lack of resources.

Theme Three: Environment

This theme describes the physical, economic, and social environment in which an organization exists. It focuses on the realities of these areas that have made it challenging for organizations or how those realities have allowed the organizations to thrive. More specifically, sub-themes address 1) organizational environment, i.e. how the organization operates; 2) an organization's placement in society, i.e. the reality of their fields and where they stand within it; 3) what sort of economic competition they face in securing funds; and 4) how an organization's location influences its success or challenges it.

Sub-theme: Organizational environment. This sub-theme represents how the organization is structured and its unique organizational culture. The sub-theme demonstrated how organizations operate within the constraints created by their structure. Words like “informal” or “organic” were used to describe the organizational culture and most responses falling into this theme demonstrated a need for employees and volunteers of the organizations to

basically help out wherever was needed and to carry out a much less rigid and clear cut job description than may be found in larger organizations. Two respondents reported that the overwhelming majority of their staff/volunteers were women, but not by preference of selection. By this they meant that while their organizational environment fosters diversity and equal opportunity, the nonprofit sector itself may be more likely to attract women and thus they have more female employees than male.

Sub-theme: Placement in society. This sub-theme represents the reality of the organization's field (e.g. health) and subfield (e.g. mental health) of focus, how the organization is positioned within the field it serves, how its mission has changed or adapted, and how the public perceives its field, mission and mandate. Some of these organizations have been in existence long enough that they have been forced to adapt to changing climates and a change in how, and to whom, they deliver their service.

We have a mandate to support individuals living with cancer, HIV and AIDS, Hep C, Cystic Fibrosis, and ALS. However, our organization was created 21 years ago as a response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Vancouver. (FFL)

This respondent stated now that treatments have allowed those with HIV/AIDS to live longer, the organization has had to expand its reach from just serving those with HIV/AIDS to serving clients with other diseases. Not only that, but since they have existed for more than two decades, their word-of-mouth has resulted in a positive connotation associated with their brand in their community.

According to the respondent from Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, this organization's cause is benefiting from a changing view toward end of life and a large cohort of people in need, or who will soon be in need, of palliative care:

Hospices are being viewed across the country as the solution to increasing healthcare costs... It's just a demographic thing with the population trajectory we have. And if we don't do something then the system will collapse. (HPCO)

In some cases, the focus of organizations have had to change to better serve their causes as this respondent did:

[O]ver the last couple of years, we've realized the need not to just support the families and give them tools and strategies for success but the need to reach out to broader sections of society and help family success by changing attitudes in society. (TSF)

Several of the organizations in this study are unique, serve a specialized niche or an under-recognized need, and have yet to reach the point where they are widely understood by the general population. This is particularly true for the Tourette Syndrome Foundation, Pancreatic Cancer Canada, Epilepsy Ontario, and the Friends For Life Society. The following quotations illustrate issues related to public perception and awareness:

I think the first thing that people would say is they would call it the "swearing disease"... That's such a pervasive misconception and it's often perpetuated by the media, both in media stories and on TV. (TSF)

We've looked at continuing medical education so that GPs (general practitioner medical doctors) have a clue about the innocuous symptoms that could be pancreatic cancer, because they don't. So Doctors need to be aware. Patients and people need to be aware that some of these symptoms could become nasty not just innocuous. (PCC)

Really it's about understanding. Raising awareness about epilepsy because even though it's one of the most common neurological conditions, it's certainly not as well known as MS or Parkinson's, so in order to make headway, we need to raise awareness about it.

(EO)

As for the other organizations in this study, their general cause may enjoy greater public awareness but the organization itself may approach that cause in a different way compared to how their counterparts approach it. This is certainly true in the case of PFMH and EPIC. For PFMH, they recognize that mental health is an issue of which more people are becoming aware, but they aim to have people take action instead of just becoming more educated or aware.

Stigma is a huge challenge. The challenge has always been ‘how do we get the broader audience to connect to the issue personally?’ Put themselves in it and a part of it...

We’re trying to catalyze a social movement. Trying to get more and more people to connect to the cause of mental health and illness and what to do something. (PFMH)

But since PFMH focuses on a specific area within mental health they uniquely meet a need that was not receiving much attention previously. Since their mandate fits into a crowded field, they have to be heard among all the other organizations dealing with mental health. The respondent pointed out that there is a lot of talk in the media and in the general public about mental health but there may not be enough understanding or real action to address the problem.

If you have a marginalized group, they’re much harder to reach. They’re less likely to have a phone that works. They’re less likely to be trusting of organizations. We know other organizations try to invite people of diverse backgrounds in and they don’t show up proportionally. And the attitude is ‘well we invited them and that’s all we can say. If they’re not here, they’re not here.’ We don’t do that. (EPIC)

This response demonstrates the difficulty some have in dealing, or providing services to, marginalized youth. It shows that some clients may be poorly understood or hard to reach, even by organizations that are trying to help them. EPIC uses persistence in contacting these

individuals (i.e. “whatever it takes”) in order to stop them from falling further through the cracks of the education system.

In contrast, Epilepsy Ontario, Pancreatic Cancer Canada, Hospice Palliative Care Ontario, and the Tourette Syndrome Foundation all serve the interests of the entire spectrum of issues within their field within the region they represent – Ontario, and in the case of PCC and TSF, Canada, rather than a narrow specific issue within their field. Their mandates are much broader than the other organizations in this study in that, for example, Epilepsy Ontario provides information to the public and its members, focuses on research, and conducts advocacy in an effort to enhance the lives of those living with epilepsy in Ontario rather than a specific subset issue within epilepsy in Ontario.

Sub-theme: Competition. This sub-theme represents the level of competition for funding in an organization’s geographical area or field/subfield. As was shown in the introduction and literature review, the larger nonprofit organizations consume the majority of the pool of funding in Canada. Not only that but from one geographic region to another there is a difference in the amount of money available to nonprofits:

In a place like Nova Scotia, there are not that many organizations you can tap into that have enough money because you don’t really want it just for one year. You want it to be something that’s repeated from one year to the next. There are very few of those. (EPIC)

Sub-theme: Location. This sub-theme represents how the geographical (i.e. what city) and the physical (i.e. where it is located within the city) location affects the organization. A particular geographical location for these organizations could mean that potential supporters or interested parties are able to discover them more easily. However, most of the organizations in this study did not emphasize their exact location in their community or the importance of being

in a certain community. Specifically, if they were located in Toronto versus somewhere in rural Ontario and on a particularly busy street in Toronto versus one that sees less traffic from the general public, it was of less importance to these organizations compared to other challenges. Several participants reported location to be a factor in their overall success, one found it to be a detriment, while the rest found it to be of no real relevance to their success. The Tourette Syndrome foundation would like to be in a storefront rather than an office building in order to allow for drop-in visits, whereas Pancreatic Cancer Canada does not see that as a benefit as their online presence is more important to them and can be built from virtually anywhere:

In my opinion we could be anywhere. But in the opinion of the board we should be in Toronto because that's where they all are. But we'd have to pay way more rent. From a networking perspective, maybe, but really we can network from anywhere. (PCC)

This response shows the changing landscape of the nonprofit sector and how online communication tools are helping small nonprofits reach out and serve a wider population, thus reducing the impact of geographic location on success.

Theme Four: Mobilization Strategies/Tactics

This theme describes the specific strategies and tactics used to further organizational goals and that respondents reported as having contributed to their success. Each of these organizations depends on the public to further its mission and therefore requires effective ways of mobilizing the public and securing them as supporters. Sub-themes deal more specifically with the tools organizations use for maximizing their efficiency, what tools and strategies they believe would help their individual organizations, how offloading work on outside sources helps elevate pressure on the organization, and how piggybacking on other organizations, campaigns, etc. and pooling resources has helped these organizations achieve their goals.

Sub-theme: Tools for maximizing efficiency. This sub-theme represents the specific tools the organization uses to further its mission/mandate, maximize efficiency, and mitigate its challenges. In terms of communicative tools, all but one organization in this study has and maintains a social media presence. Social media, i.e. online tools developed to allow users to share content and interact with anyone online, proved to be one of the main vehicles for these organizations in communicating messages on a regular basis. Perhaps equal to their use of social media was their use of their organization's websites as a vehicle to communicate with the public. Each respondent said they rely on, and maintain, their website for communicating their messages and demonstrating what they aim to accomplish:

One [way of doing PR] is just about raising awareness, so we have a weekly column on our website called "Voices of Epilepsy" so we post different stories and articles on a weekly basis. We use social media, Facebook and Twitter, and our website, of course. We have a monthly column on the Huffington Post. (EO)

We have a bi-weekly newsletter that goes out to all our members and we look at that newsletter as a way to update on issues that we're managing and prepare the members for any type of response we might need or we may be just providing them with information to pass on to their stakeholders at that local level. (HPCO)

We have Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, the main ones. So we'll engage with people that way as well. And social media also plays an important role in our PR activities as well, in terms of finding key influencers following them, or tweeting at them, trying to get a more broad reach for our message. (PFMH)

I'm always looking for new things to put on Facebook: trials, promising research, webinars, awareness campaigns, where there are races that people can sign up for,

whatever. Not only stuff we produce but also things people will be interested in. (PCC)

In addition to social media channels, several organizations put out regular digital and paper based newsletters to those who sign up for it. As mentioned by HPCO, it is a way of directly communicating tailored messages to those whom they know have an interest in their activities. Newsletters are produced in both print and electronic form by TSF as well.

Social media and websites are very dominant communication channels used across the sector but staging events open to the public, either for fundraising, awareness, or a forum for discussion about the organization's field and mandate was common among the organizations in this study. These events required a great deal of planning and required at least some help from outside sources. This particular strategy was not coded as "offloading" because the event itself is a tool used to further the organization's mandate and is largely undertaken by the organization itself rather than offloaded completely to outside help. For example, HPCO's annual conference is for "thought leaders, executives, and service providers from the hospice palliative care community" to be together in order to discuss current issues relating to end of life and the hospice palliative care. HPCO develops an entire communication plan around their conference activities months in advance to maximize the conference's impact. Another example of using events as a PR opportunity is Epilepsy Ontario. They produce timely communication ahead of their events to increase their reach:

When have our "Epilepsy Action Day at Queen's Park" we'll do a couple of stories on that so it catches people's attention and lets them know that we're active in the advocacy envelope... Holding a public event and inviting stakeholders but also the broader public and media to those events makes a big difference as well and engages those who are close to the organization so that they can see something tangible that's going on. (EO)

In contrast to those organizations that hold public events or fundraisers, EPIC has gained recognition and further legitimacy through applying and winning awards that recognize excellence in charitable service. EPIC has received nine awards since 2007 from the Donner Foundation and their annual “Awards for Excellence in Delivery of Social Services”.

Another tool unique among the respondents is the following example from PFMH about direct marketing to individuals whom they recruit:

If you said, ‘I want to get involved’ we’d have you fill out an online form and then you’d go into our *Salesforce* database and then we start communicating with you one-on-one to find out what you’re interested in and then we’ll highlight different opportunities to get involved. (PFMH)

The organizations in this study made use of efficient tools to get their message heard by the public and were opportunistic about it.

Sub-theme: Desired tools and strategies. This sub-theme represents the specific tools that the organization does not have and deems would be useful to furthering their mission/mandate, maximizing efficiency, and mitigating their challenges. Although speculative, each respondent reflected on possible tools or strategies that could help the organization in its current state.

Respondents from each of the four organizations that did not have a PR specialist on staff whose responsibility was almost entirely PR said they wanted someone more dedicated or focused on PR/communications initiatives to help the organization’s mandate:

If there were an individual who was effective who could do it on a commission basis and do it for 15%, I think there would be a whole lot of small community organizations that would be interested. (EPIC)

A very concrete communications plan is missing. I think having a staff member that's dedicated to communications within the organization and has the experience and capacity to really move our communications along we're lacking at the moment. (FFL)

We'd love to have someone who could write press releases that would grab some attention. Someone who could do Twitter effectively. (PCC)

I'd like to have a communications person on board whose expertise is in the message itself – the crafting, the language, the tone, creating the compelling stories. Then I'd probably like more social media savvy within our staff. (HPCO)

An organization can be national and be unique in the cause and population it serves while still being in need of wider recognition. The following example shows, as national organizations of a small size, TSF is searching for wider reach and understanding in order to thrive:

I think the ability to do a fairly broad-based public awareness media campaign would be tremendously helpful – TV, radio, billboard, PSAs, things like the bus ads in Ottawa, that sort of thing. (TSF)

The same seems true for PCC, who is looking to create a PSA in partnership with Shaw Media. They are trying to take an opportunity for greater reach within the media by making the connection with Shaw as its past president died of pancreatic cancer.

Sub-theme: Offloading work. This sub-theme represents how these organizations use outside sources such as PR firms or volunteers to help carry out their activities. Five out of seven organizations said they have used one or multiple outside firms to handle part of their communication/PR/marketing needs, replacing a lack of expertise and/or staff:

Without having a large budget for communication, forming partnerships with PR firms or communication companies where we can work within our budget to get the most support

has been really beneficial to us. (FFL)

We rely quite heavily on our agencies in terms of expanding our team and our impact...

So our approach is: we have a lean team internally, and so we tap into the expertise and capacity that our agencies have to bring our programs to life. (PFMH)

PFMH, in particular, has used as many as five organizations for different purposes including strategic marketing, PR, and digital communication. Many responses under this code described soliciting the public to help the organization through the organization's direction. The following examples illustrate that same thing in a few different contexts:

When we look at our membership, there are about 80 hospices in the province, but collectively it's about 14,000 volunteers, then there's staff, etc. We give them the tools to talk to their local constituents about the importance of hospice palliative care so they can engage all the political parties and find out their positions and share their feelings on why it's important. (HPCO)

We have volunteers across the country, about 650 who are volunteer leaders. They're trained, they lead groups within their communities, then we provide the tools and the means to organize their own events activities to engage with the public. We'll provide the media materials, key messaging, all that stuff so they can also interact with media in their own communities. (PFMH)

Other examples in the responses of similar tactics include EPIC having a large base of volunteers to help carry out their service making up about 150 volunteer hours per week. The Friends for Life Society contracts an individual or seeks a volunteer to handle its social media updates on a regular basis. Epilepsy Ontario has used a volunteer with a background in graphic design to help with their marketing activities.

The TSF has a number of volunteer chapters and affiliates across the country that will serve as a point of contact in their own community, providing support and promoting the mission of the foundation at the local level. Some take on a more active role in promoting the organization than others:

Our Ottawa chapter, which is one of our stronger chapters, has gone out on their own initiative and sought support and donations for that [annual bus ad] campaign. (TSF)

Campaigns are a big part of the overall PR strategy for PCC, PFMH, and TSF in particular and were coded as offloading because they were shown to rely greatly on outside help for success. These campaigns aim to increase public awareness of the organization's cause or money for their cause through promotional material and messaging from a number of sources. In the case of PFMH, the campaign is more about a call to action. Similarly, PCC's pansy flower campaign is designed to solicit people to sell pansies (the flower associated with their cause) for them. During November, national awareness month for pancreatic cancer, this organization appeals to the public and those who look after iconic buildings to put up purple lights, since purple is the official colour of the fight against pancreatic cancer. PFMH's two campaigns are "Right By You", a campaign focused on suicide prevention, and "Not Myself Today" for workplace mental health. Both of these campaigns are delivered through close collaboration with PR/marketing firms to develop material.

We're trying to get the federal government to create a fund, a \$100M youth suicide prevention fund. To do that, we need Canadians to write their MPs and the Health Minister and Finance Minister, key decision makers, to help influence creation of the fund. (PFMH)

In addition to the bus ad campaign conceived of and executed by their Ottawa chapter,

TSF offloads two major campaigns to an advertising firm that does work mostly pro bono for this charity. Those two campaigns were called “@Random”, a documentary film project where the public can view some 34 short films to become informed on Tourette Syndrome, and “Surrender Your Say”, where Twitter users allowed TSF’s agency to operate their accounts for 24 hours in order to tweet random vocal ticks.

All of these campaigns demonstrate that organizations that are trying to reach a wider audience are doing that by looking outside their own offices to get help spreading their message.

Sub-theme: Piggybacking. This sub-theme represents the tactics that make use of the public’s awareness or attention on current events, other campaigns, the political and media climates, or when the organization pools its resources with other like-minded or similar organizations to work towards a common goal.

Several organizations in this study have been a part of, or started, some form of coalition or group of organizations that had a common interest. From their responses, HPCO has most made use of the strategy of piggybacking and pooling of resources. HPCO brought together 27 organizations with a stake of some kind in the cause of hospices and palliative care in order to convince the Ontario provincial government to commit funding to hospices and palliative care:

By bringing the coalition together that increased our influence. So what we did was take all our individual messages and we looked for the common ground and we consolidated that into a single request of government that was signed on by 27 organizations. By doing that, it amplified the message and it got all the messages of hospice palliative care out to the public through those organizations. (HPCO)

This was coded as “piggybacking/pooling” instead of “offloading” as it was a tactic used to pool the resources of several organizations in order to come out with a unified voice. Similar

to the coalition discussed in the previous example, EPIC keeps a group of related organizations together as a management team to help guide its practices and delivery of services:

We have a management team for the Youth-Peer Program and there are 25 different organizations in it. Anyone in our service area that's dealing with the kinds of kids we're dealing with, we want them to be involved. (EPIC)

Similarly, PCC recognizes the value in this type of opportunity for their own organization and are looking to take advantage of it as well:

We'd like to get together with some of the other hard to treat cancer groups like lung and form a little group. To see if together we can advocate for more funding for hard to treat cancers rather than just us going. (PCC)

In addition, PCC is already an active voice in established groups of a similar mandate in Ontario and nationally that drive cancer research and health research. So they are a voice in the big picture discussion of cancer in Canada but are looking to direct more attention and discussion towards tackling hard to treat cancers.

Another element of piggyback was demonstrated in how organizations position themselves on topics in the media or current events. HPCO uses this tactic fairly often:

When the election was going on we kept providing updates on our engagement with the parties. We try to make it relevant and we try to make it so that the content is something they can use immediately in that two-week period... So there may be a public policy issue which is hot in the media and we may want to put out a specific position on it. So assisted suicide or euthanasia. (HPCO)

HPCO exemplifies how being proactive with PR can help an organization not only get in front of issues with clear positions, but show that they are engaged in society, here to solve

problems for the population they serve.

In closing, the data demonstrated how small organizations in the nonprofit sector handle communication and the challenges they face. The data analysis revealed four overarching themes: the role and value of public relations in these organizations, the challenges associated with organizational resources, the overall environment surrounding the organizations, and the strategies and tactics these organizations use to mobilize stakeholders and the public at large. The following section will expand on the results presented here and discuss the meaning of those findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication and public relations practices and strategies of successful nonprofit organizations using Grunig's excellence model as a conceptual analytical lens. It was also to identify the unique challenges these organizations face and to learn from these cases in order to propose best practices for other small NPOs. To achieve this, data was collected by interviewing senior managers within the organizations and consulting their websites, annual reports, and messaging. In order to understand how these organizations work and what has contributed to their success, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do senior managers of small nonprofit organizations with limited administration, management, and budgets account for their success in achieving their public relations goals?
2. What public relations challenges do senior managers of small nonprofits face and how do they address these challenges?

To answer these questions, this chapter will pull from the four main themes, and specific sub-themes, that emerged from the data analysis in order to build on the results and discuss the meaning of the findings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the two research questions and concludes with a discussion of the findings in light of Grunig's excellence model as a conceptual lens.

RQ1: How do senior managers of small nonprofit organizations with limited administration, management, and budgets account for their success in achieving their public relations goals?

This question gets to the crux of the problem for any small nonprofit organization. How

does an organization make the largest possible impact with little resources? As expected, every organization struggled with this issue but each reported approaches – some in common and some unique – that they used to maximize their impact. They all recognized this overall challenge as more or less the reality of operating a nonprofit in general but acknowledged that these challenges are more prevalent in small nonprofits. Accounting for how they have been able to find success and continue to pursue their goals, respondents talked mostly about what strategies and tactics they use as well as their overall organizational philosophies and policies.

Mobilization strategies and tactics. As the results showed, offloading, pooling, piggybacking, websites, and social media were the most common strategies and tactics for getting the organization's message out and into the public's consciousness. Bonk et al. (1999) stated in the literature review that a lack of communication experience is a main reason why nonprofits resist effective strategies and tactics. However, all organizations in this study that were making a concerted effort to disseminate their message and interact with interested stakeholders put a great deal of stock in the above mentioned strategies and tactics as the most efficient ways of communicating within their budget. As was shown in the literature review, social media has been referred to as a way of equalizing social interaction (Valentini & Kruckeberg, 2012) because of its ability to offer small voices a much wider audience than was possible with traditional media and the chance to interact directly with their stakeholders (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2012). However, it takes expertise to use social media to communicate effectively and hard work to establish a presence, and this on top of all the other responsibilities of small nonprofit managers.

The participating organizations in this study demonstrate many aspects of effective, easily understandable, and transparent communication and governance. This has helped in

appealing to a wider audience. As was highlighted in the overview of the nonprofit sector, this finding was supported by the work of Felkins and Croteau-Chonka (2014), who state that despite a shift away from traditional toward online communication practices, senior managers of small nonprofits should not be overwhelmed by social media tools. They say the fundamental principles of communication remain the same. Felkins and Croteau-Chonka's (2014) foundations of effective communication include: brevity, simplicity, timeliness, transparency, and relevance. In short, "ultimately success comes from telling the nonprofit story with simplicity, clarity, openness, and personal appeal to connect people to the mission and inspire engagement and action" (p. 94). Therefore, as long as these small nonprofits can apply these principles to their daily communication, they should find communication success. This is the essence of what these seven nonprofits do. For example, PFMH uses brevity in its messaging by clearly stating what the mental health landscape looks like in Canada. They use simplicity in their messages with statistics, info graphics, and accessible language. They make it timely by staying on top of current trends in mental health research and current views on mental health in general. They show communication transparency through clearly identifying themselves online and what they stand for. Finally, PFMH makes it relevant by tailoring their messages to their audiences and showing how they can be involved.

New media versus old. There was not a great deal of success expressed by the participants in this study in reaching out through traditional media. This is in contrast to what Fristenberg (2009) suggests as a way of being cost-effective, i.e. that NPOs make better use of free media like news outlets. Most participants attempted to use the media but it was not their primary platform for disseminating their message. A discussion of new media versus old media would apply here but is not necessary, as these organizations did not go into depth about the

reasoning behind their choices of one platform over another. However, several mentioned difficulties with getting stories picked up by major news media. Participants pointed to a lack of contacts with the news media, or to a less well-developed relationship and limited name recognition compared to larger organizations. With the events these organizations hold, they did all mention that they attempt to seek out media coverage for those events with varying degrees of success.

Several participants reported having established audiences through their social media channels and suggested that it is easier for them to know how many are hearing about events through social media. This reflected Duhé and Wright's (2013) contention, as discussed in the literature review, that social media can be an effective two-way communication tool. The organizations in this study did, however, acknowledge surrendering some control over how the message is received and passed on, a key consideration of using a two-way approach. As far as audiences go, PFMH has 8,572 followers on Twitter, and 11,153 Facebook "Likes", while TSF has 3,255 Facebook "Likes", and FFL has 1,592 Twitter followers (as of February, 2015). Each organization is able to rely on those seeing their posts and spreading throughout their network – the fastest way of spreading information. Several organizations in this study have done well to reach their target audience and identify clearly who their stakeholders are. PFMH, HPCO, EO, PCC, and TSF use messages focused on their stakeholders and in some cases sent directly to them to spark engagement, debate, and education. HPCO, in particular, has recognized the importance of focusing on a group of people with a distinct interest, this is known as a niche network (Baker & Search, 2014).

Several participants reported attempting to better target their stakeholders to engage them in their mission and mandate. This approach is supported by Baker and Search (2014) who argue

that organizations can achieve this through social media: “the ROI of social media is to significantly improve communication, collaboration, and performance for the organization” (p. 193). Echoing the sentiment of the excellence theory, Baker and Search conclude that the impact an organization can have is based on its level of collaboration with stakeholders: “Collaboration with others to achieve common goals is key for organization leaders” (p. 194). For the most part, the organizations in this study recognize the opportunity that effective social media use can give them. This strategy is further aided by the way these organizations take a more relatable and personal approach to communication through conversational messaging and developing distinct personalities. But, they cannot be successful in these tactics unless they have a solid plan for communication. “Communication for nonprofits, no matter what technology is used, at whatever distance, or whenever it is convenient, must be based on listening and sharing relevant information, responsive caring, and promoting both individual and collective benefits of a common good.” (Felkins & Croteau-Chonkna, 2014, p. 87).

Expanding reach. Outsourcing or offloading proved to be a common and effective strategy for five out of seven organizations in this study. Using communication/PR/marketing agencies and soliciting the help of volunteers were the most cited methods of offloading. PFMH was especially successful at this particular strategy by using as many as five different agencies developing professional material for its campaigns. This organization also made great use of a network of more than 500 volunteers across the country to spread the word about their campaigns and act as ambassadors for those campaigns. This is certainly a tactic to learn from. If a small organization can share its workload with outside entities, taking the pressure off the limited human resources it has, it can be more effective with its message and as an organization generally. This is in keeping with the three cornerstones of NPO PR (obtaining funding, reaching

out to a diverse clientele, and effectively utilizing good volunteers) that Pope et al. (2009) highlighted. The respondents here have shown that they are able to have a better presence on the web and in the public's consciousness with help from experienced outside sources with unique expertise, especially when it is expertise the organization is lacking. PFMH sees the agencies it works with as an extension of its in-house communication/PR/Marketing personnel. But how easy is it to find those sources to aid organizations? Respondents reported finding it difficult to identify outside agencies willing to do pro bono work for them so, in all but one case, the organization needed to provide significant funds for outside help.

Being opportunistic. Piggybacking or connecting to relevant issues proved to be somewhat effective for the respondents in drawing attention to themselves and their missions. For example, juxtaposing an organization and its goals with a relevant issue helped a few organizations to gain legitimacy, notoriety, and a certain level of authority, as there is already attention within the greater public on current issues. As Bennett and Gabriel (2003) argue, these organizations are already seen as more trustworthy, caring, and compassionate so by connecting to these issues it is made easier for the public to gravitate to their mission. These organizations can be considered experts in their narrow field of focus so if an issue arises in the media about, for example, assisted suicide, HPCO has answered this by taking an official position because the focus of this small non-profit is end of life. Those on the receiving end of these types of messages have to be aware of where the organization's interests lie on these types of matters. It is up to the organization itself to be clear about whether its stance is based on the best interests of its stakeholders or its cause in general. Those two things were not always the same within these seven cases. In the case of EO, they were stuck in the push and pull of their internal board and outside stakeholders in taking a stance on the use of medical marijuana. The board was not

prepared to offer a stance without more evidence of benefits while people with Epilepsy were looking for guidance from EO on the issue. Therefore, the opportunity to use an issue to an organization's advantage can be easily squandered. As the excellence model shows, they must negotiate those interests with stakeholders to arrive at a common goal.

RQ2: What public relations challenges do senior managers of small nonprofits face and how do they address these challenges?

As discussed above, the predominant challenges for these small nonprofits are their size and budget – the people to do the work and the money to do it. This was illustrated in a number of responses. Many organizations could not afford to hire a communication expert or even afford to consult at much length with a communication firm. But there are a number of other barriers that come in the way of success.

Having communication expertise is essential. As was stated by Bronstein (2006) in the literature review, small NPOs are generally less likely to hold communication efficacy. That lack of communication expertise can create a serious gap for small nonprofits. From just this sample of seven successful nonprofits it is clear that a wide range of communication related expertise is available for each organization to draw upon. Those organizations in this study that have employees possessing a background in communication expand on that as much as their budget will allow by consulting outside sources and making attempts to fill in the gaps of their expertise. Respondents from organizations that do not have experienced communicators said that they desire that function and recognize its value to all of the organization's activities. So it can be said that this study confirms the value of effective communication/PR in meeting organizational goals and in setting the strategic vision of the organization. At the same time, this study shows the challenge for these small organizations to find suitable employees with the proper expertise that

they are searching for.

Not only that but affordable outside help available to organizations is not in abundance. Only one participant reported an ongoing relationship with a consulting firm that offered pro bono communication work. In seeking the desired expertise, a few other respondents reported having been able to secure reduced rates from outside firms for certain projects. These organizations cannot expect, and have not expected, a great deal of free solutions to their shortcomings. In general, the respondents report being forced to carefully weigh the benefits of spending from their limited budget to acquire some of the lacking expertise against what is going to be most effective in their communication efforts.

Another challenge reported by the respondents was an inability to provide training in communication or public relations. This finding is supported by research by the HR Council of Canada (2008), which identified an added dimension of the expertise gap in the fact that small nonprofits have less ability to offer professional development opportunities to their employees that would help them acquire important skills.

Further to the lack of personnel and expertise challenges is the challenge of having an effective board of directors that satisfies organizational needs. As Cohen et al. (2014) argue, “nonprofit leadership has traditionally used boards of directors for fundraising purposes, but they now need to look to them for fiscal oversight and operational expertise as well” (p. 83). All registered charities in Canada are required to hold boards of directors under the Canada Revenue Agency. But in the cases of the organizations in this study there were both effective and ineffective boards with ranging connections to funders and ranging expertise to offer their organization. Wolf (2012) suggests the makeup of a board should include the following expertise: “nonprofit trusteeship; organizational planning; Financial/accounting; Fundraising

(including business/corporate, individual, public agency, and foundation); Personnel management; Legal matters especially relating to nonprofit corporations, contracts, and personnel; Public relations” (p. 52). This means that the organization can use its board members, which can often be volunteers, to fill in the gaps in their own expertise or compliment the expertise and experience the organization possesses. For example, an organization may not need a full-time legal consultant but may benefit from having a lawyer familiar with legal matters pertaining to the organization’s mandate as a board member who can be called upon for consultation when needed.

Not enough time and money to accomplish everything. Lack of time was a reoccurring theme in the data because the respondents reported that they are not able to accomplish all they have set out for themselves with the resources they have. According to some respondents, this was partly due to the fact they were forced to focus too much on fundraising to sustain the organization and were therefore scrambling to keep the organization solvent at the expense of other tasks. In sum, a large part of their fundraising activities stem from their communication efforts and help to drive those efforts, but neither fundraising nor communication with the hope of attracting support are the number one priorities of these organizations. Rather, their number one priority was delivering their service and therefore fulfilling their mandate. Several respondents also expressed the desire to produce wide scale promotion campaigns that would bring their mission to more potential supporters but they conceded that their budget would not allow for it. According to the respondents, hiring a professional with skills and experience in fundraising to alleviate this burden would be both a solution and a desire. The important potential of hiring an employee with diverse skills that includes an ability to fundraise is echoed by Akingbola (2013) who states that financial constraint influences the type of professionals

nonprofits hire and are able to recruit but does not altogether stop them from securing that type of candidate.

Location. The extent to which an organization's success is influenced by its location is difficult to determine. In terms of communication with stakeholders, considering the online environment into which so many organizations are putting energy, location may matter less. However, developing relationships with stakeholders and potential supporters cannot be put entirely online. It still requires a great deal of face-to-face connection through meetings, events, as the data show. The ability to satisfy the awareness/education obligations is becoming easier through electronic communication and its potential has yet to be reached in the context of nonprofits (Bortree & Dou 2012; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Merrit et al., 2012). Respondents used electronic communication extensively. Being physically visible to the public was not given as much prominence in participants' responses but being out in the community and engaging stakeholders was very important for most respondents.

Perceived legitimacy, big versus small. As one respondent pointed out, supporters can be lost to larger organizations that are better known and serve a broader scope. For example, PCC has struggled with gaining support when the general public is less aware of the seriousness of pancreatic cancer but aware of the seriousness of cancer in general. So the sentiment this organization faces is, "why support this small organization with a more narrow mandate on one type of cancer when I can support a similar large one with a view on all types?" In general terms, it is up to the small organization to demonstrate why giving to a more narrow cause is beneficial, either through showing how their support will go further in comparison, showing the increased need with their individual cause, or any number of other ways. Differentiation from other organizations and causes is one common way of addressing this challenge and thus gaining more

support. This reflects what Stebbins & Hartman (2013) suggest for small NPOs, as discussed in the literature review. The organizations in this study have attempted to do that when faced with this challenge. Funding is, of course, what sustains nonprofits and is an inherent challenge given they are not making profits. It requires them to be strategic in the way they pursue and communicate with potential supporters. The organizations studied here have first looked to individuals or groups related to or with a natural interest in their mandate and then expanded out from that base by attempting to attract the attention of the greater public. This strategy is echoed by Kim et al. (2014) in their assessment of the priorities of small organizations: “focusing on types of funding that are natural matches for your nonprofit’s work, clarifying who the main decision makers are behind those types of funding, and then understanding why those decision makers choose to support the organizations they do” (Kim et al., 2014, p. 151). By doing this, organizations can be more strategic about what funders they pursue and how, while not wasting time and resources pursuing unlikely funding options.

Addressing challenges. As discussed above, the organizations in this study have had to battle many challenges just to survive. However, every respondent conceded that although the challenges they face are difficult, they do not discourage them from continuously trying to accomplish their goals. This can mean adjusting to changing environments within the sector to survive (i.e. changing funders, evolving publics, trying new methods and strategies for communicating). Wolf (2012) theorizes that nonprofit organizations have to constantly evaluate survival and status quo and weigh the two priorities: “The tug between the two compromises is constant in the nonprofit environment, and it becomes extreme when organizations are under pressure, when funds are scarce, and when there’s a lack of agreement about basic purposes” (Wolf, 2012, p. 14). None of the organizations in this study seemed interested in, as one

respondent put it, “empire building”. The focus of respondents was on delivering their services and staying true to their missions, rather than on growing to as large a size as possible. So they are forced to mitigate their challenges while staying small.

In addition to staying focused on goals and missions, organizations need to involve stakeholders in the process of developing and achieving goals. According to Wolf (2012), to address challenges and be an effective nonprofit organization, a nonprofit organization “cannot keep its public at arm’s length. Broad involvement of its public at all levels of operation is absolutely necessary” (Wolf, 2012, p. 20). Respondents reported ensuring broad involvement in many ways. They develop formal member bases so there is shared investment in the organization’s survival, they are involved through communications campaigns like *Surrender Your Say* and *Not Myself Today* where they are directly involved influencing change and awareness and they continually evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts in achieving their goals and ways in which they must adapt to changing environments and realities. These are ways to ensure survival of the organization and addressing the issue of lack of human resources at the same time. The larger the group of people with a unified voice and unified goals, the more influential they have shown to be.

Excellence model in the Context of Small NPOs

The following section will analyze how the accounts of these seven small NPOs reflect the characteristics of the excellence model. It is not to evaluate the merits of the model, but to use the model as a lens to point to the ways these organizations reflect the model and how they do not.

The excellence model lays out a formula for practicing excellent communication in any organization but also acknowledges the assumption that perfect communication is likely

unattainable regardless of the business that an organization is in. Specifically, Grunig et al. (1995) reject the assumption that excellence is different depending on the type of organization: “It is the same for corporations, not-for-profit organizations, government agencies, and trade or professional association” (Grunig, et al. 1995). While none of the respondents were intimately familiar with the excellence model, two of seven were vaguely familiar with it and had read brief descriptions of the theory but the rest were not aware and none were actively trying to shape their organization to fit the theory. Of course an organization can be practicing excellent communications without knowledge of the excellence model. The theory will be used to guide discussion here, but this section cannot make any conclusions as to whether these organizations are “excellent” as indicated by the model because the full extent of the study was not used to study these organizations (i.e. original questionnaires, interview questions used by Grunig et al.). Nevertheless, the model can be used as a lens to assess the reported activities of the participant organizations as a way to understand whether they practice principles reflective of the model. The three levels outlined in the literature review, the program level, departmental level, and organizational level, will be assessed here.

Communication managed strategically. Grunig et al. (2002) refer to “programs based on research and environmental scanning, that varying rather than routine techniques are used when they are implemented, and that they are evaluated either formally or informally” (p. 16) as an organization managing its communication strategically in an effort to be excellent. In comparing that idea to these seven small nonprofits, it seems as though four can be identified as managing their communication strategically to varying degrees of effectiveness. Each of those four organizations undertakes a strategic planning process and includes communication within that planning.

These four evaluate their communication approach as a part of that plan, however, as PFMH pointed out, it can be difficult to attempt using more varied communication techniques because they are not tried and tested by these organizations. As the senior manager from PFMH said, it is the organization's limited budget that impedes its ability to try new ways of reaching out and interacting with potential stakeholders. In other words, these organizations cannot afford to take a trial and error approach to communication. However, they use a variety of communication techniques, from social media to staging campaigns to media relations. But they still rely on the techniques they know work for their organization more often than not rather than varying their techniques every time they want to communicate a message for the sake of variation. This is in contrast to the findings of Dolnicar and Lazarevski (2009), who only found a small proportion of organizations undertaking strategic marketing.

A few other examples of the approaches of the participants include EO using Google analytics to track how their message is being received; HPCO taking every initiative it delivers and discussing its goals, how they can achieve them, and which PR pieces to use in achieving those goals; TSF considering the different approaches necessitated by the levels on which they communicate (i.e. the local level and the national level) and planning according to the each perspective.

Three organizations in this study do not reflect Grunig's definition of managing communication strategically: EPIC, PCC, and FFL. This is because they do not have a well-developed and thought out plan for communication and because they do little to evaluate their communication efforts and tweak them. For example, FFL's biggest priority when it comes to its communication as an organization is actually developing a "concrete communications plan" that it can build on and carry forward into day-to-day operations. The need for that sort of plan was

also stressed by Worth (2009) in the literature review. However, this organization does have an existing communications committee that helps to guide that function of the organization. FFL is on the right track toward managing communication strategically and using some effective strategies but is not there yet. In the cases of EPIC and PCC, the communications approaches of these organizations need to be elevated internally before they can be considered an organization that manages communication strategically. EPIC has little desire to do so but is content with where its communications efforts stand. The respondent from PCC, on the other hand, reports looking for ways to significantly improve its communication efforts through reorganizing its board of directors, seeking out a PR specialist, and learning more about how to best use communication channels.

Characteristics of an excellent PR department. Since the size of these organizations prevents them from forming a sizeable communication department, Grunig's characteristics will be applied in this section of the discussion with the consideration that communication departments in these organizations are very condensed and not as fully functional as larger organizations. Of the organizations in this study, only four had more than one employee responsible for communication/PR/marketing (characteristic two).

With six out of the seven organizations having either a top-level staff member or an employee reporting directly to the top, with a role that included or focused on public relations, these organizations were found to have acknowledged that effective communication plays a role in the success of an organization. Thus these organizations satisfy the characteristic of having a direct reporting relationship to senior management (characteristic four). Three out of seven had formal education/training in public relations/communications/marketing (characteristic seven), which was perceived as a benefit and helped them make decisions pertaining to communication.

In two cases it was the president or executive director of the organization himself or herself who had a background in organizational communication (characteristic six). This finding reflects Grunig's position that potential for excellent public relations requires academic training in PR as those guiding the communicative goals need to have foresight and experience to be effective and able to make and influence decisions based on knowledge (Grunig, et al., 2002).

These small organizations did not (and likely cannot) satisfy the characteristic that "PR should be a management function separate from other functions" (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 15) (characteristic three). They do not have the resources to separate the communication functions into several different departments. As was concluded by Baker and Search (2014) in the literature review, an integrated communications and marketing approach is more cost-effective in the context of NPOs. The expectation of diversity within the organization and equal opportunity for men and women in managerial roles, particularly that of the communication manager, is more limited for these organizations in the sense that the fewer the employees the more limited the diversity. However Grunig et al. state that "both men and women must have equal opportunity to occupy the managerial role in an excellent (PR) department" (p. 14) (characteristic eight). In five of seven cases, the employee responsible for communication activities was a woman.

A two-way symmetrical approach to communications programs in targeting specific publics is an essential piece of the excellence model (characteristic five). The communication programs of all of the organizations in this study reflect both two-way and one-way communication. Examples of how two-way symmetry has been practiced were numerous. One example was seen in the process of the organization itself coming together with its key stakeholders to define a public position on current issues that relate to its mission and mandate. Another example is engagement with different audiences to satisfy very different needs and

goals. Interaction with government, a key audience for any nonprofit, must be a symmetrical process, according to one of the respondents. Specifically, the respondent from HPCO noted that the government has a problem with raising healthcare costs and, as a result, it has cultivated a relationship with HPCO that is mutually beneficial. As seen in the literature review, it was argued by Roper (2005) that two-way communication is another way for organizations to continue serving their self-interest, and it is true that these organizations have goals for which they need communication to help achieve, however, the organizations in this study look at two-way communication as a way for the public to help shape their organization and its programs.

Many of the communicative strategies within these organization's programs are one-way. For example, they all disseminate information for raising awareness about their cause. This is a main function, according to several respondents, but is not truly two-way symmetrical in how it is undertaken. Of course, it can be difficult to disseminate facts about a cause in a symmetrical way as the information is intended for educating the public rather than reflecting a negotiation of interests. But it is in the "calls to action" that the communication programs take a more symmetrical tact. Once members of the public have gained more information and are able to understand the severity of the situation, they are asked to help solve that issue in some way. This was found to be either clear cut or ambiguous in the cases studied here. It can be either a certain action the organization wants stakeholders to take (one-way), or a more open-ended request in which the stakeholder can negotiate how he or she will help the organization (two-way symmetrical). Individuals can volunteer for these organizations and often take initiatives upon themselves, thus helping to shape the organization and its identity with the greater public – giving and taking from the mission and from existing organizational communication. The public can also be a part of the discussion of how the organization's mission and purpose are talked

about and shaped in the public consciousness. This reflects Bruning, Dials, and Shirka's (2008) conclusion from the literature review that organizations best build relationships through that dialogic process.

Organizational Context. A main focus of the excellence theory centres on the idea of symmetrical communication. An organization's communication must be symmetrical so as to "balance the interests of an organization with the interests of publics with which it interacts in society" (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 306). Therefore, Grunig and his colleagues point to symmetrical communication as a crucial characteristic of communication excellence (characteristic nine). There are several ways in which the organizations in this study practice symmetrical communication and many ways they do not. None of the seven reported previous knowledge of the model or its benefits. This might seem problematic, since, according to the theory, it is preferred for PR departments and the dominant coalition "to share a worldview for public relations that reflects the two-way symmetrical model" (Grunig et al., 2002 p. 9). Despite their lack of knowledge of the model, these seven organizations demonstrated a worldview that included two-way symmetry to varying degrees. All respondents agreed that it was essential to interact effectively with their publics and discuss ways in which to best serve those publics. With the way the organizations in this study are set up and run, there are few, if any, goals or philosophies that all members do not share.

Each organization reflects the characteristic of having the person responsible for public relations holding power with or in the "dominant coalition", i.e. with top decision-makers (characteristic 10). Since these organizations are so small, there is little room for them to be separated from those decision-makers. In all cases, the communication practitioner was able to influence the direction of his or her organization's strategic communication. In several cases, the

person responsible for PR was the top decision-maker for the organization. As was pointed out by a few senior managers, it can be a benefit to be a small organization when directional decisions are made because action can be taken quickly and communication of that action goes through less internal channels and sees less scrutiny.

Going hand-in-hand with that is a “participatory rather than authoritarian organizational structure” (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 9) (characteristic 11). These organizations reflect this characteristic of excellence. Again, given the size of these organizations, it is easier to maintain a participatory organizational structure as many responsibilities are shared and require a great deal of teamwork. These organizations rely on the small number of employees they have to continue to deliver their service and must therefore give them a voice in how the organization is run and what its goals should be. But it is also not purely because they are small that they have participatory structures. Respondents made it clear that they value this type of approach. Not only that, but they certainly take a more organic than mechanical approach to their management structure (characteristic 13).

The final characteristic of excellence within the organizational level addresses the presence of outside groups challenging the organization and in turn influencing the use of public relations by the organization (characteristic 14). In sum, it helps to keep the organization honest if they listen to these groups and respond to their concerns (Grunig, et al., 2002). This did not appear in the responses of the respondents to this study, as they did not indicate any pressure from activist groups or the existence of any that pertain to their mandate.

This chapter discussed how small nonprofits are achieving success despite their many challenges, what those challenges are, and how they are being mitigated. It also discussed the potential for success as well as the specific communicative strategies and tactics they use on a

regular basis. Finally, it examined how those nonprofits in turn reflect Grunig's excellence model. The following chapter will conclude this thesis and present its practical implications as well as discuss both the limitations and possibilities for future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study analyzed how senior managers of small successful nonprofits work towards their goals and use communication/public relations to aid in that effort. It examined the unique challenges of small nonprofit organizations, how those challenges are mitigated, and in turn how their communication practices reflect Grunig's excellence model. The question of "what is success in nonprofit organizations?" was posed by Sawhill and Williamson (2001). In an effort to determine relative success, they ask the following questions: Is our organization "making progress toward fulfilling its mission and meeting its goals?"; are our activities achieving our programmatic objectives and implementing our strategies?; and do we have the resources—the capacity—to achieve our goals?" (Sawhill & Williamson, 2001, p. 372). The organizations studied could answer yes to those questions for the most part. This study made no attempt to test the merits of the excellence model in the context of small nonprofits but rather used it as a lens to help understand how these small nonprofits undertake communication and achieve success.

The findings of this study revealed a number of cost efficient or compensatory methods of communicating to gain the most impact including offloading, piggybacking, free tools such as social media, member base building, and relationship building, among others. All participants in this study acknowledged that they were not immune to challenges in reaching their goals; however, to varying degrees, they have been able to mitigate those challenges enough to succeed using logical or creative means. Participants were clear that those challenges never go away and that, as senior managers, they are in a constant balancing act between satisfying their goals and the resource/expertise challenges that they have as a small nonprofit. All respondents reported placing value on public relations as a part of their organizational philosophy and identity but nearly all conceded that they could benefit from further developing their overall communication

function.

Strengths and weaknesses of using Grunig model. The excellence model developed by Grunig et al. (2002) was used as a conceptual lens for this study and thus it aided in developing the interview guide and research questions. The analysis revealed that these organizations follow many characteristics of the model but none of them satisfy every one of those characteristics, mostly because of assumed structural characteristics of every organization. This does not mean they cannot be considered excellent organizations because the model is an ideal state and the more characteristics an organization reflects, the more excellent they are considered to be (Grunig et al., 2002). The size of these organizations meant that some of the characteristics of the model were not as applicable as they would be to larger organizations. Most notably, the theory refers to PR departments within organizations, whereas the majority of the NPOs in this study had only one or two people responsible for communication or it was just a part of one person's responsibilities along with other duties. Small NPOs realistically are not able to have a full PR department and a full marketing department separate from each other as the model calls for. Also, there was not much evidence that the NPOs in this study experience pressure from activist groups but they certainly operate in a complex and turbulent environment. However, the organizations in this study were found to possess many qualities of excellence and the potential for excellence. They all possessed participatory management structures by having open dialogue among managers, employees, and volunteers. Ideas were shared and given equal consideration in a collective way. PR/communication/marketing had a voice in the decision making of the organization in that organizational planning brought it into consideration and looked for ways to maximize the reach of organizational activities through communication. Finally, communication was managed strategically by diversifying communications channels and engaging with

stakeholders, among other ways.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study. By taking a collective case study approach, the study is limited in the range of data, i.e. its sample size and diversity of the sample. However, the data that was gathered was from a number of sources rather than just one case. A study that included seven cases was much preferred to one sole case as there are thousands of unique small nonprofits in Canada, but a sample even larger may have yielded more rich data. There was a conscious attempt to make the sample as diverse (both geographically and by organizational type) as possible. However, there were a disproportionate number of organizations in this study from Ontario compared to the rest of the country. This was partly due to which organizations responded to solicitation, which organizations were on lists of successful nonprofits, and the higher percentage of organizations (particularly those with a national scope) located in Ontario. Further, many of the lists, databases, and awards given to successful nonprofits require work on the part of the organization, including submitting applications and contributing fees. Therefore no listing of successful organizations takes into account every organization in existence and therefore limits the sample. Also, six out of seven organizations had a health-related mandate showing an unequal representation of health-related nonprofits.

Finally, the thesis was limited in the access it was able to secure into the organization's workings. There could have been greater access to the cases. The main reason for the limited access was the time commitment it would take. For the most part, these organizations were unable to offer more than one hour of their time. This was due to the fact these organizations are often stretched for time with a lack of human resources at their disposal.

Suggestions for Future Research

A number of possible avenues for future research aside from the obvious general lack of research into small organizations have emerged out of this research. A study replicating Grunig et al.'s approach that is more tailored to small organizations is one possibility for future research, given that some of the model's characteristics are not particularly applicable to a smaller environment. More familiarity and knowledge of the existing model would benefit small organizations, as they possessed limited knowledge of public relations theory and benchmarks for success.

Secondly, future research could consider a more universal and concrete measure for overall success of nonprofit organizations and success in communication. Many nonprofits fail to measure, or know how to measure, the impact of communication efforts, which could help guide future communication efforts. Value of communication is widely recognized, however, the impact is not always easy to conceptualize for practitioners. This measure could take the form of a set of characteristics developed through existing theories and responses of PR practitioners in the nonprofit sector.

The excellence model could be empirically tested in the context of small nonprofit organizations in an effort to further demonstrate how it may be applicable to them. That study could take a similar approach as the original excellence study and have a wide range of small nonprofit organizations fill out the same extensive questionnaires and respond to the interview questions posed to the organizations involved in the excellence study. The results could presumably determine the applicability of the model to small NPOs and determine characteristics specific to their realities.

With the increasingly robust and quickly developing state of online communication, small, niche causes could benefit from insight into how to better make complex and difficult messages

more easily communicated and understood by the general public particularly through online means. Arriving at a better understanding of how these messages are received and how they can be made to stand out among the myriad causes existing today could be a beneficial for the field of communication and the nonprofit sector. As this study sought to do, learning from already proven successful organizations is a good avenue for future research to take. A forum or focus group approach could be effective in gaining further insight as senior managers of nonprofit organizations would be able to come together and discuss shared challenges and successes. However, as was experienced in this study, availability of senior managers is difficult to ascertain.

Practical Implications

It was the aim of this thesis to provide practical insights into communication strategies that small nonprofits can use in the future to bolster their presence and better compete with large, resource rich organizations. There were some general, overarching lessons learned from the seven participating organizations in this study.

The first priority for a small organization could certainly be developing an extensive and comprehensive communication plan based on clear organizational goals and a focused mission. As Grunig, et al. (2002) have identified, the communication plan should incorporate the two-way symmetrical model of communication wherever possible.

Using the communication plan, organizations can build a formal support base of stakeholders. These stakeholders need to be interested in the mission/mandate of the organization and be willing to interact directly with the organization and help it further its mission. The best example of this comes from PFMH, a nonprofit with a large popular following, a base of hundreds of volunteers, and many other stakeholders with whom they engage and who facilitate

them in taking action in support of their mission. This base offers more legitimacy to an organization, which influences its ability to go after funding and further support.

An important factor in the success of these organizations is their ability to lead people to understand their mission/mandate. Small organizations must show why their cause matters when it may be an afterthought to some in the public, and show why they matter compared to larger organizations that may have similar interests under a more broad organizational purview. Small nonprofits, like those in this study, often satisfy a unique, previously unmet need or a more narrow issue within a larger one. Therefore, they must use effective and diverse communication strategies to help the public understand their mission.

It is also essential to have a solid web presence with diverse communications channels and to be continuously managing and developing it. As echoed by Felkins and Croteau-Chonkna (2014), online and web 2.0 tools help any organization build legitimacy and attract attention: “Developing communication competencies in social media improves nonprofit performance, expands resources, and builds valuable relationships to tackle tough problems and issues” (p. 89). With social media, communication can be faster, more direct, more personalized, and more easily accessed by all. These are positive aspects for small nonprofits and they are demonstrated in the communication of several of the organizations that participated in this study. Connecting to relevant issues in the media or society can help an organization demonstrate how its mission is valuable and worthwhile.

Taking as many opportunities to provide employees with professional development and the opportunity to learn new skills can only help an organization. Money spent on salaries will be spent more efficiently if employees develop more skills that are useful to the organization’s mission and activities. A smaller percentage of the budget will need to be spent on outside

expertise if it already exists within the organization. It may also provide the opportunity to share responsibilities among employees if more than one or two employees possess competencies in activities the organization carries out on a regular basis.

Finally, crafting simple and relatable messages was shown to be very effective for some respondents and can give a more human feel to an organization. Within their community and among their stakeholders, these small organizations already have a more personal touch, thanks to their size, but they may also have the opportunity to use this to their advantage in gaining more trust, respectability, and transparency through communication.

In addition to those recommendations, to consider the unique realities of small NPOs in the excellence model, several additional characteristics could be added to make the model more directly applicable to small NPOs. They might include:

- Using their position as agents of change as a strategic communication advantage (i.e. in contrast to for-profit organizations small NPOs are perceived to be working positively for society). This can be used to their advantage if done strategically by demonstrating their worthiness for support based on their mission and organizational goals.
- Have both a PR and marketing function that are not necessarily separate from each other (it is clear from the results and theory that these organizations need to fulfill both a marketing and a PR function, but to separate them into departments would be too much for a small NPO to handle).
- A turbulent and complex environment (meaning challenges they face internally and externally) is minimized with the help of well-developed communication plan and the use of compensatory strategies. (Small NPOs exist in this type of environment. If they are able to minimize the adverse effects of their competitive, fluid environment, it can help them to

be successful). They need to maximize the resources they have to help mitigate this environment. Compensatory strategies serve to make up for a lack of resources.

Although this thesis did not examine small organizations in the public and for profit sectors, it may be assumed that these findings could be transferable to those contexts. Small organizations of all types – whether nonprofit, for profit or public – face challenges such as lack of financial and human resources, lack of expertise, etc. Therefore, learning from how small nonprofits have been able to be successful despite those challenges could be beneficial to them.

The organizations in this study have shown that, although it might be more challenging, a small organization can be successful with limited resources and budget. Nonprofits play an important role in Canadian society and small nonprofits, although less recognizable, contribute greatly to satisfying previously unmet needs and filling in the gaps left by other organizations. Communication is vital to these organizations' operations. With effective communication, supporters are engaged in the mandate and direction of the organization and the organization itself is better able to accomplish its goals. More focus on communication efforts can lead to greater success for small nonprofits.

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Appendix A – Sample Consent Form

Consent Form – For Participation in Communication Research

Title of the Study: Application of Grunig’s Excellence Model to Small Nonprofit Organizations: Exploration of Accounts of PR Success by Senior Managers

Researcher: Matthew Sheriko, Master of Arts (Communication) Candidate, University of Ottawa, ***@uottawa.ca,

Research Supervisor: Jenepher Lennox Terrion, Associate Professor, Department of Communication, University of Ottawa, ***@uottawa.ca

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Matthew Sheriko and supervised by Professor Jenepher Lennox Terrion, as a part of Matthew Sheriko’s master’s thesis.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to examine the communication and public relations practices and strategies that nonprofit organizations with smaller management structures, total number of employees, and size and scope of their public relations/marketing budgets use to achieve success and reach self-prescribed of six to eight successful small nonprofits articulate their communication practices and strategies, how they account for their success and how they address challenges related to their small size and lack of resources.

Participation: My participation will consist of an audio-recorded interview lasting about an hour. The interview will be scheduled for a time and place convenient to me as the participant. I will be afforded the opportunity to provide clarification to my answers and participation in the days following the interview if I feel it necessary.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I will disclose some personal information – name, position, background, organization I work for, and contact information. By participating in this study I agree to have my identity and the identity of the organization I work for be made public through the publication of this research study.

Benefits: My participation in this study will help nonprofits better tackle the communications challenges they face. It is the goal of this study, and through my participation in it, that the findings will be useful to advancing and strengthening the nonprofit sector and to bridging the gap of public relations expertise between small and large organizations in the nonprofit sector.

Confidentiality: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will only be used for this research and that only my name, relevant work experience background, the identity of the organization and its practices I work for, will be published within the research. I have received assurance from the researcher that any contact information will be kept private and be secured on the researcher’s password protected computer. A hard copy of this form will be kept in a locked

cabinet in the department of communication to which only he and his research supervisor have access.

Rationale for lack of anonymity: I understand and accept the researcher's reasoning for desiring my identity and the identity of my organization to be known. I understand that as a participant of this particular study, my organization has been identified as successful despite its small size, limited number of employees, resources, and budget, and therefore should be specifically identified in the findings to show the legitimacy of why my organization has been asked to participate. I understand that, as a successful organization, and for the purposes of this study, identifying details about my organization and its activities, goals, and purpose are required to be made public in order to demonstrate how my organization has, and continues to, obtain success. I understand this provides context to the contribution I will make to the study as a participant and that including identifying details about my organization is unavoidable given the nature of this study.

Conservation of data: The data collected (i.e. interview recordings and transcripts) will be kept in a secure manner on a password-protected computer in a secure file and access to data will not be shared with anyone other than the research supervisor. The data will be conserved for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Compensation: I understand compensation is not available for this study. The researcher has assured me that I will not be asked to spend any money (personal or organizational) to participate in the study.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that if I choose to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, neither my organization nor I will not suffer any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted and disposed of to my satisfaction.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Matthew Sheriko of the Communication Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Ottawa and Dr. Jenepher Lennox-Terrion (thesis supervisor).

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research,
University of Ottawa,
Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154,
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

Appendix B – Interview Guide

Preamble – Overview of study

1. What is your day-to-day role with (your specific organization)?
2. What is your professional background and educational/training background?
3. How many employees (full or part time, paid or volunteer) does your organization have and what are their roles?
4. Define public relations within the context of your organization. How do you conceptualize it?
5. Whose responsibility is it to look after public relations for the organization? How are decisions made that pertain to public relations strategies and initiatives for the organization?
6. What are the organizational goals of your organization?
7. What are the specific challenges you face as a small nonprofit organization in pursuit of these goals?
8. What role does PR play in organizational decision-making, strategic planning, and the execution of strategic plans?
9. Where do you use public relations practices and strategies to help achieve those goals and overcome those challenges? Please identify specific tactics and practices your organization uses.
10. How do you communicate with your key stakeholders and potential supporters? What tools and strategies do you use? Provide examples.
11. How do you communicate internally to discuss goals, strategies, plans, etc.?
12. How has public relations contributed to this success?
13. Which communication-related expertise, resources, tools, etc., what do you think would make your organization more successful?
14. What insight can you add into your public relations and organizational success that has not been discussed in the previous questions?
15. Do you notice any similarities and/or dissimilarities between your organization and the Grunig Excellence Model?

Appendix C – Coding Reference Sheet

ROLE/VALUE OF PR

This theme describes the emphasis organizations put on public relations/communication.

Subthemes:

1. *PR a Voice in Decision-Making*: how public relations/communication influences organizational decision-making, and if the organization has placed PR as part of the job description of a high level employee.
2. *Philosophy about PR/Communication*: how public relations/communication is viewed within the organization and what value it has to the organization and to what level of value PR is to the organization's activities.

RESOURCE CHALLENGES:

This theme describes what challenges a small nonprofit organization faces as it pertains to their internal resources.

Subthemes:

1. *Size and Scope*: this indicates how lack of human resources (or staff) has affected the operations and goals of the organization.
2. *Budget*: how the budget of the organization has limited its activities and pursuit of its goals.

ENVIRONMENT:

This theme describes the physical, economic, and social environment in which an organization exists.

Subthemes:

1. *Organizational Environment*: how the organization is structured and its organizational culture.
2. *Placement in Society*: the reality of the organization's field (i.e. health) and subfield (i.e. mental health) of focus, how the organization is positioned within the field it serves, how its mission has changed or adapted, and the public awareness or attitudes to their field, and mission/mandate.
3. *Competition (economic)*: the level of competition for funding in an organization's geographical area or field/subfield.
4. *Location (Geographical/Physical)*: how the geographical (i.e. what city) and the physical (i.e. where it is located within the city) location affects the organization.

MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES/TACTICS:

This theme describes the specific strategies and tactics that respondents find have contributed to their success.

Subthemes:

1. *Tools For Maximizing Efficiency*: the specific tools the organization uses to further their mission/mandate, maximize efficiency, and mitigate their challenges.
2. *Desired Tools and Strategies*: the specific tools the organization that the organization does not have and deems would be useful to furthering their mission/mandate, maximizing efficiency, and mitigating their challenges.
3. *Offloading*: how the organization uses outside sources such as PR firms or volunteers to help it carry out its activities.
4. *Piggybacking*: tactics that make use of the public's awareness or attention on current events, other campaigns, the political and media climates.