

**Thesis:** Dominant Coalition Perceptions in Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Public Relations

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### **ABSTRACT**

Public relations departments are often faced with the task of proving their importance to their organization's dominant coalition in order to be included in the decision-making process. The focus of this study was to bring insight into how public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations perceived their abilities to influence decision-making in their organizations, and what barriers they believed were keeping them from obtaining membership into the dominant coalition. The qualitative design for this study consisted of conducting in-depth telephone interviews with nine public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations. The method for data analysis was the constant comparison method. All of the participants said they could influence the decisions made by the dominant coalition in some capacity, yet only four members perceived they were included. Respondents said public relations professionals might be able to better influence decision making if they were included earlier in strategic planning and if the dominant coalition trusted them and found them credible. Those interviewed also said being proactive and devising a strategic plan also was valuable. In addition, two consistent barriers to inclusion were identified: a misunderstanding of public relations and the existence of an uneducated or inexperienced practitioner. The significance of this study, which focuses on the health-oriented, nonprofit sector, is that it brings clarity to

existing research that has demonstrated the importance of including public relations professionals as influential members of dominant coalitions within organizations.