DOMINANT COALITION PERCEPTIONS IN HEALTH-ORIENTED, NONPROFIT

PUBLIC RELATIONS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

TORIE FOWLER

DR. DEBORAH A. DAVIS - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2015

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

Student: Torie Fowler

Degree: Master of Arts

College: Communication, Information, and Media

Date: December 2015

Pages: 50

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.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Scholars have clearly established that all organizations have a dominant coalition that makes decisions from within (Bowen, 2005). It follows that if the organization is to get the maximum return for investment in a public relations department, the public relations leader should be included in the dominant coalition, whether corporate or nonprofit.

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), "Public relations is a key driver of business outcomes critical to organization success, including crisis mitigation, reputation and brand building, consumer engagement, sales generation, wealth creation, issues management and beneficial shifts in constituent attitudes and behaviors" (Communicating Public Relations Value, 2015, p.1).

The National Center for Charitable Statistics (2014) reported almost 1.5 million nonprofit organizations existing in the United States. The Directory of Charities and Nonprofit Organizations (2015) reported that 54,000 nonprofits relate to health facilities, programs, and organizations, with the most common service lines including hospitals, recovery, and support programs. Very little research has been conducted on the role of public relations in the dominant coalition of nonprofit organizations. Dominant coalitions make the majority of decisions for an organization. Past research has indicated that a public relations representative needs to be included in order to provide effective business and communications counsel (Bowen, 2005; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Grunig, 1992).

For the purpose of this study, the dominant coalition is considered the main group of individuals who make decisions for the organization based on its values, mission, and needs. This coalition typically includes senior management and the organization's CEO.

In the nonprofit field, the dominant coalition could include a president or a board of directors

instead of a CEO.

Problem

Although some public relations professionals have achieved inclusion into the dominant

coalition, others have been excluded. In general, researchers have found that public relations

leaders are often not included because other members of the coalition do not understand the role

of public relations or believe that public relations practitioners lack knowledge, expertise, or

success in the field (Grunig, 1992). However, as Bowen (2006) points out, the presence of a

public relations leader can provide important guidance on business decisions and help ensure the

success of an organization by providing counsel on communication and business-related issues.

Past research has suggested that a public relations leader should be included in the

dominant coalition of an organization. By participating first-hand in the decision-making

process, this person can provide valuable strategic input (Berger, 2005; Bowen, 2005; Kanihan et

al., 2013). Since the dominant coalition leads an organization into a strategic path, a public

relations leader can provide counsel on crises response, organizational policies/procedures, and

major business decisions. This is true for nonprofit organizations as well, including those that

are health-oriented.

For the most part, gaining inclusion into an organization's dominant coalition can be

difficult for public relations practitioners. Even so, some organizations have seen financial and

organizational gains from their inclusion, especially nonprofit organizations that typically

operate on a low budget. The definition of public relations itself further explains this benefit,

where "public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial

relationships between organizations and their publics" (Communicating Public Relations Value, 2015, p.1).

Incorporating a public relations department into a nonprofit organization's budget allows for knowledgeable and strategic employees who can focus on public opinion and keep a positive image surrounding the organization. A public relations department allows an organization to anticipate and interpret the attitudes and opinions of the public, conduct and evaluate an action plan, and implement an effort to change or influence the public policy. Additionally, a nonprofit organization can use public relations to deliver its message and vision as well as help increase the number of donors and volunteers.

One of the first scholars to study nonprofit public relations was Marlene Wiggill (2011), who focused on financial constraints and limited resources. Wiggill concluded that public relations in nonprofit organizations should be structured the same as in corporate agencies, meaning there should be a public relations manager who would oversee technicians. Including a department for public relations into a nonprofit budget is not yet a regular practice, although research suggests that the practice is growing. It follows that when a public relations department is included in the operating budget of a nonprofit organization, that department leader should also to acquire membership into the dominant coalition to ensure that effective public relations counsel is incorporated into coalition decisions.

Purpose

Working within the specific segment of health-oriented, nonprofit organizations, this study examined the perceptions of public relations leaders in order to gain a greater understanding of the role of public relations in dominant coalitions and to help bring clarity to the question of how public relation leaders might be included in these coalitions. The theory of

dominant coalition was used to explain the importance and relevance of such groups within an organization; notably what these coalitions do, how they operate, and how members are selected. Glen Broom and George Smith's (1979) role theory was also used to help determine which role within the public relations department would be most acceptable for filling a potential seat in the dominant coalition.

The qualitative method of inquiry was used. The study conducted in-depth telephone interviews with public relations professionals in the nonprofit sector, focusing on how these leaders identified their level of involvement, their ability to influence organizational decision-making, and what barriers can cause exclusion from the coalition. The interview questions were structured around the study's three research questions and pertained to how these professionals perceived their role in their organization's dominant coalition, how were they able to influence decisions made by the dominant coalition of their organization, and what were the barriers to inclusion in their organization's dominant coalition.

Significance of the Study

Wiggill (2011) noted public relations efforts in the nonprofit sector are growing. Research within health-oriented, nonprofit organizations has been minimal. This study extends existing research in dominant coalitions and role theory to a specific group within the nonprofit sector, the health-oriented organization. In addition to demonstrating how public relations leaders perceive their influence in organizations, this study increases understanding of how academic research applies to the real world, and provides insight into how the public relations profession can advance within an organization .

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The two main theoretical frameworks used in this study pertained to dominant coalition and role theory. Section one reviews literature on dominant coalitions that is focused toward public relations leaders in these decision-making coalitions. Section two centers on Broom and Smith's (1979) role theory that describes how positions in public relations are structured. Of interest is literature that examines how roles affect inclusion of public relations professionals in an organization's dominant coalition.

Dominant Coalition

The theory of dominant coalition is one of many that focus on management of an organization. A common definition of dominant coalition is: "a network of individuals within and around an organization that most influence the mission and goals of the organization" (Bowler, 2006, p. 261). This group is chosen by the chief executive officer or president of an organization rather than appointed by their peers (Bowen, 2005; Kanihan, Hansen, Blair, Shore & Myers, 2013) and may even involve those who do not directly report to the highest ranking leader.

All organizations have a group of specific people that come together in order to make key decisions. This group is commonly known as the organization's dominant coalition (Bachrach & Lawler, 1980; Grunig, 1992; Mintzberg, 1983) and typically includes members from the board of directors and senior management, as well as employees deemed necessary to the decision-making process. In order to make good decisions and move the organization along a projected path, dominant coalition members make use of expertise, charisma, information, rewards,

sanctions, and authority (Bachrach & Lawler, 1980). Who makes up a dominant coalition is the

most studied topic within dominant coalition research.

       The theory of dominant coalition was initially operationalized as a group of individuals,

mostly top management employees, who set goals based on the values of the organization (Cyert

& March, 1963). However, Mintzberg (1983) argued that even though dominant coalitions are

composed of action oriented, committed individuals, members do not need to hold a high rank or

title within the organization. More recent literature has shown that a dominant coalition may

change according to the problem facing the organization (Kanihan, et al., 2011), so that a change

in situation might mean a change in the dominant coalition's membership. When this happens,

employees from various departments can be pulled in whenever their input is seen as valuable to

the specific issue under discussion.

       In order for public relations leaders to hear the opinions of others and participate first

hand in the decision-making process, they need to be present during meetings of the dominant

coalition. Inasmuch as each coalition member has an opinion for the direction of the

organization and what topics need to be addressed, the top communicator of the organization,

namely the public relations leader, needs to be involved in these discussions as well as strategic

planning (Bowen, 2005). Inclusion in the dominant coalition is also considered crucial for the

growth of the public relations profession. Grunig and Hunt (1984) noted that there is little use

for the practice of public relations within an organization unless the leader is included in the

dominant coalition. Some have elaborated, saying that without regular access to decision makers

and the information needed to provide quality public relations service, a public relations

department would not be needed (Kanter, 1992). In addition, when public relation leaders

participate in the dominant coalition, they are able to quickly direct communication technicians

on how to carry out the organization's communication strategy. Technicians are responsible for creating and distributing public relations messages (Broom & Smith, 1979) and typically make up the majority of personnel in a department. Unless their goals have been agreed upon by the dominate coalition and directions for implementation from the public relations leader are accurate, they cannot successfully perform their job duties (Grunig, 1992; Dozier & Grunig, 1995; Kanihan, et al., 2011).

Several factors have been found that may affect inclusion in the dominant coalition. First, in order to gain membership, a public relations leader should have direct access or report to the CEO of an organization (Kanihan, et al., 2011) who is a known member of the coalition and often the final decision-maker for the company. For nonprofit organizations, a president or a board of directors usually stands in place of the CEO. Without this contact, communication barriers can occur that make the development and execution of a public relations plan a longer process than it should be. Secondly, while having direct access to the CEO may improve chances of inclusion, social relationships or friendships outside of work with other senior management can also help. Mattia (2006) found that a public relations leader who builds friendships with members of the coalition group increases the likelihood of being trusted to act as an advisor to them. Members of dominant coalitions have advanced public relations leaders they trusted into active membership in the dominant coalition.

A third factor affecting inclusion in the dominant coalition pertains to experience. Public relations practitioners who have had experience working with various types of publics were found to be included in the coalition more than those whose experience was with only one type. Plowman (2005) found that communication leaders who had experience working with both internal and external publics were often preferred.

Grunig (1992) found that two obstacles exist in organizations whereby public relations practitioners rarely become active members of the organization's inner social circle, thereby excluding them from the dominant coalition. The first obstacle was that senior management does not clearly understand the role of public relations. Even though the field of public relations has continued to grow as a profession, many people do not understand the scope of the profession and its business implications. As soon as a public relations leader joins an organization, they find that they must thoroughly explain public relations and its importance to organizational management before they can advocate for inclusion in the dominant coalition.

Grunig's (1992) second obstacle to coalition inclusion was the perception by coalition members that the skills, education, and/or experience of the public relations practitioner were not at the level needed to provide adequate counsel on business decisions (Dozier et al., 1995). To overcome this obstacle, public relations leaders must often prove they have had career success and are an established expert in their field. This last factor may require continued education in order to keep up with the innovations of public relations.

Role Theory

Since the late 1970s, Glen Broom has played a significant role in the academic debate about roles in public relations. Broom and fellow researcher George Smith initially examined the roles that public relations consultants performed for senior management (Ruler, 2004). They developed 24 questions to measure different role activities performed by practitioners (Dozier & Broom, 1995). After using these questions in a study of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members, Broom and Smith (1979) identified five dominant roles that public relations professionals perform. The roles were labeled as (a) Expert Prescriber, (b) Communication Facilitator, (c) Problem-solving Process Facilitator, (d) Acceptant Legitimizer, and (e)

Communication Technician. After further investigation, Broom and Smith dropped the

Acceptant Legitimizer role, whose main task was to provide listening support to the client (Lee,

2013). The four remaining roles were then refined and divided into two categories, labeled

Manager and Technician (Porter, Sweetser, & Chung, 2009). Dozier (1984) contended that

Manager and Technician should be reclassified as roles rather than categories. His argument was

that the similarity of three roles identified by Bloom and Smith (e.g., expert prescriber,

communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator) should justify a consolidation

into one distinct role, called Manager, with the second category of Technician becoming the

second role, and called Communication Technician. Grunig, Toth, and Hon (2001) supported

the original four roles and directly disagreed with Dozier by saying that the two roles he

presented were not mutually exclusive and therefore should not be the only two roles used.

Several other researchers have taken interest in role theory and have tried to restructure

how the roles identified by Broom and Smith are defined (Dozier, 1984; Grunig, Toth, & Hon,

2001; Ruler, 2004). For example, the claim has been made that a public relations practitioner

often performs multiple roles rather than just one (Broom & Dozier, 1986). This observation

was addressed by Broom and Smith (1979) in their initial discussion of roles, when they pointed

out that a practitioner should be grouped within the role that is performed most often. Other

researchers have pointed out that they failed to account for the fluidity of the roles they

identified. This would mean that a public relations practitioner might initially perform the

technician role but eventually in their career move into the manager role (Porter et al., 2009).

During a time of transition from technician to manager, there could be an overlap in duties that

was not recognized by the original theory. The four roles created by Broom and Smith (1979)

continue to be used in role theory research. Table 3 in the appendix discusses the responsibilities and characteristics of each role.

As for the connection between roles and dominant coalitions, Botan and Hazleton (2006) conducted an extensive analysis of the work of Broom and Smith (1979), noting that these two scholars not only provided an adequate account of the daily duties performed by public relations practitioners but also demonstrated that professionals in public relations should also be consultants to their organization's dominant coalition. According to Plowman (2005), practitioners that fall into one of the roles categorized as Manager should be the ones attempting to be included into the organization's dominant coalition.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine how public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations viewed their participation in their organization's dominant coalition. Participants in the study were public relations leaders and were asked to describe their level of involvement with the dominant coalition of their organization; their ability, if any, to influence the decisions made for their organization; and also to identify any barriers they believed might keep public relations out of the dominant coalition.

The specific research questions guiding these interview were as follows:

RQ1: How do public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations perceive their role in the dominant coalition of their organization?

RQ2: How are public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations able to influence decisions made by the dominant coalition within their organization?

RQ3: What are the perceived barriers to inclusion into the dominant coalition?

Study Design

The qualitative method of research was utilized for this study. Essentially, qualitative research investigates the how and why of human behavior (Pasadeos, Lamme, Gower, & Tian, 2011) and has been the type of research used most frequently in the communication field (Frey, Anderson, & Friedman, 2009). The main purpose of qualitative research is "to provide a rich, in-depth understanding of how certain people think or feel about a subject" (English, 2005, p. 10). This method differs from the quantitative method by allowing the researcher to conduct a close examination of individual life experiences and perspectives on issues. Interviewees can feel more like participants in the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this study,

participants may not have been familiar with the concepts of dominant coalition and role theory. The use of in-depth, individualized interviews allowed the interviewer to increase their awareness and ability to fully describe their work situations and relationships.

Study participants resided in various locations in the United States and were interviewed via telephone. While in-depth interviews are usually conducted in person (English, 2005), telephone interviews allow researchers to communicate with participants over a long distance. Due to interview times being slotted during typical work hours, video calls using Skype or FaceTime were not considered a necessity. Interviews were conducted on speakerphone so that an external recording device could be used to record each interview. The preferred method of transcription is a combination of verbatim transcription and researcher notes (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Verbatim transcriptions were used to analyze each participant's interview. This word-for-word process is time consuming, but its use allows researchers to be closer to their data, which can be very beneficial during analysis. Each interview transcription was typed into a computer file, and saved on a password-protected computer.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the questions to be asked in a flexible format, thus encouraging participants to speak openly about their own experiences (Dearnley, 2005). Each participant's interview was kept within 20-30 minutes. This provided an adequate amount of time for listening and having questions answered, and each participant was provided an oral summary of their answers at the end of the interview. A set of demographic questions was asked prior to the summary. To ensure confidentiality for the participants, the audio recording was stopped prior to the demographic questions. The researcher wrote the answers to all demographic questions on a printed questionnaire that represented each interviewee.

Reliability was accomplished by first conducting a pilot study in order to review and evaluate the interview questions. A public relations leader working in a health-oriented, nonprofit organization was selected to participate in the pilot. Enough information was gained about the research topic that further pilot interviews were not needed. As for validity, recording the actual interviews provided a meticulous record of all the interviews. Documentation was also retained of the analysis procedures used for the interviews (Mays & Pope, 1995). In addition, at the end of each interview, a brief summary of the participant's answers was relayed back to them in order to validate their answers.

Study Participants

There are no specific job titles for public relations leaders, let alone any that are specific to the nonprofit sector. During a limited search of the PRSA membership directory for health-oriented, nonprofit organizations, management job titles included senior vice president, vice president, director, assistant director, and manager. In a PRSA database search on June 15, 2015, more than 1,300 individuals indicated that they worked in this sector. The individuals were not organized in any manner. This database was used to select potential participants for this study. The researcher selected the first 20 members who had a job title listed above and who indicated on their PRSA membership form that they were employed by a health-oriented, nonprofit organization. This was a manual process completed by the researcher. Those who worked for the same organization were excluded. For example, if person seven worked at the same organization as person five, the first name was contacted and the seventh person was skipped. Those from the same state were also excluded. A random sample was not used since participants for this study needed a management job title and a random sample could have selected someone from the database that did not have qualifications. Instead, a purposive sample

was used whereby participants are chosen because of some common characteristic (Patton, 1990). In this case, the common characteristics included working for a health-oriented, nonprofit organization and holding a management job title.

The decision was made in advance that nine participants would be sufficient to achieve data saturation. Saturation is when the researcher believes no new information will be given. When this occurs no new interviews are required (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), qualitative research needs only one or very few individuals in order to reach data saturation, but the general consensus is that research needs 6 to 12 participants for interviews (Guest et al., 2006; Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986). Therefore, nine participants were selected for this study. The number of health-oriented, nonprofit organizations was small enough for the researcher to conclude that nine in-depth interviews would provide enough information to answer the research questions and achieve saturation.

From an initial list of 20 prospective participants, the first nine were sent e-mails asking for participation. Five persons responded back via e-mails, with four agreeing to participate and one declining. After three days, a second e-mail was sent to the four who had not responded, and after five days of no response, four new prospective participants on the list were contacted. Three of these persons responded via e-mails and agreed to participate. After three days, a follow-up e-mail was sent to the fourth person on the second list, who then agreed to participate, bringing the total number of participants to nine, which was the desired number.

Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving approval from the Ball State University Institutional Review Board, several steps were taken. Initial contact with each of the nine participants was made via e-mail in order to verify their consent to participate [see Appendix C]. Attached to the e-mail was a

consent form to sign that included a page of available dates and times for interviews. The form could be returned using e-mail or fax. Once received, the consent forms were stored on a password-protected computer, with hard copies placed in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. These forms were kept separate from the interview data.

Interviews began shortly after all nine interviews were scheduled. Each participant was asked the same questions, yet due to the interviews being semi-structured, questions were asked in an order that fit with the flow of the conversation (Dearnley, 2005). Interviews were conducted on speakerphone and recorded using a hand-held recorder for transcription and analysis at a later date. Participant names were changed in order to maintain confidentiality and demographic information was converted to numerical data. The audio recordings were deleted upon completion of the data analysis. Consent forms and transcripts/analyses from the interviews were kept in separate folders without names as to not connect them with any personally identifiable information within the data. Note taking was limited to allow the researcher to pay close attention to the answers given and ask additional questions if needed. The few notes that were taken pertained mainly to questions the researcher wanted to ask to clarify an answer the participant gave, once they finished speaking.

The constant comparative method of analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts (Thorne, 2000). All transcripts were printed and each question from each interview was reviewed individually. As common words and/or ideas appeared, they were highlighted. Next, an examination was made to determine which highlighted words and/or ideas were repeated for each question, across all participants. From this list, major themes and patterns across all interviews were revealed, using an editing approach (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). All printed material was shredded following analysis.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter begins with demographic data for the nine study participants. This is followed by a presentation of selected participant quotations as they pertain to the three research questions. Included here are the major themes that emerged from the analyses of research questions two and three.

Demographic Data

Nine individuals were interviewed for this study. Out of the nine, six were female and three were male. Information was not collected regarding ethnic backgrounds. Three participants were between the ages of 30-39, one between 40-49, three between 50-59, and two between 60-69. The mean age for the participants was 47.7 years.

Figure 1. Participant Age

22%
34%
33%
11%

30-39
40-49
50-59
60-69
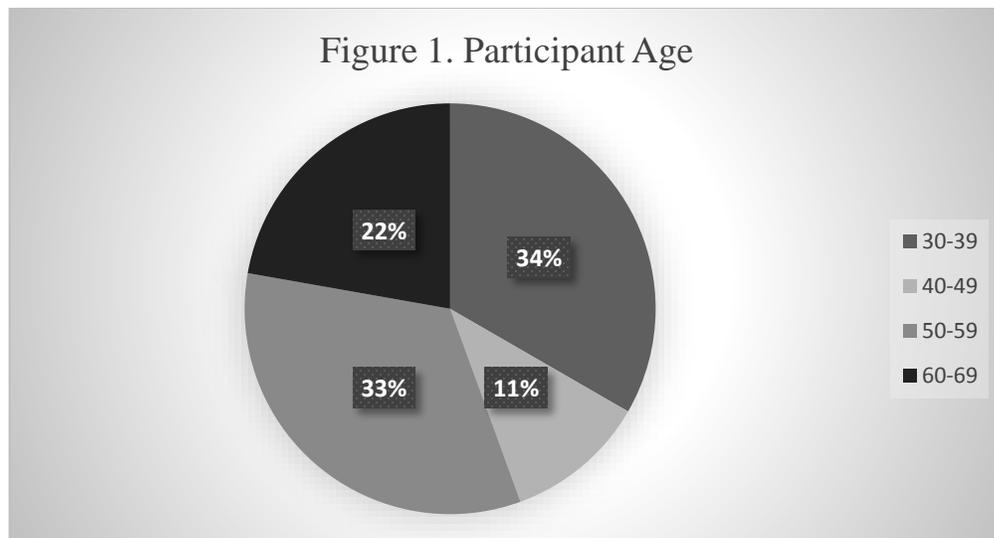
All nine held a bachelor's degree. One had a master's degree, four were enrolled and working toward a master's degree at the time of the interview, and one had completed a public relations certificate. Two of the participants were accredited in public relations (APR) by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Table 1. Education level

Bachelor's degree: 9
Master's degree: 1
Enrolled in master's program: 4
APR Accredited: 2
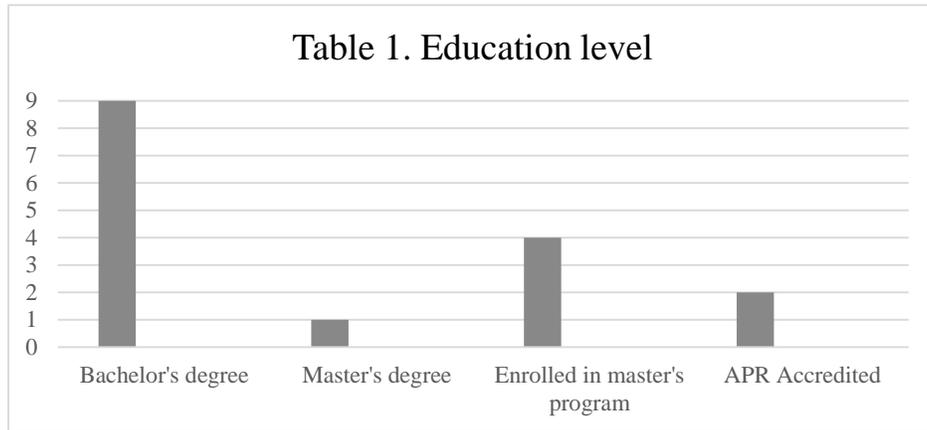
The mean number of years of experience was 18.22 and the range of years was from 3 to 41. Two of the participants had less than 10 years of experience. Four had between 11-20 years and two had between 21-29 years. Only one participant had more than 29 years of experience, with 41 years. There were three participants with the title of director, while one participant was a senior vice president.

Table 2. A table showing the years of experience for participants

Years of Experience	Number of participants
29+ years	1
21-29 years	2
11-20 years	4
Less than 10 years	2
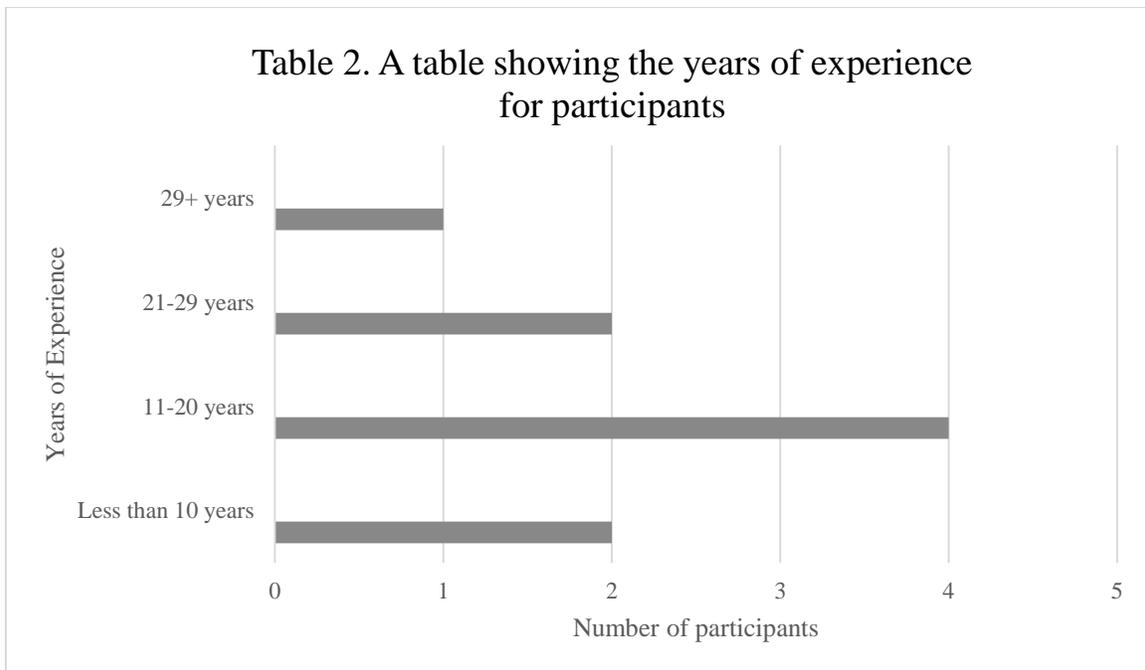
Participants in the study worked for either local nonprofits or local chapters of national nonprofit organizations. Three participants were employed by national organizations, two

represented private hospitals, two worked for health networks, one represented an academic

medical center, and one worked for a continuing care retirement facility. The size of each

organization was not acquired during the research.

Figure 2. Organization Type

National organization

Private hospital

Health network

Academic medical center

Continuing care retirement
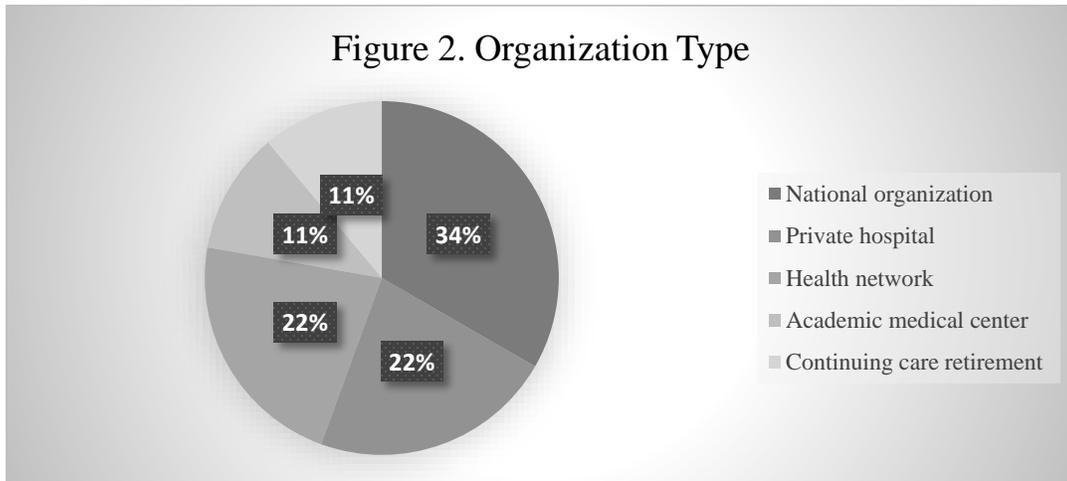
Using the region map created by National Geographic, five participants were located in

the Southeast region of the United States, while three were in the Northeast, and one worked in

the Midwest (United States Regions, 2015).

Figure 3. Geographic Regions

Southeast

Northeast

Midwest
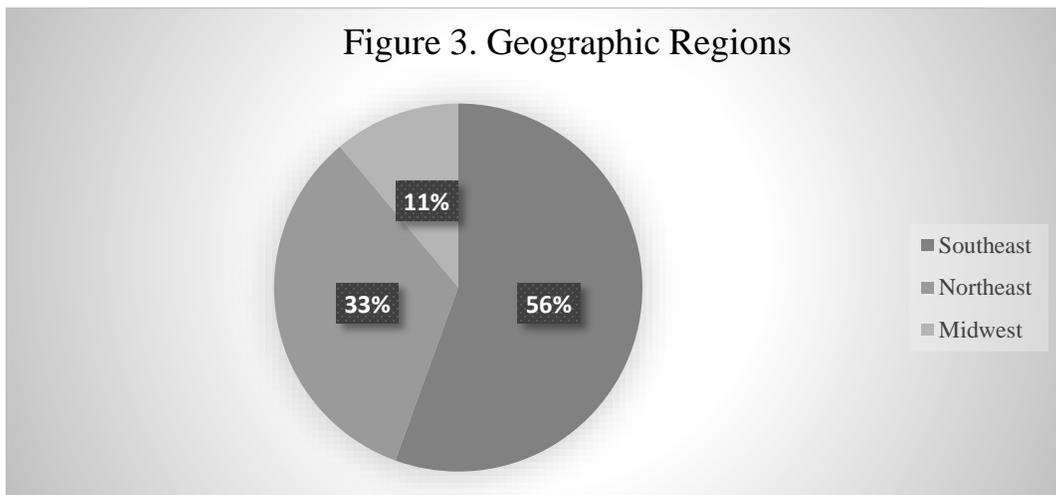
Research Questions

Appendix B provides a list of 17 questions that were used to interview study participants. Not all questions provided enough information to include in the presentation of results. Those that do are identified as IQ (interview question) in the discussions that follow. Participant names used in this section have been changed to protect confidentiality and are not the real names of actual participants.

RQ1: How Do Public Relations Leaders In Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Organizations Perceive Their Role In The Dominant Coalition Of Their Organization?

The public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations who participated in the study were asked whether they felt the dominant coalition of their organization saw their role as either strategic or tactical. When asked, "Do you believe that those in public relations are hired more for strategic purposes or tactical purposes?" (IQ13) seven of the nine participants had strong feelings that they were hired for tactical purposes and that their role continued to be tactical in nature.

Katie believed that she was initially hired for tactical purposes, although her current position was strategic:

It has to do with level and experience more than anything else. I've been doing this for 30 years, but at first I was hired for my tactical experience and when I hire people now, I hire them for tactical purposes, but I groom them into strategic positions. There is a natural transgression that you start out getting paid for what you do, not for what you know.

John found it difficult to differentiate between strategic and tactical roles. He said, "Strategy is the overall value of public relations but the tactics are the implications of the strategy. I feel like you have to have a strategy but you have to be able to carry it out."

The participants were asked if they believed the dominant coalition saw their public relations role within the organization as a vital part of the success and/or failure of the organization (IQ10). The majority of participants said the coalition perceived their role in the organization as being vital to the organization's success but two did not. Neither John nor Sarah believed that neither their roles nor public relations in general was considered to be important to the organization's success. John noted that the role of public relations can change depending on the situation at hand. He said that in the beginning of his tenure with his current organization, he thought the dominant coalition understood the value of public relations and saw the department as a vital part of its success. However, when a new senior management was brought into the organization, the public relations department was no longer seen as being valuable to the organization. Sarah said, "I don't think they see the importance of public relations. I don't think they understand what we do or how we are supposed to function."

Similar to John, Jennifer noted that her organization's views on public relations seemed to change according to the issue being covered. She explained:

> I think that on the standpoint of whether or not the issue is going to be released to the media or if it may go public, then yes, I truly believe that the dominant coalition sees my role as a vital part of the success. If there is a low probability that the information will hit the media, then no. I think that this role is seen as a vital piece of the puzzle, but I don't think it is seen as a pivotal and only piece.

Blake said:

> I think that they have a great respect for me and a lot of that is because they know me and
> they trust me. We have had to go through several challenges together and weather those
> storms. I do think that they value me and regard me in this way. Having a seat in the
> dominant coalition hasn't always been there and I think that has come from longevity and
> reputation building.

Katie stated her belief that her organization's dominant coalition perceived her
department as a success:

> I think they see my role as keeping them out of trouble. We do a lot of practice things
> around here. I think that they see that as the extra. I would say that I do think they see us
> as a success, but more than anything I think they see us as waving the flag and telling
> them to look before they leap.

Curtis had received personal affirmation that his role was vital to the dominant coalition.
He said:

> In my absence, there would be a gap. I have been here for four years and I was promoted
> about four months ago to senior vice president. That was one of the first things that the
> new CEO of our organization did. To me, that was an acknowledgment to the value he
> placed on public relations.

When participants were asked how often they were included in the meetings of their
dominant coalition (IQ2), each participant gave a different answer. Four stated they were
regularly included, while the other five were rarely included or not at all. One participant
attended every coalition meeting, another attended 95 percent of the time, a third was included
50 percent of the time, and a fourth estimated 40-50 percent of the time. One person was

included every couple of months, another twice a year, and two persons never at all. One person

noted that his invitations to participate had decreased over time.

RQ2: How Are Public Relations Leaders In Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Organizations

Able To Influence Decisions Made By The Dominant Coalition Within Their Organization?

Study participants were asked "How do you believe you are able to influence decision-

making within your organization?" (IQ2) and "Do you believe that a public relations

professional should have a seat in the dominant coalition?" (IQ7) Answers to these two

questions are related back to how participants viewed their ability to influence decisions. Every

participant said that the only way possible to influence the decisions made by the coalition was to

actually be a member of the group, even though only four participants said they were members

of the coalition. Analysis of the transcripts led to the emergence of four themes, or factors

believed to affect the ability of a public relations professional to influence their dominant

coalition's decisions. These were: (a) being included early in decision making, (b) having

credibility, (c) practicing proactive public relations, and (d) having a strategic plan.

Being Included Early

Three participants specifically mentioned that being included in the decision-making

process as early as possible would help public relations leaders influence the decisions made by

the dominant coalition. Curtis explained:

> Dominant coalition meetings are where the decision-making takes place. Communicating
>
> a message is essential to whatever decisions are being made and a communication officer
>
> needs to be included when the discussions are taking place, not after decisions have been
>
> made.

> Blake had a very similar idea when he said,

It is sort of like the telephone game. If you aren't included in the initial discussions, then

you have to receive information second hand and it is much easier to have something lost

in translation or have a communication breakdown. I think for a public relations

professional to be there and be listening and having an active voice in the conversation

carries much more weight. You are much more up to speed and you know where the

other members of the coalition stand on a message. Participating in the discussion rather

than receiving information second hand can help influence the decisions made.

Jennifer believed that being included early in the process allowed more time to prepare a

plan. She explained,

I have found as a public relations practitioner that you are better prepared and able to

create a better outcome or product if you have a seat at the table as early as possible. I

made it very well known in my role that if an issue were to arise, call me first. In the

times where I wasn't involved early, the first thing I would tell the coalition was that if I

had known about this in advance, I could have given them a much better and stronger

outcome. I was persistent with that message and was actually put on a risk management

committee discussing potential litigation for the hospital. That was a huge step for public

relations in my organization. By being included in the early stages, I have been able to

create better communication plans. The dominant coalition has even questioned now

why I wasn't involved before.

Credibility

Megan firmly believed her credibility was due to the fact that the dominant coalition

"trusts my judgment, my experience, and my knowledge." She gave more detail by adding, "I'm

seen by the dominant coalition as a trusted advisor and counselor. I think that with any

relationship over time you can build that trust and respect."

Amy stated that she had a "great relationship" with a lot of the board members for her

organization. She elaborated by adding,

> I think it has something to do with the length of time I have been with the organization.
>
> Having a great relationship with the board members, who essentially make up the
>
> dominant coalition for my organization, allows me to use them as assets when trying to
>
> make things happen.

Curtis had a similar thought saying, "I feel like I am seen as the residential and topic

expert, so unless there is a really good reason not to do something that my team and I are

recommending, I'm willing to go toe-to-toe." He also gave insight on how he came to that point.

"Long before there is a decision to be made, people need to feel comfortable with you and know

that you are good at what you do. You need to be trusted that people can bring you confidential

information. All of that is linked back to a strong relationship."

Blake focused specifically on how credibility helped him influence the decision-makers.

He said,

> Public relations isn't a role or title where you come in with credibility. You have to build
>
> it and continue to tie it in to other elements within the organization. Combine it with
>
> weathering challenges, handling crisis communication, and coming out on the other side
>
> better than you went in.

Jennifer simply stated that "history with the organization and experience" played a part in

her ability to influence decisions.

Proactive Public Relations

Four of the six female participants mentioned that being proactive in their jobs has helped them influence the decision making of their dominant coalitions. Instead of being reactive, where they would wait for the issues to come to them, these participants would try to anticipate what could happen and have set plans in place for each issue. Megan said that her ability to be proactive is the reason her organization's dominant coalition values her input. She accomplishes this by "always being ahead of the game, anticipating things that may happen or affect your organization or your people … coming up with recommendations and solutions before they even occur."

Jennifer went even further on the topic by saying:

I think that by bringing a broad prospective that maybe those folks that had been close to the issue maybe hadn't seen or thought of, even looking at it from the standpoint of 'if we do this the consequences would be this.' Trying to look ahead and think about what the next step would be from either someone on the opposition or on the opposite side of the issue that someone else might be thinking about it. Public relations is almost like a chess game. You have to always anticipate your opponent's next move.

Katie stated that in order to prove herself as a qualified public relations leader, she practiced proactive public relations and performed extra job duties.

You can't be silent. Silence isn't good in our business. You have to think about the repercussions and present the solutions. My organization finds value in public relations keeping them out of trouble and in order to do that, you have to be proactive.

Sarah was the only participant in the study to deny having membership in the dominant coalition with absolute certainty. She said,

I feel like if public relations was a part of the dominant coalition, the organization as a

whole could be more proactive instead of reactive. Right now an issue hits the media or

we get a new piece of equipment and there is a reactive approach. Instead of handling the

issue before it went to the media or promoting the equipment before it was in use, we do

the opposite.

Having a Strategic Plan

Although several participants of the study indicated that they thought their jobs were

more tactical than strategic, all but three participants said that in order to influence decision-

making in their organization, having a strategic plan of action was necessary.

Blake gave an example of public relations strategy from his organization. He said,

It is painful for members of the dominant coalition when they are told that public

relations actually has a strategy and that when communicating a message, you could use

strategy. For example, a media outlet asked to shoot video for a story they were covering

about acute care in our nursing center. The dominant coalition thought it was a great idea

because their mindset was any coverage is good coverage. However, I began to talk to

them about how in the acute care facility, (which is where the video would have been

shot), the public would see patients in wheelchairs and having a hard time speaking. Our

organization is very active among promoting healthy aging, it is practically our slogan. I

explained to them how that type of coverage would go against what we promote. I

recommended other sections of the facility that would be a better fit for television

exposure. The media outlet was very adamant about shooting in the acute care section

and we declined participation. That was the best decision for the organization.

Sometimes it is hard for the dominant coalition to understand that there is actually

supposed to be a strategy behind communication efforts.

Stacey said that by showing them a strategic plan, she instantly built credibility.

I think a lot of times the dominant coalition doesn't understand the strategic purpose

behind public relations. For instance, social media is an aspect that most people don't see

a strategic background for. When I created the strategic plan for social media, the

dominant coalition allowed me to be heavily involved in the content for the posts. There

is some sort of strategy behind every post and some sort of outcome that I am looking for

with each one. I use social media to achieve a specific purpose.

Katie said that in order to influence the decisions of the dominant coalition, she needed to

create a strategic communication plan for almost every issue. She said,

I am able to influence the dominant coalition by getting them to consider the external

ramifications of an issue. I create strategic communication plans on how to handle

different situations that could possibly hit the media. The dominant coalition knows now

that if I come to them about an issue or problem, I will be providing solutions to them. I

never go to them with an issue and not have a solution for it. I'm the expert on the topic

and by showing them that I've thought it through and know how to handle it, I typically

just need their approval.

Curtis had a completely different view on his ability to influence decision-making within

the organization. He said that his ability to be a strategic thinker was the reason for his inclusion

in the dominant coalition. He said,

When I came to this organization, my predecessor was not a strategic thinker. In turn, a

lot of what the communication team did was whatever we were told to do. When I took

the position, I said that's nice, but we need to have thoughts and ideas of our own; we

need to come up with a communication strategy that perfectly aligns with the business

strategy. So, that's what we did. Once it was finished, we got the buy-in and agreement

to proceed by senior management. That was the turning point for communications here

to be less of order takers and more of strategic thinkers.

John said that any influence on organizational decision-making need to extend beyond

having a strategic plan. He said,

I don't really think that you can be strategic without producing good tactics. The tactics

help implement the strategy, so not only do you have to have a good strategic plan, you

have to produce good tactics. If the dominant coalition thinks you can do one but not the

other, I doubt you will be able to influence their decisions.

Sarah, who said her position was more tactical than strategic, still had thoughts on how

public relations could influence decision-making. "I believe that marketing and public relations

are part of the strategic plan for an organization," she said.

I believe that they need to be at the table and hear first-hand from senior leaders what the

plans are for the organization and how public relations fits into that plan. Discussion

should take place then on what public relations can do to advance the objectives set forth.

When the discussion is happening, that would be the opportunity for the public relations

department to devise a strategy of its own.

RQ3: What Are The Perceived Barriers To Inclusion Into The Dominant Coalition?

Participants all had different thoughts on reasons public relations could be excluded from

the dominant coalition. One participant did not comment on this topic, but the other eight all

agreed that public relations should have an automatic seat in the dominant coalition. With that,

none of them thought dominant coalition inclusion was a common practice in any sector of

public relations. Most participants suggested two to three possible barriers, but only two major

themes became relevant during analysis. These two themes were (a) a misunderstanding of

public relations and its value to the organization, and (b) the perception of public relation

practitioners being uneducated or inexperienced.

Misunderstanding of Public Relations And Its Value

　　Three of the nine participants mentioned in their interviews a belief that public relations

leaders are often excluded from the dominant coalition because that group's members do not

have a full understanding of public relations. Jennifer explained,

> One of our goals in public relations is to get information put out into the public, but what
>
> the dominant coalition doesn't understand is that the other part is to keep news stories out
>
> of the media. Really it is walking a fine line, especially if you have had stories placed in
>
> the community before. The dominant coalition starts looking at you as only being able to
>
> get a story published.

Blake gave a little more detail saying, "Public relations is a very confused term and it is often

misunderstood. When you combine that misperception with things like public relations being

hard to measure, you have to work harder to show a return on investment."

　　One participant, Sarah, was very vocal about why she believed she has been excluded

from her organization's dominant coalition. She said,

> I don't believe that my role in the organization is seen as a vital part of the organization
>
> and I honestly think that it is because the dominant coalition do not see the importance of
>
> public relations. I don't think that they understand everything that we do. They don't

understand how public relations is supposed to function within an organization. There

are so many things that we do on a daily basis that they have no idea about.

Three participants said that a misunderstanding of what public relations is supposed to do

explain why a department leader might be excluded from the dominant coalition. Three others

stated that even if the coalition recognized the value of public relations, the department would

automatically be excluded. Participants unanimously agreed that once the dominant coalition

understood the value of public relations, the department's leader would not only be included but

would be considered vital.

Uneducated or Inexperienced Practitioner

Blake explained how not keeping up-to-date with professional knowledge could cause

exclusion. He said,

Social media is still relatively new to the field of public relations, but with it, issues like

to come out. An organization doesn't want to hide anything now. It used to be that

companies hid behind legal and said they couldn't take fault because of legal issues.

There used to be a time when 'no comment' was acceptable, but it isn't the case anymore.

More public relations professionals are about transparency and authenticity than they

have ever been.

Katie spoke extensively on this topic. She said,

I learned very quickly that a nonprofit organization is a tax status. It doesn't mean that

the organization does not have to make a profit. In order to invest in the organization and

its employees, you have to meet some sort of margin in order to operate. Public relations

practitioners that don't learn their industry can easily be excluded. You need to be

curious and learn your industry, whatever it is. Know what makes it tick, the pitfalls, what drives the business. Know your competitors and be curious.

The four participants who said that they were members of the dominant coalition talked specifically about how their own level of experience helped them gain membership into the coalition. Katie said,

I have been here for eight years, but I have several more years of experience in crisis management. We have had significant events occur here in the eight years I have been here and I have had to control those situations. Even now in dominant coalition meetings, if I am not there initially, I typically get called into the meeting to discuss the media relations side of an issue.

Blake discussed how his longevity with the organization has helped him gain the trust of the coalition. He said, "Having a seat at the table hasn't always been there and I think that it has come from longevity and reputation building. If you don't gain experiences from both within your organization and outside, you could easily be excluded."

Megan insisted that further knowledge would always be helpful when needing to gain inclusion. She said," I recommend professional development and accreditation. By doing these things, it would make it harder for the dominant coalition to exclude you."

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the analysis results for this study about perceptions of public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations. As for the first research question, pertaining to perceptions of organizational roles, the majority of participants felt that they were not members of the dominant coalition and that their role in the organization was tactical instead of strategic. Seven of the nine, had strong beliefs that they were hired for tactical purposes and

that their jobs continued to be tactical in nature. The other two participants said that they were

initially hired to perform tactical duties, but that they have since transitioned into a strategic role.

Six participants said that the dominant coalition saw their role as a vital part of the organization's

success or failure. Two of the participants did not believe that their role was viewed as a vital

part of either the success or failure, and one participant said that her views on how the dominant

coalition viewed her role depended on the situation that was being discussed.

As for the second research question, pertaining to perceived organizational influence,

most of the participants said that they could influence the decisions made for their organization

to some level, and the majority believed they were perceived by the dominant coalition as vital to

the success or failure of the organization. Four of the nine participants perceived they were

included in their organization's dominant coalition, stating that they participated in 50 percent or

more of the dominant coalition meetings. The other five participants said that they participated

monthly, quarterly, or never. Four themes that arose from the analysis of influence were (a)

being included in the decision-making process early, (b) having credibility, (c) practicing

proactive public relations, and (d) having a strategic plan.

Regarding the third question, pertaining to perceived barriers to inclusion, almost all of

the participants provided information about barriers that could keep public relations

professionals from being included in the dominant coalition. All were persistent in saying that

public relations should automatically have a seat in the organization's dominant coalition. Two

themes about barriers emerged from these responses. The first was that the dominant coalition

might have a misunderstanding of the public relations profession and its value. The second was

that the public relations practitioners might be perceived as uneducated or inexperienced.

Saturation was achieved quickly in this qualitative study. Although all of the participants had different experiences to share, many of their answers were similar enough to conclude that no new information would be found with additional interviews.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The practice of public relations has been around for many years. Organizations have been aware that they need to be building relationships with their customers and clients, have a plan of action for doing so, and be strategic in their tactics. Unless people have spent an extensive amount of time studying the topic, most people in organizations are unfamiliar with all the components that are tied into the public relations profession. A misconception about the actual duties, definition, and responsibility of public relations is not unusual.

This study has provided insight into various perceptions that public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations have about their organizational roles and how these roles influence the dominant coalitions of their organizations, particularly with regard to inclusion in the coalition. While the need for organizations to build and maintain relationships with their publics has always been there, public relations as a professional career path is relatively new.

Role Theory and Research Question 1

Broom and Smith (1979) defined four organizational roles for public relations and categorized them as Manager and Technician. According to Plowman (2005), those who should be included in an organization's dominant coalition would be those who hold manager roles, not technicians, whose roles are mostly limited to the creation and distribution of public relations messages. In this study, the four participants who stated they were members of the dominant coalition held senior management positions, one as a senior vice president, and three as directors. These same participants perceived their roles as emphasizing strategy rather than tactics with regard to performance. The remaining participants described their roles as primarily technical rather than strategic, but also believed their dominant coalitions perceived their roles as vital to

the success or failure of the organization. Their participation in coalition meetings ranged from 0

percent to 50 percent.

Oddly, of the four participants who said they were members of the dominant coalition,

only two participated in decision meetings over 95 percent of the time. One participant

described how he had worked his way upward in various public relations organizations, moving

from technician to manager. When he began to be perceived as a strategic thinker, his value to

the organization increased and he was included in the dominant coalition. This narrative upholds

the contention by Porter et al. (2009) that organizational roles are fluid in nature.

Dominant Coalition Theory and Research Questions 2 and 3

All of the study participants agreed that public relations professionals should be included

in the decision-making meetings of their dominant coalitions, yet less than half found this to be

the case. When public relations leaders do not attend meetings of the dominant coalition, their

access to decision makers is seriously impeded, reducing the likelihood they will ever be

included. Bowen (2005) stated that the inclusion of a public relations leader in the conversations

of their dominant coalitions allows them to also play a part in the strategic planning of the

organization. Grunig and Hunt (1984) went so far as to say that there is little need for a public

relations department unless the leader is included in the dominant coalition,

With regard to the second research question, four themes emerged from the interviews

regarding the abilities of public relations leaders to influence decisions made by the dominant

coalition. These themes were (a) being included early, (b) having credibility, (c) practicing

proactive public relations, and (d) having a strategic plan. Two of these themes are unique to

this study, (i.e., being included early and practicing proactive public relations) in that neither

theme appears to have been revealed by previous research yet they emerged from these interviews.

As for the other two themes, having credibility and having a strategic plan, both topics have been supported by previous research. However, the credibility study of Bachrack and Lawler (1980) was concerned with the credibility of dominant coalition members. The credibility issue in this study pertained to how dominant coalition members perceived the credibility of public relations professionals. When participants described how they believed they were perceived, they mentioned experience, length of time with the organization, judgment, knowledge and expertise, and the ability to build trust and respect.

Multiple researchers have focused on strategic planning in public relations (Grunig, 1992; Dozier et al., 1995). The construct of dominant coalition was first theorized as a group of individuals who were top management employees, all of whom came together with a set of goals based on the value of the organization (Cyert & March, 1963). Mintzberg (1983) argued that members of the dominant coalition were usually both action oriented and committed.

Having a strategic plan was discussed multiple times in the interviews as a way to help influence the decisions made by the dominant coalition. Participants who said their jobs were strategic in nature were also active members of their organization's dominant coalition. The majority of participants agreed that a strategic plan of action was needed when addressing the dominant coalition, even though most participants said their jobs were more tactical than strategic. If practitioners went to the coalition to present a plan that was strategic and comprehensive in nature, the dominant coalition would be more responsive to them. This was mentioned by six participants.

A common definition of public relations identifies it as "a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (Communicating Public Relations Value, 2015, p.1). Not only is a strategic process incorporated into the meaning behind public relations, several researchers have supported the assertion that in order for public relations to provide successful strategic counsel on business decisions, a public relations leader needs to be included in the dominant coalition (Bowen, 2005; Grunig, 1992; Kanihan et al., 2013; Wiggill, 2011).

With regard to the third question, pertaining to perceived barriers to inclusion, two themes emerged from the interviews: (a) a misunderstanding of public relations and its value, and (b) an inexperienced or uneducated practitioner. He defined the first obstacle as senior management had little knowledge about the profession of public relations and its role in an organizational setting. Three participants noted that public relations might not be included in the dominant coalition because its members have a misunderstanding of what the public relations profession is actually supposed to be and how valuable the department could be to the organization. With the profession being fairly new, many coalition members have not had the opportunity to see for themselves how beneficial public relations could be to an organization. For many years, public relations was not seen as a strategic profession, but one where practitioners simply did as they were told. Because of this mindset, some members of the coalition have never advanced their knowledge of how public relations leaders are actually supposed to be treated -- as a strategic profession rather than a tactical one.

Grunig defined the second obstacle as coalition members often do not see the skills, education, and/or experience of public relations leaders as being at a level needed to provide adequate counsel on business decisions. Three participants specifically discussed how a lack of

education or experience in the profession could be seen as inadequate to participate in the discussions of the dominant coalition.

The research on the two obstacles is more than 20 years old, yet little has changed. Knowing these barriers have consistently existed for a long period of time suggests that the public relations profession is unable to communicate its value to the dominant coalition, continuing the perception that public relations practitioners at all levels are inexperienced and uneducated, even when this may not be true.

Interestingly, the mean number of years of experience for this study was 18.22 years with only two participants reporting less than 10 years. One participant had 41 years of experience. All participants held a bachelor's degree and the majority were working toward a master's degree. It would seem that the education and experience levels of these participants would be sufficient to convince dominant coalition members that they had sufficient knowledge to properly and successfully counsel the dominant coalition on business decisions.

Limitations of the Research

The first limitation to this research is that only nine leaders were examined. Even though this number of participants allowed for data saturation, the study results cannot be generalized to a larger population. The data for this study is specific to this one study and cannot represent the entire health-oriented, nonprofit public relations profession.

The second limitation is that the geographic regions represented by participants were not diverse. The participants were primarily from the eastern United States. It is very common for geographic regions to be stereotyped based on the common personality type and belief of its residents. For instance, the majority of the Southeastern states are included in what is known as the Bible Belt (Rentfrow et al., 2013). This study of personality traits in various geographic

regions concluded that residents in the Southeastern region of the United States are friendly and

conventional, but not relaxed or creative. This is the region where the majority of the

participants in this study resided. Western regions were determined to be almost the exact

opposite from their Eastern counterparts. With only one participant of the study located in the

Midwest, the results of the study could have skewed towards the personality types represented in

the Southeastern region, but not reflective of the entire United States.

A third limitation is that interviews were conducted via telephone and speakerphone,

which did not allow relational, face-to-face contact to be made or nonverbal body language to be

observed.

Lastly, participants may have wanted to embellish their job duties as well as their ranks

within their organizations. It is possible that participants could have perceived they were

included in the dominant coalition when in actuality they were not. A desire to be included in

the dominant coalition could skew the actual answers of participants whose organizations had

not yet validated the value of their public relations profession.

Implications for Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Public Relations

In order for a health-oriented, nonprofit organization to successfully develop strong

relationships with its publics, a public relations department should be incorporated into the

operating budget. A nonprofit organization of any size could see their return on investment

within a short period of time. The role of public relations leaders to counsel and advise top

leadership on strategic matters should automatically admit them as members to the dominant

coalition from the beginning of their employment or creation of the department. The role of

public relations in an organization should be considered a strategic role instead of a tactical one.

When leaders of nonprofit organizations are unfamiliar with the public relations profession, the practitioner should assume the responsibility of teaching them. Senior management may not understand the full value that public relations can bring to the organization. They may not understand the scope of public relations and why its professionals should be treated as strategic managers rather than technicians.

Lastly, public relations practitioners should take a proactive approach to their careers rather than a reactive one. This means making the case for inclusion in the dominant coalition where organizational level decisions are made and making progress as early as possible. Being involved in these decisions and hearing the background and facts for them are necessary if public relations practitioners are to craft strategic approaches for handling organizational situations in the best way possible.

Implications for Future Research

Both qualitative and quantitative studies can benefit the field of health-related nonprofit organizations, with regard to understanding organizational roles and their influences on decision-making at top levels of management. Scholars might consider taking a deeper look at the skills, experiences, and personalities that are perceived by members of dominant coalitions as necessary for inclusion in order to help new leaders coming into the field gain entrance more quickly and easily. Reformulating the geographical parameters of a study such as this might bring insight into what strategies for inclusion work in various regions, and perhaps across the entire country.

Further research into dominant coalitions of health-oriented, nonprofit organizations from the public relations perspective would provide the public relations profession with an understanding of what the decision-making group knows about the profession, how valuable they see public relations, and how a public relations employee could gain inclusion.

Finally, studies should also be conducted with college and university students in mind. If students are taught the importance of pursuing pursue membership in the dominant coalition, they might be able to enter into the profession with an understanding that public relations should always be involved in the decision-making of senior management. Practical information pertaining to dominant coalitions need to be understood and taught to undergraduate students so they have a clear understanding of barriers they might face once they enter the field as professionals. Learning about the importance of inclusion, ways to become included, and how to overcome exclusion could truly benefit undergraduate public relations majors.

REFERENCES

Aldoory, L., & Toth, E. (2004). Leadership and gender in public relations: Perceived effectiveness of transformational and transactional leadership styles. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 16,* 157-183. doi:10.1207s1532754xjprr1602_2

Bacharach, S., & Lawler, E. (1980). *Power and politics in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Baker, S., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough? *National Centre for Research Methods.* Retrieved from http://eprints.ncrn.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf

Berger, B. (2005). Power over, power with, and power to relations: Critical reflections on public relations, the dominant coalition, and activism. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 17,* 5-28. doi: 10.1207/s1532754xjprr1701_3

Botan, C. (2006). *Public relations theory II*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bowen, S. (2002). Elite executives in issues management: The role of ethical paradigms in decision making. *Journal of Public Affairs, 2,* 270-283. doi: 10.1002/pa.119

Bowen, S. (2005). What communication professionals tell us regarding dominant coalition access and gaining membership. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *37,* 418-443. doi: 10.1080/00909880903233184

Brick, J., Edwards, W., & Lee, S. (2007). Sampling telephone numbers and adults, interview length, and weighting in the California health interview survey cell phone pilot study. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 71,* 793-813. doi: 10.1093/poq/nfm052

Broom, G., & Smith, G. (1979). Testing the practitioner's impact on clients. *Public Relations Review, 5,* 47-59. doi: 10.1016/S0363-8111(79)80027-2

Broom, G., & Dozier, D. (1986). Advancement for public relations role models. *Public Relations Review*, *12,* 37-56. doi: 10.1016/S0363-8111(86)80039-X

Communicating public relations values. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/businesscase/communicating_public_relations_value#.VihRg9HlvIU

Cyert, R., & March, J. (1963). *A behavioral theory of the firm*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dearnley, C. (2005). A reflection on the use of semi-structured interviews. *Nurse Researcher, 13*, 19-28. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bsu.edu/docview/200774376/fulltextPDF?accountid=8483

DiCicco-Broom, B., & Crabtree, B. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40*, 314-321. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x

Dozier, D. (1984). Program evaluation and roles of practitioners. *Public Relations Review*, *10,*13–21. doi: 10.1016/S0363-8111(84)80002-8

Dozier, D., & Broom, G. (1995). Evolution of the manager role in public relations practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research, 7,* 3-26. doi: 10.1207/s1532754xjpr0701_02

Dozier, D., & Grunig, L. (1995). *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Duhe, S. (2007). *New media and public relations*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Frey, L., Anderson, S., & Friedman, P. (2009). The status of instruction in qualitative communication research methods. *Communication Education, 47,* 246-260. doi:10.1080/03634529809379129

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, *18*, 59-82. doi: 10.1177/1525822X05279903

Directory of Charities and Nonprofit Organizations (2015). Retrieved from https://www.guidestar.org/nonprofit-directory/health/health-care-facilities programs/37.aspx

English, L. (2005). Public relations research in the real world of business. *Public Relations Research*. Morristown: English Communications.

Grunig, J., & Grunig, L. (2000). Public relations in strategic management and strategic management of public relations: Theory and evidence from the IABC excellence project. *Journalism Studies*, 1, 303-321. doi: 10.1080/14616700050028271

Grunig, J., & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing public relations.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston

Grunig, L., Toth, E., & Hon, L. (2000). Feminist values in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *12,* 49-68. doi: 10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1201_4

Grunig, J. (1992). *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Halcomb, E., & Davidson, P. (2006). Is verbatim transcription of interview data always necessary? *Applied Nursing Research*, 19, 38-42. doi: 10.1016/j.apnr.2005.06.001

Kanihan, S., Hansen, K., Blair, S., Shore, M., & Myers, J. (2013). Communication managers in the dominant coalition. *Journal of Communication Management, 17,* 140-156. doi: 10.1108/13632541311318747

Kanter, R. (1992). In search of the post-industrial hero. In M. Syrett, & C. Hogg (Eds.), *Frontiers of leadership: An essential reader*, (pp 73-78). Oxford: Blackwell.

Langer, J. (1996). Telephone time: In-depth interviews via phone gain greater acceptance. *Marketing Research, 8, 6-8.*

Laskin, A. (2012). Public relations scales: Advancing the excellence theory. *Journal of Communication Management, 16,* 355-370. doi: 10.1108/13632541211278996

Lee, N. (2013). *The role of new public relations practitioners as social media experts.* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/2489655 The_Role_of_New_Public_Relations_Practitioners_as_Social_Media_Experts

Mattia, T. (2006). Navigating the C-suite: How do you become the CEO's trusted adviser?, *The Public Relations Strategist, 11(15),* 15-17.

Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research? A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *Journal of Computer Information Systems, 54 (1),* 11. Retrieved from http://iacis.org/jcis/articles/ JCIS54-2.pdf

Mays, N., & Pope, C. (1995). Rigour and qualitative research. *BMJ: British Medical Journal, 311(6997),* 109-112. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/ articles/PMC2550154/?tool=pmcentrez

Mintzberg, H. (1983). *Power in and around organizations.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Leech, N. (2007). A call for qualitative power analyses. *Quality and Quantity, 41,* 105-121. doi: 10.1007/s11135-005-1098-1

Pasadeos, Y., Lamme, M., Gower, K., & Tian, S. (2011) A methodological evaluation of public relations research. *Public Relations Review, 37*, 163-165. doi: 10.1016/ j.pubrev.2011.01.007

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.).* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Plowman, K. (2005). Conflict, strategic management, and public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *31,* 131-138. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2004.10.003

Porter, L., Sweetser, K., & Chung, D. (2009). The blogosphere and public relations: Investigating practitioners' roles and blog use. *Journal of Communication Management, 13*, 250-267. doi: 10.1108/13632540910976699

Quick facts about nonprofits. (2014). Retrieved from http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/ quickfacts.cfm

Rentfrow, P., Jokela, M., Gosling, S., Stillwall, D., Kosinski, M., & Potter,J. (2013). Divided we stand: Three psychological regions of the United States and their political, economic, social, and health correlates. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 105, 996-112. doi: 10.1037/a0034434

Romney, A., Weller, S., & Batchelder, W. (1986). Culture as consensus: A theory of culture and informant accuracy. *American Anthropologist, 88,* 313-338. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/677564

Rhee, Y. (2004). The employee-public-organization chain in relationship management: A case study of a government organization. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Maryland, College Park.

Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *EBN Notebook, 3*, 68-70. Retrieved from http://ebn.bmj.com/content/3/3/68.full.pdf+html

Toth, E., & Grunig, L. (1993). The missing story of women in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research,* 5, 153-175. doi: 10.1207/s1532754xjprr0503_01

United States Regions (2015). Retrieved from http://education.nationalgeographic.com/maps/unitedstates-regions

Waters, R., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholder through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, *35,* 102-106. doi: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006

Wiggill, M. (2011). Strategic communication management in the nonprofit sector: A simplified model. *Journal of Public Affairs, 11,* 226-235. doi: 10.1002/pa.415

Appendix A
Table 3

Table 3: Duties assigned to each role developed by Broom and Smith (1979)

Expert prescriber	Communication facilitator	Problem-solving process facilitator	Communication technician
Responsible for independently solving a public relations problem	Responsible for maintaining two-way communication throughout the organization and its clients (Broom & Dozier, 1986)	Works with other members of the organization in order to solve public relations problems	Responsible for producing and distributing the public relations message (Broom & Dozier, 1986)
Considered the authority figure in the public relations department	Referred to as liaisons or interpreters between the organization and its clients	Works with lower-level management throughout the public relations process	Are not grouped under the manager role
Clients are confident in the ability of this employee and therefore tend to play a passive role in public relations decisions	Brings the client's views to the organization management and relays messages from management to client	Part of the management team and guides others in problem-solving and planning	Has specialized skills used to create a public relations campaign and execute the organization's message

Appendix B
Questionnaire

1. Tell me a little bit about your organization. What is your job title and specific duties?

2. How often are you included in decision-making meetings with senior management and the organization CEO? What topics are discussed during those meetings?

3. How are you able to influence decision-making on business issues?

4. How would you feel proposing a new idea to senior management and/or the company CEO?

5. Please elaborate on whether conversations with senior management and/or the company CEO tend to be social in nature or work-related.

6. How often do you speak with senior management and/or the company CEO?

7. Do you believe that public relations should have a seat in the decision-making group, or dominant coalition? Why?

8. How common do you believe it is for public relations in nonprofit to play an integral part of decision-making for the organization?

9. Describe the role (tactical vs. strategic) you believe the dominant coalition of your organization places on you.

10. Explain whether or not you believe the dominant coalition of your organization sees you as a vital part of their success/failure and why?

11. How do you believe someone in public relations can gain inclusion into the dominant coalition?

12. What reasons do you believe public relations employees could be excluded from the dominant coalition?

13. Are there times when you believe nonprofit public relations employees are hired more for tactical purposes instead of strategy purposes? Why/why not?

14. Tell me a little bit about your organization. What is your job title and specific duties?

15. What type of education or certification have you obtained?

16. What is your age? At what age did you enter into the nonprofit public relations sector?

17. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix C
Informed Consent

Study Title   Dominant Coalition Perceptions in Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Public Relations

Study Purpose and Rationale
The purpose of the proposed study is to determine the perceptions of public relations leaders in health-oriented, nonprofit organizations regarding their role in the organization's dominant coalition.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria
To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age, currently work in a health-oriented, nonprofit organization and consider yourself to be the top leader within the public relations department.

Participation Procedures and Duration
For this project, you will be asked to participate in a telephone interview that will last a maximum of 30 minutes.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity
All data will be maintained as confidential information and no identifying information will appear in the presentation of data.

Audio Recording
Please be aware that the interview will be conducted on speakerphone so that it can be recorded using an external recording device. This is only for the purpose of interview transcription at a later date. The audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after two years.

Storage of Data
The data will be kept on a password protected computer and locked cabinet for two years and then will be deleted and properly disposed of. Only members of the research team will have access to the data in those two years.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no perceived risks for participating in this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits with the participation.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you are uncomfortable answering any question during the interview, you do not have to answer it. Please feel free to ask any questions before signing this form.

IRB Contact Information
For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title   Dominant Coalition Perceptions in Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Public Relations

****

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, "Dominant Coalition Perceptions in Health-Oriented, Nonprofit Public Relations." I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation in this study.

_____			_____

Participant's Signature					Date

Researcher Contact Information

Principal Investigator:						Faculty Supervisor:
Torie Fowler, Graduate Student				Dr. Deborah Davis
Public Relations						Journalism
Ball State University						Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306						Muncie, IN 47306
Telephone: (601) 550-2058					Telephone: (765) 285-9104
Email: ttfowler@bsu.edu					Email: dadavis@bsu.edu

Appendix D
Institutional Review Board Approval Form

B A L L S T A T E
U N I V E R S I T Y

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

_____

DATE: May 28, 2015

TO: Torie Fowler

FROM: Ball State University IRB

RE: IRB protocol # 763885-1
TITLE: Dominant Coalition Perceptions in Health-Oriented, Non-Profit Public
                               Relations
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
DECISION DATE: May 28, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: **EXEMPT**

_____

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on May 28, 2015 and has determined the
procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such,
there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures
outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol
will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Exempt Categories:

	Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educations practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
X	**Category 2:** Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior
	Category 3: Research involving the use of educational test (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under category 2, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
	Category 4: Research involving the collection of study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or

- 1 -   Generated on IRBNet