

CCO views on high-performing communication teams

How the function and its leaders can deliver greater value

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Research objectives

- 1. Ask top CCOs to identify the factors that shape, drive and impede performance in communication functions**
- 2. Help CCOs and others in the profession elevate performance of the communication function, delivering greater value and helping to advance the enterprise role of communication**

Background

CEOs want all corporate functions, including communication, to contribute greater value to the business. But little is known about what “high performance” means for a communication function and how that translates into value.

Our quantitative research sought to identify factors that influence, drive and impede performance of communication teams. It builds on findings from a recent qualitative study we led on a similar topic.

Findings from our work will help CCOs lead and manage their teams more effectively, increasing the value the communication function brings to the business and, by extension, advancing the enterprise role of the function.

Methodology and interviewees

- **Online survey conducted April-May 2017**
- **551 CCOs (or equivalent title) invited, 74 responded (13.7%)**
- **Respondents are senior leaders in the profession**
 - 70% work for large companies (revenues of \$1-20 billion/year) in wide range of industries
 - 76% work for publicly listed companies (16% for private, for-profit companies)
 - 78% work for international/global companies
 - 83% are most senior communication leader in their company
 - 86% have 15+ years of experience in communication and/or PR
 - 84% head teams with 10+ communicators (36% have 50+)
 - 42% female, 58% male

Insights

Our interviews surfaced four insights for CCOs to consider as they strive to build high-performing communication teams

- 1. CCOs believe their function is important to business success.**
- 2. Many CCOs think their function outperforms other communication functions.**
- 3. CCOs believe 8 factors are vital for high performance in their function.**
- 4. CCOs see 7 key impediments to performance in their function.**

Insight 1

CCOs believe their function is important to business success.

- On a 7-point scale, CCOs gave the communication function a mean rating of 5.85
- CCOs rated the finance (6.51) and information technology (6.0) functions as more important than communication
- CCOs rated the marketing (5.66), legal/government affairs (5.61) and human resources (5.46) functions as less important than communication

Observation

Would CEOs and other C-Suite peers rate communication ahead of marketing, legal and HR? If so, why do budgets for marketing, legal/government affairs and human resources teams typically exceed those for communication?

Insight 2

Many CCOs think their function outperforms other communication functions.

- On a 7-point scale, CCOs rated their function 5.47 on average
- Ratings ranged from 3-7

Observation

Other studies show that communication staff give their leaders much lower job performance ratings than the leaders give themselves. An objective, third-party assessment of functional performance, using standard criteria, would probably show a broader distribution of performance ratings.

Insight 3

CCOs believe 8 factors are vital for high performance in their function.

A function that is tied to the business	A function that works well with others	A function that works as one team
<p>Alignment – our function’s work is aligned with business goals</p> <p>Acumen – the people in our function understand the business</p> <p>Role – our function has a clear role in the organization</p>	<p>Collaboration – the people in our function collaborate effectively with others</p> <p>Respect – the people in our function demonstrate respect for others</p>	<p>Agility – our function adapts quickly to change</p> <p>Culture – our function has a culture that allows people to do their best work</p>
<p>Support – the CEO is a visible supporter of the function</p>		

Observation

CCOs most often cite alignment and collaboration as important factors. But building an aligned and agile function, with strong business acumen, a healthy culture and a clear role in the company, remains a challenge for some CCOs.

Insight 4

CCOs see 7 key impediments to performance in their function.

Key impediments to performance of the communication function
Respect – a CEO who doesn't value employees
Alignment – lack of alignment around strategy in the organization
Culture – unhealthy work culture in the organization
Agility – inability of organization to adapt to change
Vision – lack of a clear vision for the organization
Talent – difficulty in hiring and retaining top talent in organization
Silos – silo approach to working together in the organization

Observation

CCOs have limited ability to control or influence these factors, which exist to some extent in many organizations. Still, these can have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of communication work, and CCOs have to plan and manage accordingly.

Comments

We believe these research findings will help CCOs consider, with greater confidence, what steps they can take to improve performance in their teams. Further study is required, however, to attain an objective, standardized definition of high performance in the function.

We are encouraged that CCOs see high performance as crucially important to business success, and we are impressed by the efforts of some CCOs and their teams to elevate performance.

We are concerned, however, that some CCOs may have an unrealistic sense of their function's importance relative to other corporate functions, as well as their team's performance relative to that of their professional peers.

We also wonder why some CCOs who seem to see high performance as a priority are not doing more to elevate it. Are their functional priorities directly tied to business priorities? Do team members understand the business enough to become trusted advisors on business, not just communication matters? Are they creating a culture where communication team members are clear about direction (strategy, vision, mission, etc.) and equipped to do their best work?

Finally, are CCOs and their teams adapting quickly enough to the rapidly changing nature and practice of communication? Some are growing functional capabilities, skills and tools to make communication more predictive on stakeholder behaviors and business outcomes. Still, we see too many functions that are in perpetual fire-fighting mode, struggling to build for a new future and increasing the value they bring to the business. Obviously, that's not sustainable.

The challenges and opportunities outlined here are not unique to the communication function. But since we all work in this field and care about its place in business, we are keen to see the field seize this moment and accelerate progress.

Thank you!

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