

## **Delivering Higher Value Through Higher Performance: Insights On Performance Evaluation And Talent Management In Corporate Communication**

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### **Abstract**

This study explored the current state of performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication from the perspective of senior communication leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page society. The findings of a national survey underscore several opportunities for communication leaders to elevate performance and importance of their function. In addition to actionable insights, key trends and best practices in measuring communication effectiveness, the study also concludes with recommendations on developing high performing teams that also deliver higher value.

Keywords: Talent management, performance evaluation, professional development, communication effectiveness, corporate communication

### **Introduction**

Public relations and corporate communication leaders are increasingly concerned with evaluating effectiveness of their work. Previous research has identified a wide range of measures and metrics that are being used to assess the impact of communication activities (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zerfass, 2009). These studies have independently concluded that performance evaluation in our field is marked with inconsistencies and ad hoc measures that fail to capture the full spectrum of contributions that communication efforts make towards organizational excellence.

This study extends this line of research by reporting on the findings of a national survey of senior corporate communication leaders (e.g. CCOs, VPs, and Directors of communication) to unveil the key trends in performance evaluation and best practices in managing communication functions. After all, high performing teams are a prerequisite to delivering higher value to organizations. Aligned closely with the annual Generally Accepted Practices (GAP) VIII survey (2014), this study collected responses from senior leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page Society to 1. evaluate the importance of corporate communication efforts to overall organizational success from their perspective as well as from the perspective of others (e.g. peers, organizational leaders, etc.), 2. identify the key measures currently being used to evaluate

success and how well communication teams are performing against these measures, 3. define the current state of talent and professional development in corporate communication teams, 4. identify the current measures being used to manage staff training and development, and finally, 5. determine what these leaders consider important for talent management in the future.

The study furthers our understanding of the context for performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication. The study aims to provide managers with strategies and tools that communication leaders are currently using to attract, organize, develop, and retain communications talent – all at a time when CEOs are expecting higher performance and greater business value from all functions, including communications. Findings also provide key insights and recommendations for developing high performing communication teams.

### **Literature Review**

Although the discourse surrounding public relations measurement and evaluation has been building since the 1950s when Cutlip and Center published *Effective Public Relations*, the topic has gained prominence in recent years (Lindenmann, 2003; Watson, 2012) and proving the value of public relations has become an omnipresent issue for public relations professionals. In the absence of effective measurement, PR professionals are left without a way to determine the value of their efforts (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). As the demand for proof of public relations' organizational contribution has increased, communication teams must show how they do, in fact, drive revenue and affect the bottom line.

However, attempts to develop standards of measurement and best practices have continued to remain elusive (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Previous research has focused on the relationship between theory and practice (Gregory, 2001) - academic discourse has professed that measurement and evaluation is possible, but in practice it has not been easily achievable. As aforementioned, current studies have shown a gap between how practitioners view measurement and how it is implemented (Gregory & Watson, 2008). Moreover, according to Michaelson et al. (2015), "the first and most important reason for the lag in attention to measurement and evaluation in public relations is that practitioners cannot agree on what constitutes success from measurement" (p. 9).

This sentiment is not surprising given the considerable number of measurement tools and performance indicators that have been introduced to the profession in recent years. Scholars such as Michaelson and Stacks (2011) and Lindenmann (2003) have written extensively on standardization in public relations measurement and the widely accepted Barcelona Declaration of Measurement Principles (2010) was crucial for the advancement of public relations measurement standards (Eisenmann, O'Neil, & Geddes, 2015) and disqualifying AVEs as adequate measurement for public relations. The Barcelona Principles 2.0, which were unveiled in 2015, propelled public relations measurement even further asserting that measurement was not only important, but absolutely fundamental to the field (AMEC, 2014). Yet, despite these major advancements, a recent study by Michaelson et al. (2015) shows, only one quarter of the surveyed public relations practitioners have adopted standardized measurement approaches.

Although academics and practitioners have introduced guidelines and metrics for communication outcomes (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Lindemann, 2003; Macnamara, 2005) and business outcomes alike (Likely, Rockland, & Weiner, 2006; Watson & Zerfass, 2011), an industry-wide framework is yet to be developed. This can be attributed in part to the fact that measurement and evaluation most certainly depend on individual goals and objectives (Laskin,

2016). As such, different best practices guides provide varying and disparate measurement indicators. Proposed measurement tools for communication and relationship outcomes range from Valid Metrics Framework (AMEC, 2011; Jain, 2014) to Integrated Reporting (Macnamara, 2014) to adaptations and variations of the AIDA model (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

Likewise, the measurement of business outcomes has been a point of contention as well. Proponents of using Return on Investment (ROI) argue that it is applicable to the discipline and can demonstrate the financial return of public relations efforts in a specific campaign (Likely, Rockland & Weiner, 2006). Other metrics include Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) and Cost-Effective Analysis (CEA), which some believe are more appropriate tools for measuring the financial value of PR (Likely, 2012; Likely & Watson, 2013). Additionally, recent research has provided case studies utilizing marketing mix modeling to determine how public relations drives sales (Weiner, Arnorsdottir, Lang, & Smith, 2010).

Scholars such as Laskin (2016) have highlighted the detriment this variability has brought on the profession as a whole. Amidst the surplus of suggested KPIs, tools and practices, standardization is imperative if public relations practitioners want to successfully communicate value to clients. However, attempts to develop standard metrics for public relations have been lacking in their application to the general profession for various reasons. The UK Central Office of Information, in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, created an initiative listing eight distinct measurement metrics, yet they were focused too narrowly on media relations (Watson, 2012; Laskin, 2016).

More recently, the Association for Measurement and Evaluation of Communication endeavored to create a matrix measuring public relations activity, intermediary effect and target audience effect (AMEC, 2014), but as Laskin (2016) points out, the standards “lacked the stages that, arguably, were the most important for the clients and agencies – what was the actual impact on the clients’ business/operations and how it helped the client vis-à-vis its competitors” (p. 9). Individual scholars have likewise inserted themselves into the measurement and evaluation dialogue by proposing various frameworks for public relations professionals to quantify the value of their programs (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Lindemann, 2003; Macnamara, 2005). Valiant as these efforts may be however, the guidelines proposed failed to address the immense amount of work public relations professionals and agencies actually put into a campaign (Laskin, 2016).

The efforts of scholars and practitioners have elevated the public relations profession in profoundly significant ways but, despite the extensive amount of research that has been done on public relations measurement and evaluation, clear and reliable methods of comprehensive measurement have not, as of yet, been produced. A standardized framework is not out of the realm of possibility, but it must take into account the broad range of activities that public relations professionals perform at an industry level.

In particular, there is a lack of a measurement framework to demonstrate value of corporate communication efforts. Much like other specialized practice areas, there is a wide range of corporate communication roles and responsibilities. However, there are no standard measurements in place to evaluate these functions in a tangible manner. Performance evaluation in corporate communication runs a gamut of ad hoc measures lacking a common understanding around the value of this important function.

### **Corporate Communication Roles and Responsibilities**

Corporate communication has developed into a discipline of its own in recent decades (Christenson & Cornelissen, 2011) and what was once a seemingly vague term, has become a definitive field that factors into an organization's corporate identity. van Riel and Fombrun (2007) have defined corporate communication as "the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favourable [sic] starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends" (p. 25). The corporate communications professional therefore assumes a variety of roles within the organization and as a form of "intellectual capital," influences an organization's bottom line and must be recognized as such (Malmelin, 2007).

The role of a corporate communicator has become increasingly more vital to an organization's daily operations and value creation. Executives and communicators identify both internal and external stakeholders as the focus of corporate communications (Zerfass, Schwabach, Bentele, & Sherzada, 2014), yet, to solidify communication structures that effectually connect with all stakeholder groups, corporate communication roles need to be wholly integrated in an organization (de Beers, 2014) and be on par with other leadership roles.

The perceived importance of the corporate communicator to an organization has grown by leaps and bounds, but there is still a need, at times, to demonstrate why and how communication contributes to overall operations. A successful communicator does not have a simple role. Hamrefors (2010) argues that in addition to basic competencies and general knowledge of the field, a communicator must develop knowledge in four major areas: processes, structure, social interaction and organizational-wide relationships. Hamrefors goes on to also identify four simultaneous sub-roles that a good communicator must assume if he or she is to thrive as a leader, which are the system designer, mediator, coach and influencer. Hence, "communication plays an important boundary-spanning role for companies" (Illia & Balmer, 2012, p. 418) that warrants representation in the leadership of an organization.

In a role that has minimal definitive boundaries, corporate communications outlines a multitude of responsibilities for practitioners. As scholars have noted, the communications professional is essentially the bridge between an organization and its stakeholders (Swerling, Thorson, & Zerfass, 2014; Illia & Balmer, 2012). Practitioners similarly consider the responsibilities of corporate communications to consist of building the corporate brand and managing the reputation of the company (Gupta, 2011). With the advent of social media and emergence of ideas such as corporate social responsibility (Swerling, Thorson, & Zerfass, 2014; Christenson & Cornelissen, 2011), the field of corporate communications is ever-evolving, and professionals must increasingly be proactive in daily practice (Gupta, 2011).

### **Performance Evaluation and Talent Management in Corporate Communication**

Corporate communication program evaluation is integral to demonstrate accountability and effectiveness, as well as contribution to bottom line (Xavier et al., 2005). However, due to a lack of a measurement framework, practitioners often rely on ad hoc tools and methods to demonstrate the value of their work to corporate leadership. Regardless of this divergence in opinion around performance indicators, practitioners and scholars agree that evaluation and reporting are central to effective practice (Center & Jackson, 2003).

Scholars have argued that evaluation of communication functions is contingent on the views that CEOs and top management hold of the role these functions play in organizational success (Hon, 1998; Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015). For instance, Hon (1998) found that CEOs see

image and reputation building as a primary role for communicators. Further, interviews with 32 practitioners and 10 top executives revealed that while public relations planning and evaluation is becoming more systematic, practitioners use a range of formal and informal tools to assess performance. Practitioners also reported that evaluation is often limited by lack of resources (staff, budget, etc.) and organizational support. However, participants agreed that to be effective, performance evaluation goals and objectives should be closely aligned with the overall mission of the organization.

Similarly, a survey of top executives of companies in Germany revealed that while they understand the value of corporate communications and its contribution to organizational success, they “view communication as a transmission of “objective” meaning” (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015, p. 304). Further, CEOs and board members consider “informing and motivating employees,” “conveying corporate trust,” and “building and preserving a positive image” as primary objectives for corporate communication. On the other hand, building relationship with and influencing media, fostering dialogue with stakeholders, and exploring trends and developments in society are considered less important. Similarly, facilitating business processes, building corporate assets, managing relationships and crises, and adjusting organizational strategies are viewed as the contributions of corporate communication to organizational success.

Despite the obvious advantages and significance of performance evaluation, this area has been under examined in the context of corporate communication. As Hon (1998) argued, “the long-term viability of the public relations function is directly linked to a better understanding of public relations’ value-added contribution” (p. 104). Scattered understanding around what constitutes effective measurement and evaluation in corporate communication limits the value of the discipline. Investigating the current status of performance evaluation is an important first step towards developing a common notion about corporate communication effectiveness and value in organizational success. Therefore this study examined the following research questions:

**RQ1.** According to communication leaders, how important is their work to overall organizational success from their perspective as well as from the perspective of others (e.g. peers, organizational leaders, etc.)?

**RQ2.** What key measures do communication leaders currently use to evaluate success and how well their teams are performing against these measures?

An area that is closely related to corporate communication performance is talent management and professional development. Dozier, Grunig, Grunig (1995) in their landmark study argued that excellence in public relations and communication management can only be achieved by cultivating communicators’ knowledge and expertise. After all, if communication departments lack the necessary talent, they cannot deliver value to upper management. The authors identified four types of knowledge of communication excellence namely, strategic and operational management, research, negotiation, and persuasion knowledge. Included in these categories were also expertise related to developing department goals and objectives as well as budget. To this end, the excellence study presented seven strategies for acquiring knowledge for excellence: knowing the business, self-study, professional association seminars, mentoring, departmental training, accreditation, and higher education. These strategies vary in the amount of resources, efforts, and institutional support they require.

However, professional development and talent management have been largely ignored in corporate communication research. More importantly, there is a lack of knowledge about the various strategies and tools that corporate communication leaders use to enhance their department's capabilities and how they manage their budget for staff training and development. Therefore, this study examined the following research questions to address this gap in the scholarship and identify best practices to guide communicators:

**RQ3.** What is the current state of talent and professional development in corporate communication teams?

**RQ4.** How do communication leaders currently manage staff training and development?

**RQ5.** What do communication leaders consider important for talent management in the future?

### **Method**

A total of 358 senior leaders in communication were invited via email to participate in a self-administered, online survey during January-March, 2015. Participants were selected from Arthur W. Page Society's mailing list by screening for members who specifically work in corporate communication roles. This professional organization was selected to gain access to senior public relations and corporate communication executives including chief communication officers of Fortune 500 corporations. In addition, participants were recruited through personal contacts.

The survey questionnaire comprised of four sections with 26 questions. The first section consisted of a series of contextual questions about enterprise role, primary responsibilities, and performance of the communications function, along with current talent management and professional development practices that participants use. The second section carried questions about operating expenditures, including staff training and development. In the third section, participants answered questions about talent management in the future, including skill sets, performance drivers, and functional direction. The survey concluded with questions about participant's current titles, years of experience, and the nature of their current organization.

A total of 83 (23%) respondents participated, with some questions receiving more responses than others. The questionnaire was tested in advance with about 10% of participants. The response rate and total number of respondents is fairly consistent with other studies involving top-level communications leaders, who often are too busy to respond to all the survey requests they typically receive (Ragas, Uysal, & Culp, 2015).

A majority of the respondents have worked in communication for over 20 years, and 84% hold the Vice President, Senior Vice President, Executive Vice President, or Chief Communications Officer (CCOs) title. Most (63%) of the participants represent publicly owned companies and a comparable number (60%) work at a global organization. About half of the participants (44%) work at an organization with over \$10 billion in annual revenues. In terms of current scope of responsibility, most common areas of focus are external communication including media relations (100%), reputation management (96%), executive communication (96%), and internal communication/employee engagement (93%),

**Findings**

**RQ1.** Results show that participants place high importance on the value of communication ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and also believe that their immediate manager or supervisor ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), their direct reports ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ), and other team members ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) agree with this view. However, senior communication leaders acknowledged that while their CEOs perceive communication as an important organizational function ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), their board members ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and functional peers ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ) do not completely share this assessment (Table 1).

Table 1. Perceived importance of the work of communication department (in comparison to other departments) to organization/company's overall success

	Mean	SD	High (4-5)	Medium (3)	Low (1-2)
Self	4.33	0.80	89%	5%	5%
Your immediate manager	4.26	0.76	88%	9%	3%
Your direct reports	4.6	0.72	93%	3%	3%
Other members of your department	4.4	0.77	90%	7%	3%
Your peers in other departments	3.84	0.64	77%	19%	3%
Your CEO (or senior-most executive)	4.1	0.87	81%	12%	7%
Your Board of Directors	3.88	0.80	75%	17%	7%

**RQ2.** The measures that senior communication leaders most commonly use to evaluate performance are achieving communication goals and objectives related to awareness, attitudes, and behaviors ( $n = 48, 91\%$ ), effective issues and crisis management ( $n = 47, 89\%$ ), and reputation management ( $n = 45, 85\%$ ). Surprisingly, effectively measuring and reporting the impact and value of department work ( $n = 20, 38\%$ ) as well as encouraging sustainable and socially responsible corporate practices and activities ( $n = 17, 32\%$ ) are among the least monitored outcomes of communication performance (Table 2).

Table 2. Outcomes currently used to measure communication department's success and value

Outcomes	N	%
Achieving communication goals/objectives (e.g. awareness, attitudes, behaviors, etc.)	48	91
Achieving media goals/objectives (e.g. impressions, tonality, spokespersons, etc.)	31	58
Achieving organization/company goals/objectives (e.g. revenues, market share, etc.)	33	62
Informing and engaging stakeholders through social/digital media	33	62
Increasing employees understanding of and engagement in company strategy	39	74
Developing, promoting and/or reinforcing corporate culture and values	35	66
Building, protecting and managing corporate reputation	45	85
Effectively managing issues and crises	47	89
Encouraging sustainable and socially responsible corporate practices and activities	17	32
Efficiently managing the department's budget and improving its operational effectiveness	40	75
Hiring and retaining high-performing talent in the department	40	75
Measuring and reporting the impact and value of department work	20	38
Satisfying internal clients with quality service, support and advice	40	75
Creating innovative new communications tools, techniques and practices	30	57
Collaborating effectively with colleagues and others	34	64
Others	3	6

As Table 3 shows, participants believe their teams are performing especially well on internal client service ( $M = 3.89, SD = 0.33$ ) and issues/crisis management ( $M = 3.88, SD = 0.46$ ). However, they see room for improvement with hiring/retaining high-performing talent ( $M = 3.54, SD = 0.67$ ), achieving enterprise goals ( $M = 3.48, SD = 0.4$ ), promoting corporate culture ( $M = 3.39, SD = 0.93$ ), and creating innovative new communications tools ( $M = 3.39, SD = 0.84$ ). Areas of concern included increasing employee engagement ( $M = 3.37, SD = 0.53$ ) and engaging stakeholders via social/digital media ( $M = 3.03, SD = 0.75$ ).

Table 3. Current performance on each outcome used to measure communication department's success and value

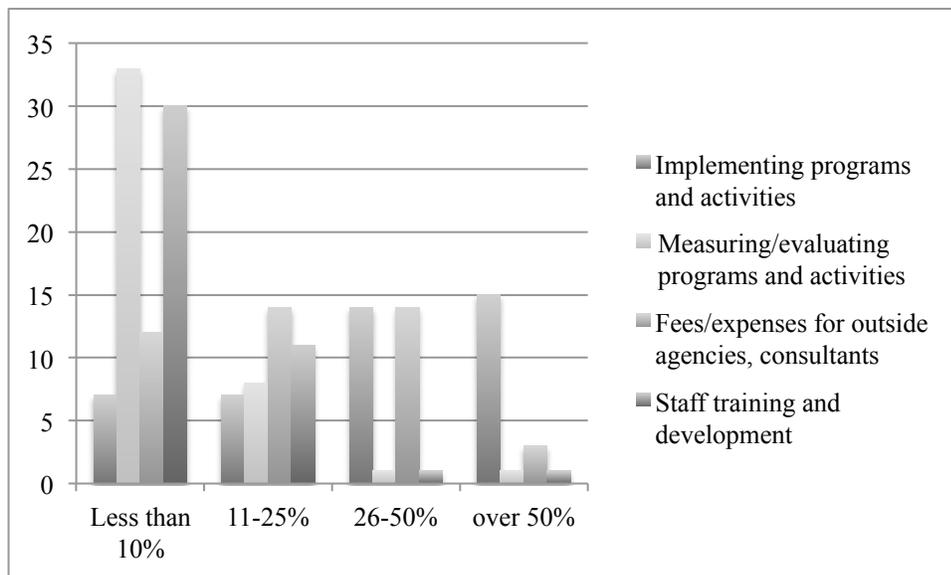
Outcome	M	SD	Exceeds expectations (4-5)	Equals expectations (3)	Short of expectations (1-2)
Achieving communication goals/objectives (e.g. awareness, attitudes, behaviors, etc.)	3.62	0.58	62%	36%	2%
Achieving media goals/objectives (e.g. impressions, tonality, spokespersons, etc.)	3.75	0.7	68%	29%	4%
Achieving organization/company goals/objectives (e.g. revenues, market share, etc.)	3.48	0.63	41%	59%	0%
Building, protecting and managing corporate reputation	3.73	0.67	61%	39%	0%
Collaborating effectively with colleagues and others	3.97	0.68	76%	24%	0%
Creating innovative new communications tools, techniques and practices	3.39	0.92	39%	46%	14%
Developing, promoting and/or reinforcing corporate culture and values	3.39	0.97	42%	39%	18%
Effectively managing issues and crises	3.88	0.68	71%	29%	0%
Efficiently managing the department's budget and improving its operational effectiveness	3.81	0.71	64%	36%	0%
Encouraging sustainable and socially responsible corporate practices and activities	3.5	0.85	57%	29%	14%
Hiring and retaining high-performing talent in the department	3.54	0.82	46%	49%	6%
Increasing employees understanding of and engagement in company strategy	3.37	0.73	40%	51%	9%
Informing and engaging	3.03	0.87	21%	59%	21%

stakeholders through social/digital media					
Measuring and reporting the impact and value of department work	3.28	0.83	39%	44%	17%
Satisfying internal clients with quality service, support and advice	3.89	0.57	78%	22%	0%

**RQ3.** Reflecting on the current talent in their departments, about a quarter of the participants said they have the right people in the right roles, and a third would like to have a few more people to fill existing, open positions. Nearly one in 10 participants wants to dramatically redesign her/his team, bringing in people with very different skill sets. About a third of the participants expect their department’s operating budget to increase in the next fiscal year, and half think budgets will stay the same. A high number (44%) of the participants expect the staffing (salaries, wages and benefits) component of their operating budgets to increase and half expect those budgets to stay the same.

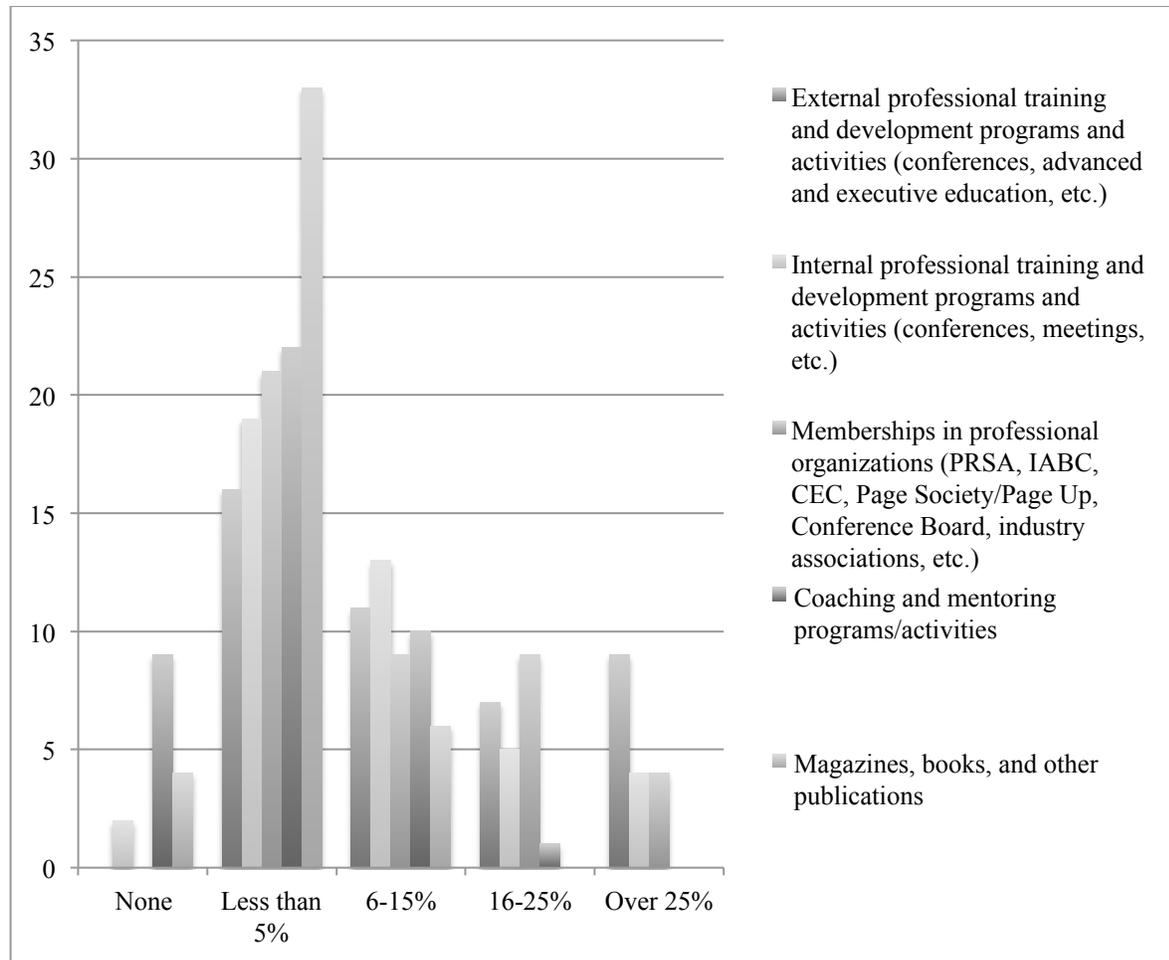
**RQ4.** After staffing costs (salaries, wages and benefits) have been covered, participants spend 26-50% or more of their remaining budgets on implementing programs (Figure 1). Spend on agency/consultant fees (often for program implementation) takes the next largest chunk of remaining budget – from 11-25% on average. This leaves less than 25% of the remaining, non-staffing costs for staff training and even less for program measurement.

Figure 1. 12. Allocation of communication department’s annual operating budget (aside from staffing needs)



Staff training and development budgets appear to be spread wide and thin (Figure 2). External training/development programs get the most funding (about 6-15%), closely followed by memberships in professional organizations (about 5-6%) and internal training (about 5-6%). Less is spent on coaching/mentoring and magazines, books and other publications.

Figure 2. Allocation of communication department’s annual staff training and development budget



Overall, senior communication leaders are unhappy with the quality of current staff training and development programs/activities available to them – and more than 70% are not planning to invest more in this area during the next fiscal year. Nearly half (49%) said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of training and development programs available inside and outside their organizations.

**RQ5.** Communications skills (e.g., writing, presenting, social media, design, etc.) remain important foundations ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 0.17$ ), but senior communication leaders rated leadership and interpersonal skills as equally desirable for future communication professionals (Table 4). Examples of management/leadership skills included process management, running effective teams, hiring, and adapting to change ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.6$ ). Examples of interpersonal skills

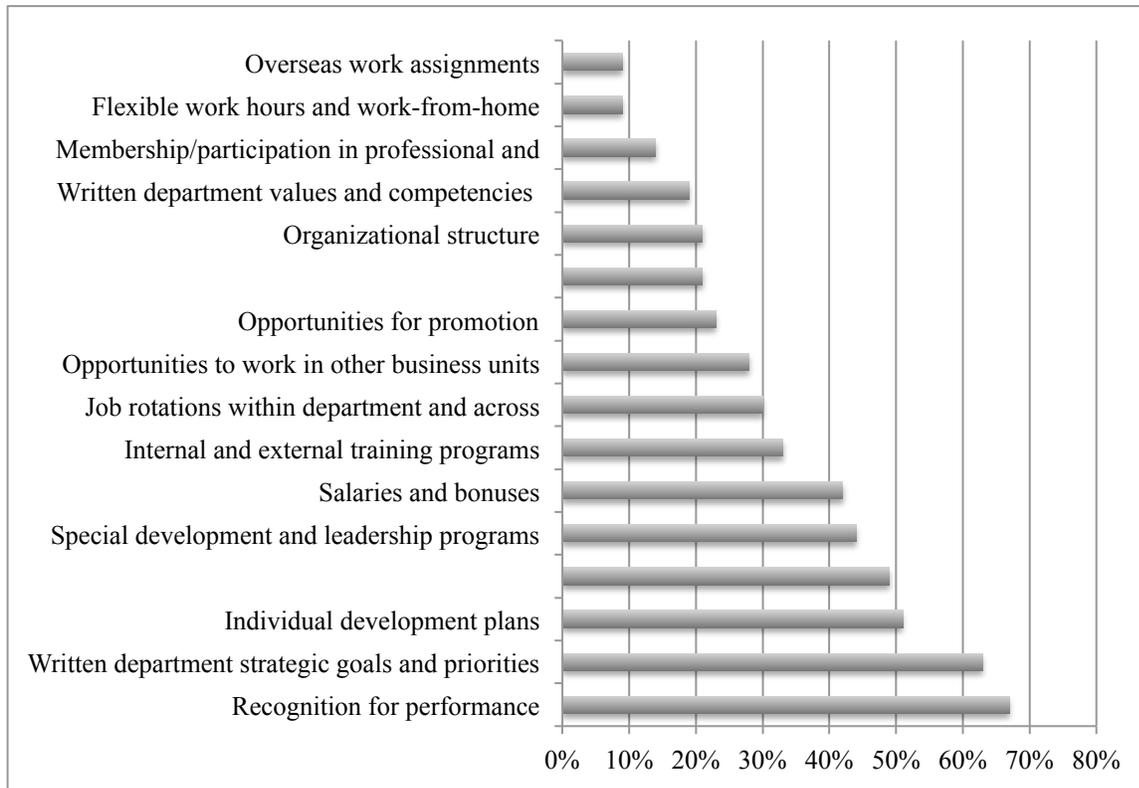
included listening, perseverance, collaboration, and organizational savvy ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 0.4$ ). Overall, international skills (e.g., global knowledge, cross-cultural sensitivity, humility, international resourcefulness, etc.) were seen as valuable but secondary to the other skill sets ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ).

Table 4. Essential skills for communication professionals

Skills	M	SD	High (4-5)	Medium (3)	Low (1-2)
Communication skills (e.g. writing, presenting, social media, design)	4.79	0.41	100%	0%	0%
Interpersonal skills (e.g., listening, perseverance, collaboration, organizational savvy)	4.53	0.63	98%	0%	2%
Management/leadership skills (e.g., process management, running effective teams, hiring, adapting to change)	4.21	0.77	91%	7%	2%
International skills (e.g., global knowledge, cross-cultural sensitivity, humility, international resourcefulness)	3.51	1.05	58%	28%	14%

Participants agreed on three items as having the most potential to drive high performance on their teams (Figure 3): recognition for performance (67%), written department strategy goals and priorities (63%), and communications about department priorities/performance (49%). CCOs cited membership/participation in professional and business organizations (14%), overseas work assignments (9%), and flexible work hours and work-from-home policies (9%) as less important drivers of higher performance.

Figure 3. Most important items for their potential to drive high performance in communication department



### Discussion and conclusion

This study explored the current state of performance evaluation and talent management in corporate communication from the perspective of senior communication leaders including the members of the Arthur W. Page society. Previous research has revealed inconsistency in evaluating communication effectiveness and the limited nature of assessment measures (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011; Wright, Gaunt, Leggetter, & Zerfass, 2009). To further corroborate these findings, this study conducted a national survey to gather empirical insights from senior leaders on how they manage communication function to deliver higher value to their organizations.

Results show communications teams highly value the role of corporate communications within an organization, while CEOs, board members and other peers view the function as important but less vital to overall business success. These findings are similar to those reported by Hon (1998) and Zerfass and Sherzada (2015) that senior leaders often have limited vision for communication's role in organizations. As a result, it is not surprising that while communications leaders in the current study value their input to organizational health, measuring the department's impact and value is not widespread and ranks lower than other methods of performance evaluation like measuring campaign objectives. This finding also confirms the criticism that our field receives for lacking effective measurement and reporting standards and practices (Lindenmann, 2003; Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). This finding also adds to the on-

going debate about developing standardized measures and frameworks for practitioners so they have more compelling rationale to evaluate their efforts and also, guidance in this endeavor. In particular, these findings point out a need to develop measures that are aligned with business outcomes and therefore, resonate with upper management in demonstrating value of communication functions.

Further, most participants see room for improvement in the quality of staffing, with only a quarter satisfied with the current allocation of staff in department roles, while there is a mixed reaction to assessments of budget growth or stagnation. After staffing costs, a large amount of the remaining budget goes to in-house program implementation and agency/consultant fees, which leaves little for professional development or program measurement. Participants feel unsatisfied with current training and development programs and do not plan to expand their budgets in this area. These findings reveal a clear need for more strategic approach to develop knowledge and expertise of communicators in these roles. Perhaps, the findings and suggestions from the excellence study should be made available more widely so communicators can make a case for resource allocation towards professional development.

With regards to skills that these leaders consider important, while communications skills continue to be foundational, leadership and interpersonal skills are seen as equally desirable for incoming practitioners. Finally, communications leaders identified personal recognition and clear strategy and goals as factors that lead to high performance.

The findings of a national survey of senior communication leaders underscore several opportunities for CCOs to elevate the performance and importance of their function. First, communication leaders must define value – then deliver, measure, and prove it. It's important for communication leaders to build an agreed definition of value for their function, then to make sure their teams consistently deliver against it. Second, given the impact of new tools and skills, communication leaders must drive the change they wish to see by looking over the horizon and taking immediate, deliberate, and thoughtful steps to identify, attract, and integrate new types of talent on their teams.

Third, talent and performance should become a top priority and not an afterthought. Past approaches to developing communications talent – a conference here, some internal training there, provided there's some budget left over – won't elevate team performance quickly enough. In addition to helping new types of talent fit into the team, communication leaders must look for smarter/better ways to "upskill" existing team members who already bring institutional knowledge and culture fit to the table. And finally, much as Ragas, Uysal and Culp (2015) emphasized there is dire need to develop business leaders, not just communicators. Financial acumen, operational insight, and management/leadership skills are just a few of the critical competencies that now distinguish good communicators from trusted business advisors.

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