

## Commandment 4

### Embedded: Influence Through Communicative Leadership

In the previous chapters we have seen how communication helps the organisation to be related to the dynamic of the world. To make this happen communication departments need also to be completely *embedded* into the organisation they work for. That is the fourth commandment in this book: excellent communication departments are embedded in the organisation they work for and the organisation is effectively embedded in the societal, cultural and social spaces they are part of (see [Box 14](#)). A prerequisite for being embedded is effective *leadership*. Communication professionals have to show *leadership* to be able to become embedded in the organisation and the organisation has to show leadership to become embedded in its surroundings.

Today, leadership is a much debated concept and the subject of many books, conferences and seminars. In this debate scientific insights, from psychology to management science, compete with many non-scientific and even spiritual ideas about leadership. The lack of leadership is often seen as the big problem of our time.<sup>1</sup> But what is a leader and what is the role of a leader? Is leadership an authentic characteristic of a person or is it a role taken up by a person that is attributed with the leadership by his or her environment? What kind of leadership style is effective and does that vary in different cultures or European regions?

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<sup>1</sup> Aascher (2016), in a special edition of *De Gids* about leadership.

**Box 14 Embedded organisations<sup>2</sup>**

*Embedded* companies aim at more than just having a business impact. Beyond their short-term financial performance, their ambitions and actions are driven by another overarching target: to shape a broader and lasting specific world of their own. Their success comes from being simultaneously the architects and the epicentres of new societal, cultural and social spaces: the ultimate benchmarks and common denominators of all involved. We call this process 'marking a territory'.

In this ever-changing, global and competitive world, the leaders in organisations should be able to embrace uncertainty in order to create new opportunities. Leaders applying a communicative approach within the organisation can increase theirs and their organisation's effectiveness and make it easier to take decisions. What does this mean for communication professionals? We will argue, based on the European Communication Monitor research, that communication executives face a threefold leadership challenge:

1. To help organisational leaders to be communicative
2. To support overall goals of the organisation through strategic communication, which includes messaging as well as listening
3. To lead the communication department

For targeting these three related goals excellent communication departments design their leadership styles with an appreciation of the corporate culture, with a need to be influential in the executive board (C-suite) or other decision committees and to maintain fluid relations with other functions inside the organisation. In other words they have the capacity to cross borders and boundaries.

## Help Organisational Leaders to be Communicative

The 'Panama Papers' created quite a storm. The material came to light in 2015 making public thousands of bank accounts belonging to public figures and highly reputable companies who were utilising well-known tax havens. The release of information from the papers not only opened the debate about

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<sup>2</sup> Thoening and Waldman (2007), n.p.

cases of corruption and the legitimacy of tax havens. It also brought to the discussion table that not only rigorous legal systems, but ethics, moral and cultural aspects influence the evaluation that societies make of organisations and their leaders.

Until the twenty-first century the value of companies was mainly measured by their profitability and tangible assets generated – products, buildings, equipment, property, etc. Today, intangible assets – such as brand, reputation, culture, etc. – also contribute substantially to the value of a company. In this context new forms of ethical and sustainable measurement exist such as Sustainalytics, Dow Jones for Sustainability, Standard & Poor's 500, OEKOM, Vigeo, FTSE4Good, GS Sustain (Goldman Sachs), RobecoSAM, Ethical Investment Research Services (EIRIS), Tomorrows Value Rating or STOXX Global ESG Leaders Index. Nowadays, the complexity of the markets evaluating business models is clearly illustrated by a breadth of indices that go further than tangible assets. Markets do not measure companies only based on hard values, such as revenues, profits, number of employees and other indicators of size, but based on all the constituent parts that can provide trust for consumers, shareholders and other enabling stakeholders like lawmakers and public administrators; or legitimisers like public opinion.

In view of this broader perspective, organisational leaders face an increasingly complex world where change and uncertainty are an everyday occurrence. To encounter this new complexity, they also need updated competences. The soft aspects of management must be additional to the traditional management skills and it is in this environment where communication acquires a central role.<sup>3</sup> This was recently exemplified in the Volkswagen diesel emissions scandal, DieselGate. The company was blamed for using deceptive software to hide the limits of emissions on Volkswagen cars worldwide. 'Our company was dishonest . . . we have totally screwed up' was the frank statement by Michael Horn, then Chief Executive and President of Volkswagen of America, when he first appeared before the media on 21 September 2015. This came after a whole weekend of speculation and finger pointing as the controversial issue was alive and active in debates on social media and produced little initial comment or response from the company. The scandal pushed the Volkswagen Group €3.5 billion into the red, making this its first quarterly loss in 15 years. The crisis also had repercussions for the overall management structure of the company with key resignations from figures such as CEO Martin Winterkorn, and a subsequent reduction in the number of

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<sup>3</sup> Mintzberg (2004); Dahlgard-Park and Dahlgard (2007).

executive managers with half the number reporting directly to the new CEO, Matthias Müller. The crisis was based on management issues, on deviations of the rules and established processes and it was all rather hard for the media and general public to believe that just two rogue engineers had, apparently, been entirely to blame and should take sole responsibility. The Volkswagen case damaged the group itself but also put into question the German car industry and the whole automotive industry worldwide. It also focused the spotlight on the regulations and policies of macro institutions such as the European Union, but above all it demonstrated that for today's leaders the importance of solid ethical values and responsibility is impossible to ignore. As Harvard neuroscientist Howard Gardner stated: bad people can never become excellent professionals.<sup>4</sup> Being responsible and transparent in your communication to society is a key priority of global companies to avoid severe damage to their reputation.

These anecdotes show that new appropriate leadership is necessary, leadership that fits the demands of society and public opinion. This new appropriate leadership can be labelled as communicative leadership, reflective and responsive to developments and looking outside the organisation. Helping organisational leaders to lead communicatively is one of the most important tasks of communication departments. Not only outside the organisation but also inside the organisation in communication with employees (Box 15).

### **Box 15 Communication for leadership**

Communication departments help top executives and organisational members to communicate appropriately

To deal with the continuous changes and the overload of information, leaders are sensemakers for their organisation. Dennis Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi describe this process in three cognitive ways as sensemaking, sensegiving and sensenegotiating<sup>5</sup>: they give meaning to experiences and events, they gain followers and support for that meaning and they negotiate collective understanding to make decisions (see Box 16).

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<sup>4</sup> Amiguet (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991).

**Box 16 Leaders as sensemakers**

1. *Sensemaking*: To give meaning to experiences and events.
2. *Sensegiving*: To gain followers' support. In order to achieve this aim, leaders can use rituals, metaphors, storytelling, rewards.
3. *Sensenegotiating*: Attempting to negotiate some collective understanding so as to make decisions.

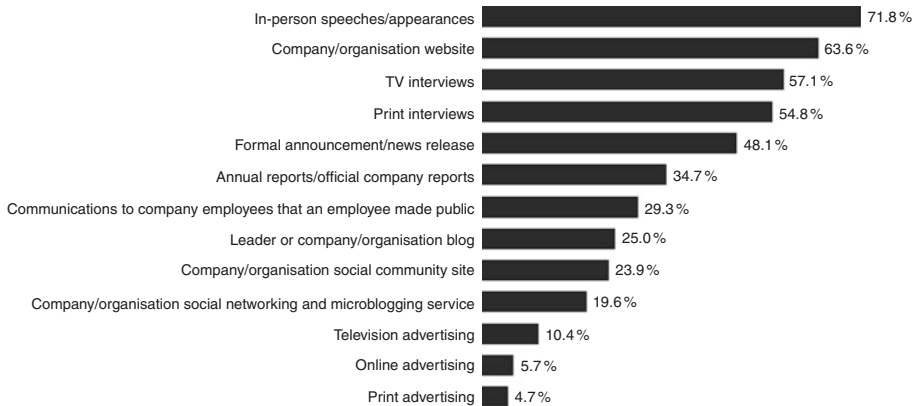
But what happens when the CEO or other top executives stop making sense with their public statements? There is one thing worse than an organisational leader who does not comment formally on behalf of the organisation and that is an organisational leader who does not understand the basic principles of communication and public opinion. Today leadership training therefore is not only about presentation skills but also about building relationships and links between communication, management and activities of the organisation from a strategic framing approach. Organisational leaders have to communicate complex phenomena such as values, norms, visions and overall goals and organisational identity through a wide set of instruments both within and outside the organisation.<sup>6</sup> Therefore it is a very important action for the future to train managers to act as communicators, namely to have leaders that hold communication competences. Three quarters of European communication professionals identify this organisational need and nearly one-third see a challenge in re-establishing the lost societal credibility of management.<sup>7</sup>

Today stakeholders demand more and more information in a transparent way and because of this communication practitioners must work hard with leaders throughout the whole organisation. They are increasingly responsible for positioning organisational leaders both internally and externally. Communicators also have the important task of training and developing the specific communication skills of CEOs and other top executives. Profiling leaders is a major part of CEO communication. Data from the European Communication Monitor show that effective communication is very important for great leadership. The vast majority of communication professionals (83.3 per cent) support this view. The communication department is a key partner to effectively lead internal stakeholders, to position CEOs and other executives as effective leaders and to help them to achieve leading positions for the organisation both in their markets and the

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<sup>6</sup> Falkheimer (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Zerfass et al. (2009).



**Fig. 13** Impact of communication activities on public opinion about leadership<sup>8</sup>

public sphere. A mix of different approaches and instruments is necessary to make this happen, where personal communication is seen as most important for organisations being perceived as leaders (see Fig. 13).

## Supporting Overall Organisational Goals with Communication

Besides helping organisational leaders to communicate effectively the second aspect of leadership for communication departments is to support overall goals of the organisation through strategic communication.

Achieving power for the communication department in an organisation is also connected to leadership. Communication leaders, it is argued, are crucial for taking strategic and effective decisions in organisations and defining the strategic decision-making capability as a dimension of leadership referring:

to the extent to which public relations leaders understand external socio-political environments and internal organizational structures, processes and practices, and are able to translate relevant knowledge into effective advocacy and become involved with strategic decision-making processes in the organization<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 75. *n* = 2,777 communication professionals across Europe. Q: When stakeholders form a view on the leadership of a company/organisation, which five (5) communications activities have the greatest impact on their opinion? Top 10. Max. 5 picks per respondent.

<sup>9</sup> Meng (2012), p. 337.

Communication departments play a key role in the construction of meaning, identity and legitimation for their organisation. They do this through the management of intangible assets, giving advice to executives and other members of the organisation and through the coordination of each act of communication. Because of the task of producing communication content, public relations and strategic communication has a privileged position to create and recreate the organisation, the stakeholders and themselves through communication. Paradoxically, despite this important role in the construction of meaning and discourse, communication practitioners have traditionally had difficulties with gaining access to the decision-making position in their organisations.<sup>10</sup>

### Commandments in Practice: Embedded



#### Enhancing Reputation Through Empowering Employees and Leadership to Communicate

We are gradually moving into an era of “no management”. Because I believe that many employees are capable, willing and enthusiastic if they are able to organise work themselves’, says Hans Koeleman, the Director of Corporate Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility for KPN Royal Dutch Telecom. ‘Managing reputation of companies is not done by official “Reputation Managers”, whatever that may be. It’s done by our people, every day, and it’s done by empowering them to communicate freely and actively, though also responsibly.’

This year in February KPN received an award from the International Reputation Institute for its reputation in the Netherlands. KPN started to formulate clear reputation goals in 2010 which are part of the Long-Term Incentive bonus scheme for the top management of KPN. This clearly motivated the board to improve reputation of the company and after all these years we have achieved it, with the second best reputation in the European telecom sector after Swisscom.

One of our core beliefs in reputation management is ‘We communicate transparently, openly and honestly’. Total clarity for our customers became the

<sup>10</sup>Moreno et al. (2014b).

norm. And if you really want to be open then you have to start from the inside. You have to empower your employees to communicate. Therefore we have built a very open communication environment in which our people are totally free to communicate, whenever they want and wherever they are. Our leaders are strongly advised to be visible too (and that's not optional!) and communicate also in an open manner. Only then can we expect our people to do the same and to take responsibility for their actions.

The platform we have developed and use is called *TEAM KPN*, which reflects our main effort to work and perform as a team in our company. A recent benchmark showed that *TEAM KPN* is Europe's best and we also received an Intranet Award in Berlin for *TEAM KPN*. But more important is the way the employees recognise the platform and the way they participate with it. In 2015, 13,772 employees generated two million views, 4735 blogs, 35,129 responses and 118,679 likes. Almost 100 per cent of our employees are active on the platform. Even the staff in the stores, call centres and our field engineers are connected. By creating so much communicational traffic we have not only boosted the possibility for dialogue in the company but also the pride of our people.

Since it all starts with a clear purpose for internal communication, the strategic alignment monitor from the Reputation Institute is a valuable tool. We monitor very closely if our people really understand the strategy, are capable to perform to it and are really doing the right things. The strategic alignment monitor conveys to us very clearly if we are communicating effectively with our employees. A positive side effect is the impact on the efficiency for the Corporate Communications Department. We now only need to produce the more official corporate news and board messaging and then drive the further development of the platform and monitor what's going on. Most of the content is produced by our people and particularly the senior management. And we are able to see very easily and factually how effective each senior manager is in creating an open dialogue with his or her staff. Even among our board members we have had a talent contest and the winner for the most active and effective blogger of the company was our CEO. But you don't have to be the CEO to be effective. One of the most famous bloggers is one of our engineers who regularly highlights his experiences with customers.

Another, and maybe even more important aspect of modern internal communications, is that much of this information we share internally is external at the same time. More than 30,000 followers of our KPN Twitter account follow us because they want to read about interesting elements on the whereabouts and new technologies of our company. Once the information is posted on *TEAM KPN*, the colleagues share this information via social media platforms, like Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. Logically they like to share stuff about the company they work for and about which they are proud. When the Rijksmuseum held an astonishing exhibition of Rembrandt's art (*The Late Works*), KPN got as many visitors on the special online environment as there were visitors in the museum; over 500,000. When *SAIL Amsterdam* was organised in 2015 we managed to create the most effective social media event of the year because of our fixed mobile infrastructure and our KPN Social Media boat, we were able to attract lots of dignitaries and celebrities. Both of these projects were supported by the sharing activity of our own internal community.



New leadership and new communication starts with open and honest communication. The times for leadership to play hide and seek are in the past. If you expect employees to take responsibility for their actions, you have to be there as a manager and communicate yourself in an open manner. Codes of conduct are nonsense (although we have one too); it's in the everyday communications where we make the difference. Be open whether as the company CEO, as the corporate communications department and as senior managers and facilitate your employees in every way to communicate internally and externally. Welcome to the new world.

**Hans Koeleman**

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**About KPN Royal Dutch Telecom**

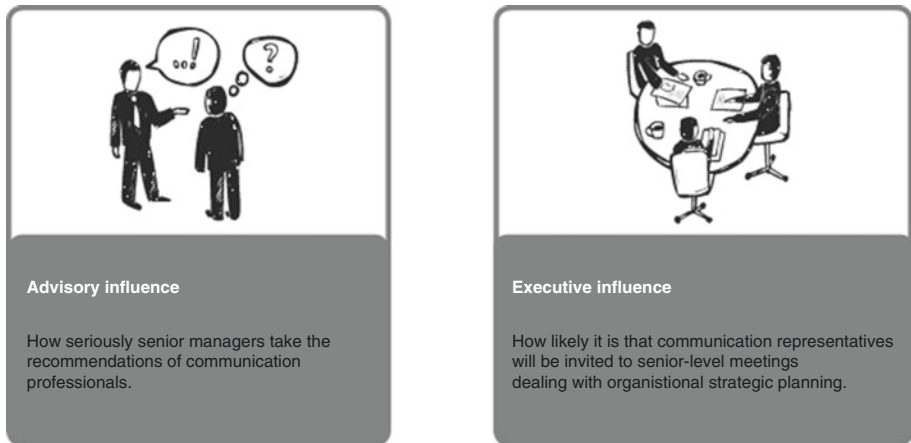
*KPN Royal Dutch Telecom is the largest telecom and IT service provider in the Netherlands and a leading supplier of ICT services internationally. The company serves a large number of diverse customer groups in the Netherlands and abroad with a wide range of products and services under various brands: from prepaid call services in the United States to interactive HD television in the Netherlands. KPN Royal Dutch Telecom has more than 18,000 people working for the company.*

## Advisory and Executive Influence of Communication Professionals

Power can be seen as an individual attribute, although it can also be considered as departmental.<sup>11</sup> Functions can achieve power in the organisational structure vertically by achieving higher internal responsibility, influence and position. Influence can be seen as actual power. We could state that if power is the capacity to influence in order to get things done or achieving desired results, influence is the realisation or actual use of this capacity.<sup>12</sup> Influence points to the hierarchical dimension of power, which refers to the political dynamics among people within an organisational structure. It is also identified as vertical power in an organisational context. Power holders compete for influencing organisational decisions, resource allocations and interpretations. These ongoing conflicts produce the organisational structure. The internal structural chart of the organisation formally represents this

<sup>11</sup> Berger (2005); Smith and Place (2013), Smudde and Courtright (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Pfeffer (1977); Pfeffer (1992).



**Fig. 14** Executive and advisory influence

hierarchical dimension, but power can also flux through informal mechanisms sometimes rejecting or bypassing the formal systems such as organisational structure.

The concept of a dominant coalition in an organisation, a group of powerful and influential people, reflects a power perspective. Derina Holzhausen and Rosina Voto suggest that membership of the dominant coalition is not required for the communication department to be influential, but other sources of power can be achieved through relationship building.<sup>13</sup> Indeed most professionals do not describe influence in communication management as just having a seat at the table, but being listened to and having access to diverse decision makers and executive-level committees (Fig. 14).<sup>14</sup>

In the Comparative Excellence Framework, as explained in the introduction chapter, the concept of influence rather than power is used. Influence is conceptualised in two dimensions (see Fig. 14): advisory influence (that is the perception of how seriously senior managers take the recommendations of communication professionals) and executive influence (that is the perception of how likely it is that communication representatives will be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organisational strategic planning). Although both ways of influence mean that communication professionals have power, the executive influence indicates the most complete level of influence because communicators play a more active role in organisational planning and decision-making.

<sup>13</sup> Holzhausen and Voto (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Reber and Berger (2006); Neill (2015).

How influential are communication professionals in European organisations? The influence of communication departments has continued to increase in the last decade, with advisory influence currently overtaking executive influence. This means that until 2014 communication managers' advice was taken more and more seriously, but the departments still did not always have access to the strategic decision-making table. Nevertheless, the distance between these two ways of influence is disappearing. The most recent results from the European Communication Monitor 2016 assign advisory influence to 76.1 per cent of communication practitioners. Executive influence is reported by 75.1 per cent of them.<sup>15</sup> Therefore the gap is closing.

## Who's the Most Influential?

Not surprisingly, not every professional reports the same level of influence. Who are the most influential communication managers in Europe? According to the analysis of the European Communication Monitor male practitioners with more experience and higher positions in the department report more influence.<sup>16</sup> Professionals with a better alignment in the organisation, meaning that they report to the highest management levels and sit on the board, perceive their influence as higher than professional who are less aligned.

Today the majority of top-level communication managers report directly to the CEO or highest executive (president, managing director) in the organisation, although only about a quarter of them actually sit on the board. Reporting lines do not differ significantly between various types of organisation, but they do between regions. In Northern European countries, nearly a quarter of top-level communicators sit on the board, in contrast with Southern Europe where only a fifth of them have the same alignment. Results from the European Communication Monitor show that 57.6 per cent of the departments are aligned, 26.6 per cent strongly aligned and only 15.8 per cent are still weakly aligned.<sup>17</sup> This means that some chief communication officers are not members of the executive board and do not report directly to the top executive of the organisation.

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<sup>15</sup> Zerfass et al. (2016), p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Zerfass et al. (2012), p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Zerfass et al. (2016), p. 13.

The more senior the communication practitioner's position the higher the influence of the communication department is perceived to be. The formal position is closely related to the influence of communication managers on the business strategy of the organisation. Also there is a relation between sitting on the board and perceived influence on the management of the organisation; practitioners on the board perceive a higher influence than practitioners that are not on the board.

Communication departments are more influential in joint stock companies than in other types of organisations. 47.8 per cent of communication departments in that group of organisations are very influential in comparison with 42.5 per cent of governmental organisations and NGOs.<sup>18</sup> Private companies have the least influential communication departments. More than 60 per cent of communication departments in private companies do not have a lot of influence, which includes not taking communication advice seriously and not being invited to strategic planning meetings. Yet the problem does not remain only in this type of organisation. In overall terms, the majority of organisations do not have highly influential communication departments. This means that they cannot reach excellence because influence is a clear prerequisite for excellent communication departments (Box 17).

### **Box 17 What we have learned about influence in excellent communication departments**

The European Communication Monitor shows that excellent communication departments are the most influential:

1. Top communication managers or chief communication officers are more frequently members of the executive board or report directly to the CEO or top decision-maker.
2. Excellent communication departments report the highest levels of advisory and executive influence when comparing with non-excellent communication departments.
3. Moreover, the gap between advisory and executive influence in these excellent departments is visibly reduced. Excellent communication departments are taken more seriously and at the same time they also participate more in strategic decisions of their organisation.

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<sup>18</sup> Zerfass et al. (2016), p. 112.

## Embeddedness of Communication Departments

We have talked about the vertical power of communication departments, the power to reach the top of the organisation, but how are the relationships between communication and other functions in the organisation? In other words how embedded are communication departments in Europe?

The building of alliances with other departments in organisations is explained by the so-called theory of strategic contingencies.<sup>19</sup> This theory explains that strategic alliances, both internal and external, are key to achieve organisational goals. In the horizontal direction, departments related through the working of these strategic contingencies phenomena tend to achieve more power. In *The Hunger Games*, the successful film franchise, there was a fictional, staged arena that is a good analogy for understanding the factors of these strategic contingencies. In the 'game' there was demand for high-level skills to be successful, in actual fact to survive. Katniss, the main character, has exceptional skills through her upbringing and life experience, which enable her to hunt and survive in the forest. At a certain point in the game she occupies a prominent position in the net of competitors. She becomes essential for others to survive, effectively because of her skills in hunting. This makes her successful in even the most difficult situation. Such unique skills, like hunting in the case of *The Hunger Games*, can also become very contingent in an organisation. When a company has an important issue to solve, for example, if it is going public, individuals and departments that are key to the flow of information and provide scarce skills, for example, the finance department, gain organisational power at that point in time. In the same vein it is frequently acknowledged that communication departments become more powerful when an organisation has to face a crisis, especially when it is one in the eye of the media. This means that media relations skills of the communication department entail a set of specific skills and competences that other functions clearly identify with those of the communication's department. And those skills are needed.

The European Communication Monitor has measured the horizontal power achieved by communication departments in organisations with categories originally suggested by Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor of organisational behaviour at Stanford University and one of today's most influential management thinkers (see [Box 18](#)).<sup>20</sup> According to him there are five sources of

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<sup>19</sup> Hickson et al. (1971).

<sup>20</sup> Pfeffer (1992).

horizontal power for a department. Besides the example of irreplaceability in *The Hunger Games* case, dependency, financial resources, centrality and uncertainty are the other four sources of horizontal power.

**Box 18 Five sources of horizontal power for organisational departments**

1. Dependency
2. Financial resources
3. Centrality
4. Irreplaceability
5. Coping with uncertainty

Not all the five factors of horizontal power score highly for communication departments in Europe. On a five-point scale the level of dependency on the communication department in the organisation is rated just near to three, the same as generating financial and immaterial assets for the organisation.<sup>21</sup> Irreplaceability of the communication department is higher, although only anticipating situations and conflicting issues, together with the importance of the role communication departments play in overall performance of the organisation, reach a score of four. These last two aspects of horizontal power together seem to strengthen the internal position of communication departments because they are also related.

Regarding the connections between formal and horizontal power the results show that the horizontal power of communication departments is stronger when the top communication manager has broader responsibilities. Communication managers with responsibility for at least three fields or stakeholders score higher on all five of Pfeffer's dimensions than communication managers that are only responsible for media relations and/or internal communication.

So in the horizontal direction, departments make strategic alliances to get the required skills and the access to information to try to achieve power. Therefore, the question is who does the communication department relate to in the organisation? A longitudinal analysis of the European Communication Monitor shows that ties between functions have not been strengthened during a period of five years (see Fig. 15).

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<sup>21</sup> Zerfass et al. (2011), p. 56.

The communication department works always closely with the ...

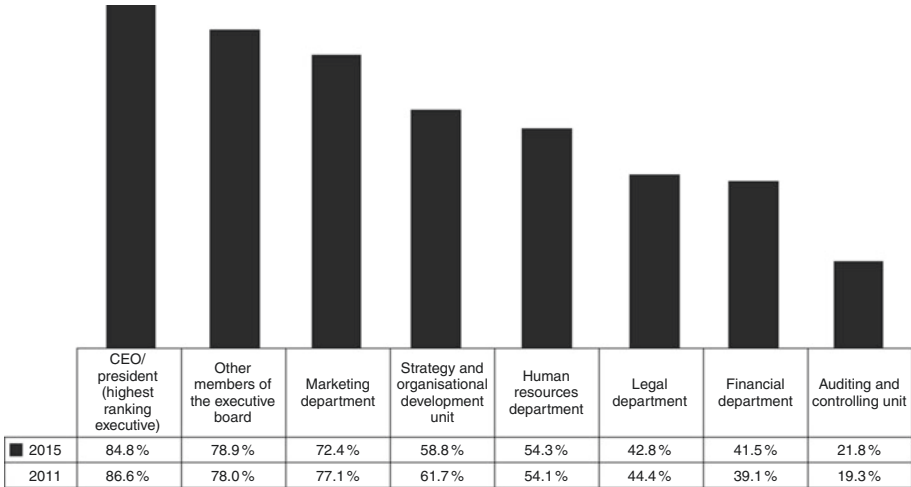


Fig. 15 Integrating communication by horizontal relations<sup>22</sup>

Working relationships are especially close with the CEO and other members of the executive board. Next to them, on the overall organisation structure, marketing is clearly the department with whom the communication function has the closest working relationship. There are also close relations with strategy and organisational development units. Relations with human resources, legal and financial departments are less frequent. At the other end of the scale, relations with auditing and controlling units are the weakest.

Not every organisation establishes horizontal relations in the same way. For instance, there are differences between the importance of collaboration with marketing in commercial organisations in contrast with governmental and also with non-profits. The same can be said for the higher relations with legal, financial and human resources departments in joint stock companies. Collaboration is stronger in publicly traded (joint stock) and private companies, and weaker in non-profit and governmental organisations overall.<sup>23</sup>

Why is it important to have intra-organisational collaboration? Traditionally in the field of strategic communication there was an axiom of the necessity to

<sup>22</sup> Zerfass et al. (2015), p. 30. *n* = 1,601 (2015) and *n* = 1,450 (2011) communication professionals working in communication departments across Europe. Q: How closely does the communication function in your organisation work with the ... Scale 1 (never) – 5 (always). Percentages: frequency based on scale points 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> Zerfass et al. (2015), p. 31.

differentiate public relations from other disciplines such as marketing and advertising, and keep them separated. Indeed, the foundational work of James Grunig and colleagues identified the separation of public relations and marketing as one of the characteristics of excellent communication.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, nowadays, there is a growing body of academic literature advocating the need to integrate all communication functions, marketing and public relations included.<sup>25</sup> So, what has changed?

There is a special, new reality of the new media landscape and the mediatisation that comes with it, that affects the relations between communication management and other functions. New technologies have brought the opportunity of merging communication in the same interfaces. This physical merging of spaces has also brought new ways of communicating such as brand journalism, content marketing or native advertising, that have overtaken the traditional division of marketing and corporate communication content.

Recent studies identified a strong convergence of stakeholder priorities, goals and instruments when interviewing public relations and marketing professionals about their branding activities, as well as a high level of structural integration and collaboration, although there are also underlying conflicts, discrepancies and contradictory perceptions. The new scenario of convergence brings new proposals for integrating communication and conceptualising all organisational communication activities such as strategic communication to the forefront.<sup>26</sup>

Convincingly 85.6 per cent of respondents of the European Communication Monitor believed that there was an overall need to integrate communication activities, which affects all functions.<sup>27</sup> Professionals in Europe seem to have embraced the new concept strategies as important for the future, and not just as a passing fad. But the challenging point is who will achieve internal, departmental power from these new content strategies?

Nearly two-thirds of respondents report that corporate communication is gaining in importance as it has a long tradition of handling content, while nearly half of respondents (64.0 per cent) also see marketing gaining in importance (45.2 per cent) as a consequence of the same processes. Marketing, brand, consumer and online communicators are more in favour

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<sup>24</sup> Grunig et al. (2002).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Zerfass (2008).

<sup>26</sup> Hallahan et al. (2007); Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015).

<sup>27</sup> Zerfass et al. (2015), p. 28.



of emerging concepts like content strategy, content marketing or native advertising than media relations or strategy and coordination people.<sup>28</sup> There seems to be a defensive and conservative tendency at work here involving 'traditional' public relations functions (e.g. media relations).

Instead of using the integration of communication functions as an opportunity, also to organise an umbrella under which communications from marketing departments could migrate and feel welcome, many seem to be trying to preserve their turf in what is a diminishing territory. Media are not what they used to be and the demarcation line between news and advertising is becoming fuzzy. There is no way that the lines between advertising/marketing and publicity/public relations could stay untouched. The question is not if different communications functions will integrate; the question is how and with what effect. Collaboration is key. Only a combination of consistent goals, intelligent structures, transparent processes, a supportive culture and leaders who support integration will make this happen (Box 19).

#### **Box 19 What we have learned about organisational integration from excellent communication departments**

Excellent communication departments collaborate more intensively with all other organisational functions:

1. They always work more closely with the CEO and with other members of the executive board.
2. They always work more closely with the marketing department.
3. They always work more closely with strategy and organisational development and with auditing and controlling units.
4. They always work more closely with human resources, financial and legal departments.

## **Leading the Communication Department**

In order to be able to face the future communication professionals also have to show effective leadership in managing the communication department. That is the third leadership challenge communication professionals face (Box 20).

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<sup>28</sup> Zerfass et al. (2015), pp. 32, 36.

**Box 20 Leadership for communication**

Communication managers lead effective communication departments that help the organisation to reach its goals

It is easy to talk about ‘good leadership’ but it is often more difficult to define. We see this across business disciplines as managers search for the essence of effective leadership. Our empirical surveys over the past ten years have also focused on this question. What does great leadership look like in effective communication departments? How do communication managers lead? And how do they adapt to the organisation’s needs when leading the communication function?

Leadership directly or indirectly determines structures, culture, power distribution and communication at different levels of the organisation. Research in leadership has been developed from a conception based on the ‘traits’ of the leader to more sophisticated approaches that focus on behaviours and styles of leadership, skills, group work and management, situational approaches and contingency models. All these approaches have produced an extended corpus of knowledge in diverse scientific disciplines. But, between all of them, the transformational approach has been the most strongly supported and accepted approach in the last few decades. Transformational leadership means that leaders develop a vision that appeals to ideals and values of the followers. Despite the current – and plentiful – scientific literature in the field of management about leadership, just a few studies have focused on leadership in strategic communication and public relations.

The latest cross-cultural research about leadership in communication management by Bruce Berger and Juan Meng evaluates a leadership model that includes seven dimensions and integrates abilities, personal traits, behaviours and cultural and structural factors.<sup>29</sup> The seven dimensions are self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship-building skills, strategic decision-making capability, communication knowledge management and organisational culture and structure (see [Box 21](#)).

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<sup>29</sup> Berger and Meng (2014).

**Box 21 Seven principles of leadership in communication management**

1. Self-dynamics
2. Team collaboration
3. Ethical orientation
4. Relationship-building skills
5. Strategic decision-making capability
6. Communication knowledge management
7. Organisational culture and structure

## Characteristics of a Good Communication Leader

In general, today's most in demand professional is one with characteristics such as enthusiasm, energy or passion, trustworthiness and flexibility. All of these characteristics are necessary due to the fact that, among the numerous tasks of communication professionals, one of the most important is to develop and nurture relationships.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, many organisations agree that leaders must have strategic decision-making capability, problem-solving ability and communication knowledge and expertise if they want to reach excellence.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Bruce Berger and Juan Meng affirm that leaders in the communication sector on a daily basis must manage a vast quantity of data that develop rapidly (see also Commandment 5, Datafied).<sup>32</sup> Hence, in defining effective leadership we must include the capacity of determining what is most relevant, evaluating that information in a strategic and tactical way and identifying valuable opportunities to create internal and external engagement.

Despite these general characteristics for the field of communication management, these studies also underline important cultural and national differences.<sup>33</sup> Leadership is contingent and must be adapted to geographic cultures, but also to the culture and subcultures of and around each organisation. Despite the characteristics of the leader him/herself, leadership can be understood as a complex process with participation by a considerable number of individuals. Leaders cannot be leaders without followers, leadership is a co-creative process. In this sense, to determine how excellent

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<sup>30</sup> Meng and Berger (2013).

<sup>31</sup> Meng et al. (2012).

<sup>32</sup> Berger and Meng (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Moreno et al. (2014a).

communication departments must be led requires understanding of what leadership styles can be best adopted for communication functions.

The European Communication Monitor researched the styles of leadership in European communication departments.<sup>34</sup> The leadership questions were based on previous research by Kelly Werder and Derina Holzhausen from the United States.<sup>35</sup> These authors reviewed management literature about leadership styles and concluded that in the field of communication practitioners enact three main leadership styles: transactional, transformational and inclusive.

The transactional leadership style draws on authority and reminds followers of common standards. The transformational style develops a vision and appeal to followers' ideals and values. Finally the inclusive style identifies challenges and involves followers in shared decision-making and stimulates them to participate in the process (see Fig. 16).

Transactional and transformational leadership styles have been compared in many studies, highlighting transformational leadership as the most effective style because it creates higher levels of satisfaction in followers. This style appeals to followers' ideals and values so that they work with more motivation and commitment to the organisation; meanwhile the transactional style is more dictatorial and rules are defined. The leadership principles of Bruce Berger and Juan Meng and other recent studies in the public relations field also support the transformational leadership style as the best one for communication departments.<sup>36</sup>



**Fig. 16** Leadership styles

<sup>34</sup> Zerfass et al. (2011), pp. 30–39.

<sup>35</sup> Werder and Holtzhausen (2009).

<sup>36</sup> Berger and Meng (2014); Meng (2014); Jin (2010).

Nevertheless, the European Communication Monitor survey outcomes discovered that inclusive leadership has more support among communication managers. Almost every second respondent reports predominance for the inclusive leadership style, which means that leaders involve followers in shared decision-making.<sup>37</sup> Practitioners in non-profit organisations use significantly different ways of leadership and an inclusive leadership style is even more prevalent in this kind of organisation. This approach matches with a ‘power with relations style’,<sup>38</sup> which refers to shared power and collaborative decision-making, and is also in line with the symmetric and dialogic approaches to sustainable relationship with stakeholders.

It is essential to outline that leadership styles develop better in some contexts and organisations than in others. The European Communication Monitor shows that the transactional style is more used in governmental organisations and the transformational style is practised more in private companies. In contrast, inclusive leadership is more popular in joint stock companies and non-profit organisations.<sup>39</sup>

So, should joint stock companies practice an inclusive style of leadership and governmental organisations a transactional style? No, not necessarily. Contingencies and context influence the style of leadership and they are a set of complex factors. One factor of influence can be the type of organisation, but we can also find other differences based on the particular culture of the organisation. Leadership and organisational culture also have reciprocal influences on each other. The organisational environment also contributes to how communication fulfils this function. There are positive organisational environments in which communication can flourish because leaders are more accessible and visible for their diverse stakeholders letting relationships build with strong and long-term commitment. The style of leadership has to be developed within the social group of a given organisation. It has to connect, interact with and be part of the culture of the organisation. Previous research shows that communication leaders who demonstrate high levels of ability in collaborating with members and maintaining the core values of public relations as professional standards are more likely to foster an environment of flexible communication. They also foster a supportive organisational culture.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Zeffass et al. (2011), p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Berger (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Zeffass et al. (2011), p. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Meng (2014).

	TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP	TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP	INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP
INTEGRATED CULTURE (participative – proactive)	11.8%	35.9%	52.4%
INTERACTIVE CULTURE (participative – reactive)	20.9%	33.6%	45.5%
ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE (non-participative – proactive)	20.8%	49.1%	30.2%
SYSTEMATISED CULTURE (non-participative – reactive)	46.5%	26.9%	26.6%

**Fig. 17** Organisational culture and leadership style in communication departments<sup>41</sup>

In the European Communication Monitor we analysed the relationship between leadership and organisational culture based on a classification by Robert Ernest.<sup>42</sup> He established a model of organisational cultures based on two dimensions: (1) orientation to people and (2) answer to the environment (proactive or reactive). From these two dimensions four types of organisational culture are defined:

1. Integrated culture – participative and proactive;
2. Interactive culture – participative and reactive;
3. Entrepreneurial culture – non-participative and proactive; and
4. Systematised culture – non-participative and reactive.

As demonstrated in Fig. 17, the inclusive leadership style is the most common in organisations with an integrated culture, while transformational leadership is the most common in entrepreneurial organisational cultures. Transactional leadership is the most common in a systemised culture (Box 22).

<sup>41</sup> Zerfass et al. (2011), p. 41.  $n = 2,209$  communication professionals across Europe. Q: How would you describe the dominant strategy used by leaders in your communication department (or in your consultancy) to achieve common goals? Q: How would you perceive your organisation regarding the following attributes? Significant differences between the three types of culture (chi-square test,  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

<sup>42</sup> Ernest (1985).

**Box 22 What we have learned about excellent leadership in communication departments**

1. Excellent leadership in communication points first to contingency and adaptability, to be embedded into the organisation's culture and subculture.
2. Today, in Europe as a global region, it points to inclusive styles and integrates cultures.
3. Inclusive leadership style positively correlates with job satisfaction and influence of the communication function.

We have seen that being influential is a matter of leadership, power and collaboration. Insofar as the function of communication is actually *embedded* it can bring its value to the organisation. To ensure that the organisation can obtain the maximum benefit of communication, the communication department has to be fully embedded into the organisation: hierarchically and vertically to integrate all communications activities. The communication professional has to be an effective leader to have the needed influence to fulfil its threefold role effectively: by helping organisational leaders to be communicative, supporting overall goals of the organisation through strategic communication and leading the communication department well.

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