Commandment 9

Solid: Strong, Sensitive and Savvy

Personal solidity, with all its ups and downs, is one of the storylines in the famous Danish television series *Borgen*. The series revolves around the female Danish Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg, her 'spin doctor' Kasper Juul and Katrine Fonsmark, the anchorwoman of the most important Danish news show. These three characters symbolise politics, public relations and journalism, the tension between those fields and what these interrelationships can do to people personally. The importance of personal solidity and what it entails becomes clearer and clearer in the course of the series' 30 episodes. In one episode, for example, Birgitte Nyborg fired her spokesman Kasper Juul and replaced him with the highly educated professor of rhetoric Tore Gudme, to handle the press. That did not go very well. Why not? Because Tore delivered 'tone-deaf, elitist responses' to the media.[1] He lacked a feeling for journalistic reasoning and media dynamics. He lacked the critical savviness and antennae for public opinion. Birgitte quickly rehired the experienced 'professional' Kasper Juul.

The Borgen example shows that working in strategic communication requires extensive knowledge of communication theory and media but also a solid sensitivity to other social, political and interpersonal dynamics with their related tensions and how to manage them.

Our final commandment for the book's series of nine is, therefore *solid*. By this we mean having explicit individual solidity driven by personal,

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[1] See the Borgen website at https://www.dr.dk/tv/se/borgen and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Borgen_episodes.

organisational and professional ethics and frameworks as well as exploring issues of pluralism and diversity in the workplace to facilitate and deliver the satisfaction our framework calls for. Before drawing conclusions about solidity let's first take a look at three aspects of it: the forgotten skill of listening, ethics and gender.

Commandments in Practice: Solid

Communication Practitioners Striving for Excellence Help to Reposition the Organisation

The Princess of Asturias Foundation is a non-profit private Spanish institution that has granted the Prince of Asturias Awards (now Princess of Asturias Awards) since 1981. Intended to reward scientific, technical, cultural, social and humanitarian work carried out at an international level by individuals or institutions, they are conferred in eight different categories: the Arts, Literature, Social Sciences, Communication and Humanities, Technical and Scientific Research, International Cooperation, Concord and Sports.

The annual presentation ceremony of the Awards is presided over by The King and Queen of Spain. More than 800 journalists from different countries come to Asturias every year to provide media coverage on the cultural events organised around the Awards Ceremony and the ceremony itself. Many of the leading figures of our time have graced the stage of the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo, the capital of Asturias, to receive the Award: Nelson Mandela, Woody Allen, Mario Vargas Llosa, Martha Nussbaum, Stephen Hawking, Annie Leibovitz, Peter Higgs, Tzvetan Todorov, Susan Sontag, Michael Schumacher, Jürgen Habermas, Sebastian Coe, Howard Gardner and Michael Haneke, among others.

Mindful of the need not to stand apart from the world around us, the Board of Trustees of the Foundation started to work on designing the future of the institution a few years ago. The Trustees realised that the world had changed a great deal since the Foundation was created in 1980: new social changes, different (online) means of communicating our message and values and a new King was expected to assume the throne not many years later. All of these things led to a profound process of change.

The Board decided that the organisation needed to adapt to these new times without losing its essence and that new management dynamics were required. Accordingly, a new director took up the post seven years ago, implementing a more innovative management model, one that is more professionalised and

more demanding than the one the institution had followed for the previous 30 years.

Within this context, in 2014 the Foundation underwent its first major transformation since it was created 36 years ago. The then Prince of Asturias was proclaimed King of Spain and his eldest daughter assumed the title of Princess of Asturias. Consequently, the Honorary Presidency of the Foundation is now held by a ten-year-old girl (the Princess of Asturias, Leonor de Borbón).

Rubén Vigil, the Director of Communication and Media Relations, explains the challenge and how it was approached:

> We need to rethink how we do things. The main strategic objectives are to generate trust in our institution, engage the public, reinforce our organisation's impact on society, attract young people and increase the impact of the Foundation's activities in the international media. Nevertheless, we are aware that the main value we bring to society is intangible and that prestige must never be equated with impact.
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> I began working with the Foundation in 2002 and became a member of staff in 2004. I have been Head of the Communications Department since January 2005, supporting the director in the areas of representation and institutional communication, in addition to designing, implementing and assessing the institution's strategic communications. I am also responsible for ensuring the compliance of all in-house media to the corporate identity manual.
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> Throughout these years of heading the Foundation's Communications Department, I have seen the importance of professional development in order to maintain the high levels of expectation of a job of these characteristics. I regularly take part in different training schemes that allow me to evolve and improve as a professional. I hold a degree in Information Sciences from Salamanca Pontifical University, as well as a European Master's Degree in Conference and Events Organisation from the University of Deusto and an Expert in Protocol qualification from Miguel Hernández University, Spain. More recently, I have been awarded a certificate of completion of the 'Leadership Decision Making: Optimizing Organizational Performance' program by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.
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> The staff of the Princess of Asturias Foundation's Communications Department is made up of three men and one woman who work for the organisation on a full-time basis. Extra staff are brought in during September in all areas of work to cover the official as well as cultural events organised on the occasion of the Awards Ceremony, which is held in October. For this purpose, I count on a team of more than 20 people in the Communications and Credentials Department to help me with the work.
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> When building my team of co-workers, I seek to obtain the highest possible professional diversity in the backgrounds of the people I am going to hire. Staff members are skilled in communication and protocol, photography, public relations, journalism, video and social networks and are able to speak some of the following languages: Spanish, English, German, French and Italian. In recent years, we have also introduced hiring policies aimed at integration. We accordingly have someone working with us who belongs to a group in risk of social exclusion.
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> In addition to the necessary training, in a job such as this, the common factors defining the team are an interest in culture, a strong sense of responsibility at work and attention to detail. The job demands a constant commitment to excellence from everybody so as to minimise the public impact of unforeseen events.

Any gesture or message may give rise to different interpretations due to the links between our institution and the King of Spain as the Head of State. Therefore, self-control and prudence are two fundamental aspects when interacting with others. As a result, the level of pressure and stress experienced over a period of several weeks a year is very high and requires a great deal of self-discipline.

Any communications department knows that it must earn the trust of journalists in order to get support for the messages that matter most to the organisation. Always providing accurate information whilst achieving a balance between maintaining a certain distance and generating trust with the media is vital. Journalists and other media professionals are largely the ones who will act as the chain of transmission of the image we seek to project.

That is no longer enough, however. We are now facing a new context populated by an increasingly educated public that is more demanding about the kind of information it wants to know, less forgiving of any mistakes that may be committed, and whose habits of consuming information seek immediacy. Thus, one of the main tasks of the Communications Department is to identify the perceptions and expectations of key stakeholders. This allows us to adapt messages to the new communication paradigms.

We are aware that we must safeguard the public image of the institution. So we develop strategic communication plans that are very mindful, not only of the opinion that society has of us, but also of the self-evaluation that we ourselves carry out regarding our own work. It is a system of across-the-board active listening that is applied throughout the organisation. Each year, this system allows us to carry out an in-house analysis of all those elements that may be fine-tuned to achieve an even higher degree of excellence. Therefore, in addition to encouraging the participation of the whole team in the development of internal assessment reports, we ask those people who work with us in each edition of our Awards to do the job with a fresh approach, devoid of self-censorship, bringing new ideas that enable greater efficiency in the work we do.

Another part of this active listening system at the Foundation that allows us to establish strategic lines of action is conducting external surveys with the help of consultants. This allows us to focus attention on those areas susceptible to improvement and identify changes in society that may affect us. In this respect, one of the aspects that we have worked on most in recent years is that of transparency. For some time now, there has been a greater demand from society to learn more about what lies behind certain institutions, how they work, the way they are funded, and so on. For this reason, we are currently working on matters of transparency with the aim of being leaders in this field among Spanish foundations. We have likewise introduced new elements in our work, such as the Spanish Association of Foundations and the European Foundation Centre's principles of good practice in this field. At the same time, we are undertaking environmental awareness projects, improving accessibility for disabled people at our events, measuring the impact of our activities and strengthening our international links with our Laureates and other prestigious institutions from all around the world.

An added difficulty is that our message, associated with the highest values, is aimed at a spectrum of the public covering all backgrounds and ages. Also our actions may be interpreted in a way that transcends the institution itself and affects the Head of State. This constitutes a major challenge that we face with both professionalism and rigour.

Rubén Vigil
Rubén Vigil is Head of Communication and Media Relations at the Princess of Asturias Foundation (Fundación Princesa de Asturias) in Oviedo, Spain.

About the Princess of Asturias Foundation
The Princess of Asturias Foundation is a non-profit private institution whose essential aims are to contribute to extolling and promoting those scientific, cultural and humanistic values that form part of the universal heritage of humanity and consolidate the existing links between the Principality of Asturias and the title traditionally held by the heirs to the Crown of Spain. The Foundation's net assets are about 31 million euros; its income comes from donations by the different individuals and institutions that form part of its Board of Trustees and Patrons, revenue from its assets and public grants.

The Forgotten Skill of Listening

For communication professionals listening is a multi-level activity.[2] Multi-level listening has four levels: listening to yourself, listening to co-workers and colleagues, listening to customers and listening to the other stakeholders of the organisation and to society. Part of being solid is to be able to listen well on all these levels. This starts with knowing your own listening style. And, as a practitioner being able to create a good listening climate in your own communication team. Listening to customers requires empathy. Empathy is the skill to sense what others feel and mean, to find out what others really need and to react actively during and after the conversation.[3] Listening to stakeholders and society at large is the fourth level of listening and can prevent conflicts between the organisation and the involved stakeholders. To whom should we listen and when and what shall we do with the information obtained? These are all questions for any professional responsible for creating a culture of listening in and around the organisation. At all levels tests are available to give insights into listening skills and into ways for improving listening capabilities.[4]

According to the International Listening Association (ILA), listening is 'the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non-verbal messages'.[5] This is a pretty straightforward definition and

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[2] Siere (2014).
[3] Drollinger et al. (2006).
[4] Siere (2014).
[5] See www.listen.org.

clearly an important part of communication. Still, it is sometimes referred to as 'the forgotten skill'[6] especially in a world saturated with mediatised messages. Audience fragmentation and proliferating media channels and speakers demand more 'work of listening'[7] on all levels. The label of forgotten skill even applies to communication management. Practitioners often argue to their superiors that listening is important and therefore communication is relevant, but listening strategies are often not in place.

According to our empirical data, a vast majority of organisations in Europe have an overall communication strategy and are focused on messaging strategies.[8] A bit more than half of them have also developed an organisational listening strategy. The most active listeners are joint stock and private companies and the least are governmental organisations. There are also significant differences between countries, organisations in countries in Southern and Western Europe more often have listening strategies in place than organisations in Eastern and Northern Europe.

For the most part listening is limited to media and issue monitoring in the broadest sense of the word. Dialogues and specific research on stakeholders are much less practised. Furthermore not many professionals have listening tasks in their official job description or have them ascribed as an explicit objective for the communication department. It is clear from the findings of the Monitor that joint stock companies lead the way in the practice of organisational listening. That is probably because their publicly traded stocks can be sensitive to the dynamics of opinion formation among shareholders, investors, the media and the public.

Organisational listening is perceived as a task for the communication department. About a fifth of them can be labelled as listening-minded and being well ahead of the rest. They are better in contributing to overall objectives of the organisation by identifying opportunities. Also they are better able to explain the benefits of listening and therefore the value of communication. This leading group made listening an explicit objective for the communication function and part of the communicators' job description. They conduct stakeholder research and dialogue on a regular basis and pay more attention to issues monitoring and management. This relatively small group of pioneers shows that systematic listening is an important part of communication and can enhance the value of

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[6] Burley-Allen (1995).
[7] Macnamara (2013, 2016).
[8] Zerfass et al. (2015), pp. 58–69.

communication in the organisation. Good multi-level listening skills therefore definitely contribute to being a solid professional (see Box 38).

Box 38 What we have learned from excellent departments concerning listening

Excellent communication departments:

- Illustrate the benefits of listening to stakeholders and identify opportunities.
- Implement listening strategies more often (like defining contact points for collecting feedback, instruments to listen to stakeholders, to monitor discussions, to initiate dialogue and integrate the knowledge gained).
- Are forerunners in listening to stakeholders.
- Use a greater number of techniques as well as applying more advanced modes of listening.
- More often have listening tasks as part of the personal job description of communicators.

The New Relevance of Ethics

In an era of banking scandals, personal and corporate tax avoidance and evasion, like anyone else, communication professionals sometimes face situations where particular activities might be legally acceptable, but challenging from a moral point of view.[9] In our 2012 survey six out of ten communication professionals in Europe reported that they had encountered such situations in their daily work over the past year and more than one third of the respondents experienced several ethical challenges.[10] The ECM data suggest that, year-on-year, ethical issues are becoming more relevant again. For the profession ethics have always been an issue, if not at the front than at the background of it. The profession and practitioners are used to being criticised about their ethics or ethics being ignored. Perceived as sinners, downright impostors who try to deceive the public and society for the benefit of organisations or saints that only communicate dialogically and symmetrical.[11] Perceived as cultural and ethical relativists that set their sails to every wind,[12] proclaim that perception is all there is,[13] or caught between

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[9] Bowen (2010); Bentele (2015).
[10] Zerfass et al. (2012), pp. 18–35.
[11] Fawkes (2012).
[12] Pearson (1989).
[13] Brown (2012).

relativist and universal values,[14] the profession has sought several solutions for the dilemma's and criticism, for example, by looking for ethical communication *processes* instead of content.[15] In practice though ethics in organisations are often driven by compliance and transparency rules.

The European Communication Monitor data demonstrate high levels of awareness of ethical problems in the world of strategic communication.[16] Professionals working in governmental relations, lobbying, public affairs, as well as in online communication and social media encounter the most ethical challenges. Two-thirds of them face such problems at least once a year. Less ethical questions or challenges were perceived in the fields of internal and international communication. The results show that ethical questions are more prevalent in Eastern Europe, compared to Western, Northern and Southern Europe. Also professionals working in consultancies and non-profits face ethical challenges when working in strategic communication more than professionals working in governmental organisations, private companies and joint stock companies.

Despite the variety of challenges and the intense debate on codes of ethics in the profession over many years (e.g. the Code of Athens), the majority of European communication practitioners have never used such a code to solve moral problems. Only a minority of them has ever applied a code in their daily work. Male communication professionals and members of professional communication associations use ethical codes more often than female professionals or professionals who are not affiliated to associations. A country-by-country analysis revealed that the use of codes is surprisingly not greater in countries with an elaborated system of regulations and institutions like Germany.[17] A third of the professionals think that typical ethical codes provided by the communication profession are outdated. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority thinks that the communication profession really needs such rules. This suggests a clear opportunity for professional associations to take a lead and provide up-to date ethical guidelines made to fit the digital age across Europe.

Dealing with ethical issues on individual level and on the level of the organisation and society certainly is one of the most important aspects of working in communications. It's also a challenge in a world where no clear

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[14] Kim (2005).
[15] Pearson (1989).
[16] Zerfass et al. (2012), pp. 18–35.
[17] Avenarius and Bentele (2009).

ethical rules exist anymore, not in organisations, not in society and not for individual behaviour. Being solid also means being able to handle the grey and ever changing area of ethics well.

The Gendered Profession of Communicators

When it comes to communication management, women have taken over in numbers, and the industry is nowadays a predominantly female industry.[18] It is a so-called gendered profession. In the United States, 70 per cent of the professionals are female.[19] and similar estimates of the amount of women working in the field are made for the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden.[20] This feminisation of the profession raises all kinds of questions. What does it mean for the power of the profession in organisations? And for equality of men and women? For leadership in the field? And for the communication style of organisations?

The high numbers of women in the field do not, for instance, mean that women are equally occupying senior and powerful positions.[21] This connects communication management to the leadership issue being brought forward in the third wave of feminism about a rising role of women in education and employment, but insufficient participation of women in politics and leadership.[22] An additional problem with communications is that because it became a 'profession' where there is a majority of female employees, stereotypes of practitioners emerged such as the PR Bunny or a PR Girl.[23] These are also reflected in film and other popular culture products with PR women such as Samantha Jones in Sex and the City.[24] As soon as women started to enter the profession in higher numbers, debates on why this has happened occurred.[25] Some scholars argue that the reason why women managed to enter communications in such high numbers is because women are more inclined towards emotional work and they are more friendly and kind, all of which are skills necessary in the field[26]

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[18] Wyatt (2013); Fitch and Third (2010); Aldoory and Toth (2002).

[19] Aldoory and Toth (2002).

[20] Van Ruler and Elving (2007); Bentele and Junghänel (2004); Flodin (2004).

[21] Grunig et al. (2001); Rush et al. (2004).

[22] Merchant (2012).

[23] Fröhlich and Peters (2007).

[24] Ames (2010); Johnston (2010).

[25] Yeomans (2010); Aldoory (2005).

[26] Hochschild (1983, 2003, 2008); Yeomans (2010).

with which traditional prejudices against women have actually been enforced, even by scholars. What did we find in the European Communication Monitor about gender and communication management over the years?

Still Traditional Views on Personal Traits of Men and Women

When it comes to personal characteristics ascribed to women, communication practitioners report traditional views on differences between men and women. Men are seen as seen as more aggressive, more able to promote themselves, self-confident, political savvy, more motivated for managerial positions, more analytical and with stronger managerial and operational skills. On the other hand, women are seen as more emotional and sensitive to people. Curiously men and woman value all these characteristics differently, except political savviness. Political savviness is seen equally strongly by men and women alike. For the rest of the characteristics the values differ. Figure 34 shows all the values and differences reported about personal traits for men and women. Generally speaking

Perceived distribution of personal traits among male and female professionals
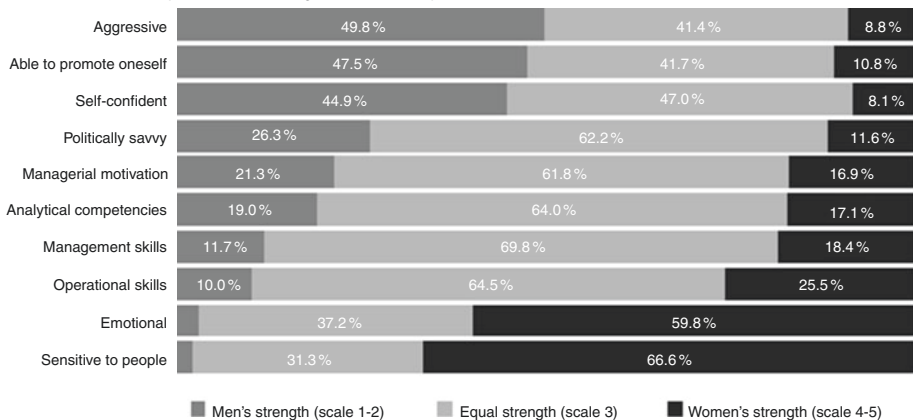
Trait	Men's strength (scale 1-2)	Equal strength (scale 3)	Women's strength (scale 4-5)
Aggressive	49.8%	41.4%	8.8%
Able to promote oneself	47.5%	41.7%	10.8%
Self-confident	44.9%	47.0%	8.1%
Politically savvy	26.3%	62.2%	11.6%
Managerial motivation	21.3%	61.8%	16.9%
Analytical competencies	19.0%	64.0%	17.1%
Management skills	11.7%	69.8%	18.4%
Operational skills	10.0%	64.5%	25.5%
Emotional		37.2%	59.8%
Sensitive to people		31.3%	66.6%

■ Men's strength (scale 1-2)   ■ Equal strength (scale 3)   ■ Women's strength (scale 4-5)

Fig. 34 Differences between male and female communicators[27]

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[27] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 130. n = 2,777 communication professionals across Europe. Q: How do you believe the following personal traits are distributed among male and female communication professionals? Scale 1–2 (men's strength) – 3 (equal strength) – 4–5 (women's strength).

women think more stereotypically about men and also about themselves. They think men are more aggressive, self-promotional and self-confident than women and women are more emotional and sensitive to people than men.

These views largely fit into stereotypes against women as compassionate and emotional while men are more predisposed for managerial and leadership position. On the other hand, there is a drop in characteristics ascribed to men when it comes to managerial motivation, analytical competences and managerial and operational skills. It seems that women are slowly finding their way through acknowledgement of their efforts and an increase in self-esteem. These skills are more seen as equally strong than the other characteristics. However, they are still seen as emotional and compassionate as opposed to men, which fit into traditional stereotypes against women held by both sexes.[28] Men and women interpret the issue of gendered personal traits and skills quite differently.

Perceived Consequences of a Gender Shift

What does feminisation mean for the industry? According to the practitioners interviewed for our survey a female majority can have both positive and negative consequences upon the profession. First of all women's engagement with the industry is, in general, not labelled through negative stereotyped images of women. It is labelled through increased professionalism. Moreover, it could be said that increased professionalism and characteristics associated with the alleged dialogic nature of women, as the prescriptive model of symmetrical communication, are positively attributed to the feminisation of the profession. Women think this is so more than men. The fostering of professionalism is also linked to an increase of salaries for communication professionals. On the negative side professionals are afraid that feminisation might perpetuate the soft image of the profession, increase the process of encroachment and that it will slow down the technological evolution of the profession. Men are more afraid of this technological slowdown than women are. Figure 35 provides an overview of the answers on the statements.

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[28] Van Zoonen (2004); Eichenbaum and Orbach (1999); Templin (1999).

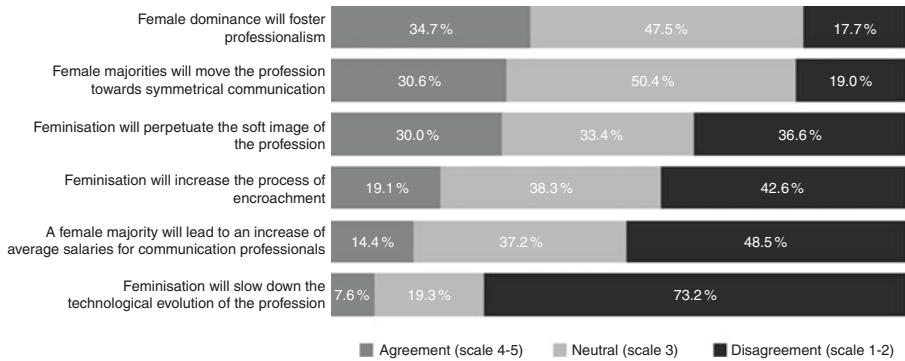*Perceived consequences of a female majority upon the profession*

Fig. 35   How women might change the profession[29]

Lower Job Status and Payment for Women

The European Communication Monitor identified that male and female professionals agree on a lot of things about their jobs. For example they think their tasks are interesting and manifold, their work-life balance is all right and overall they are equally satisfied with the job (see Fig. 36 for the total list). The only difference is reported on job status. Male professionals report a higher job status than their female colleagues. This goes in line with feminist views that women still have lower positions even if they work in an industry where women form the majority of employees.[30] However, the difference between men and women is not large, which might mean that women report slow progress towards equality in work in general.

However, as emphasised by feminist activists, when it comes to assigning important roles, women seem to be treated unfavourably, and these roles are more often assigned to men. For example, mentoring roles are more assigned to men than women in the communications industry. These two results are in line with frequently discussed views on women's position in management literature that largely demonstrates the unfavourable position of women against their male colleagues.

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[29] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 120. *n* = 2,777 communication professionals across Europe. Q: Please state whether you agree or disagree with those statements. Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (totally agree).
[30] Merchant (2012).

	Female	Male	Overall
My tasks are interesting and manifold	77.2%	77.5%	77.3%
The job has a high status**	46.4%	53.0%	48.9%
My work-life balance is all right*	36.2%	36.4%	36.3%
The salary is adequate	37.0%	38.6%	37.6%
I have great career opportunities**	36.7%	35.2%	36.1%
My job is secure and stable*	46.1%	47.0%	46.4%
Superiors and (internal) clients value my work	65.9%	68.0%	66.7%
Overall, I am satisfied with my job	65.2%	68.6%	66.5%

Fig. 36 Job satisfaction of communication professionals[31]

One other visible consequence of this is unequal payment for the same jobs. Even though women are the majority in communications, a wage gap still exists. For example, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the United Kingdom reported a significant wage gap between men and women working in the field. This difference exists, even though it cannot be explained by part-time positions or any other factor that could normally affect the wage gap.[32] In addition, the European Communication Monitor has systematically also identified a wage gap between male and female strategic communication professionals.[33]

Women Experience More Barriers to Success

Climbing the ladder of success is not the same for male and female communication professionals. Men and women really have different experiences in organisations. Men are much more optimistic about – or blind to – the

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[31] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 40. n = 2,777 communication professionals across Europe. Q: How do you feel about your actual job situation? Scale 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (totally agree). Percentages: Agreement based on scale points 4–5. * Significant differences (chi-square test, $p \le 0.05$). ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \le 0.01$).

[32] CIPR (2015).

[33] Zerfass et al. (2007); Zerfass et al. (2008); Zerfass et al. (2009); Zerfass et al. (2010); Zerfass et al. (2011); Zerfass et al. (2012); Zerfass et al. (2013); Zerfass et al. (2014); Zerfass et al. (2015); Zerfass et al. (2016).

experiences of women in organisations than are women. Women more than men think it is true that they have to accomplish more in order to achieve the same success as men. They also feel, more than men, that women have to work harder to secure quality long-term relationships with superiors or top executives in the organisation. Also women think there are more invisible barriers hindering their career path to the top. Also they experience less advancement opportunities despite the same qualifications and think they perform work that is less valued in relation to organisational success. Finally they think, more than men, that women are excluded from informal power networks and receive less support by mentors. All in all there is a high level of agreement that women find progression in their careers harder, and face invisible barriers. This might be even worse in practice, but it is impossible to estimate this based on the results of the Monitor since there are records showing that women deny the *glass ceiling* issue and blame themselves for not progressing in their careers.[34] In organisations with an excellent communication function gender equality is more prevalent, the results of the monitor show.[35]

Closely connected to this issue is that over the years we have consistently found that women think the advisory influence of the communication function is lower than men do. Also women think that the executive influence of communication, the likelihood of to be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organisational strategic planning, is less than men do.[36]

Moving Beyond Male and Female Communication Stereotypes

When it comes to communication styles, scholars systematically report on differences between men and women.[37] Often the theory of Deborah Tannen, an America sociolinguist, who tape-recorded and analysed numerous conversations for a better understanding of miscommunication

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[34] Wrigley (2002).

[35] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 149.

[36] Verhoeven and Aarts (2010).

[37] Coates (1989); Tannen (1990); Merchant (2012); Zerfass et al. (2014).

between men and women, is used to explain the differences.[38] A key aspect of Tannen's theory is that men and women have different ways of speaking. Men and women express themselves differently and construct different frames in interaction for different reasons. Men more often use communication to express and maintain independence, whereas women try to maintain intimacy when communicating. Tannen also found that women use communication more to connect emotionally and express their feelings, and men talk to increase their status. Put differently, men are understood to speak the language that expresses independence, competitiveness and enforces status while women are seen to speak in a way that enables connection and intimacy.[39]

However, when it comes to the preferred methods of communication of male and female managers in communication management, the results of the Monitor have showed surprising findings, that contradict the 'difference' approach that is often taken for granted. If we take into consideration the proposition that sees women and men as different, men are seen as less compassionate and more task-oriented, while women are seen as more interested in building relationships with their employees through interpersonal communication.[40] It is quite surprising that we found that women are more inclined to use emails and social media as methods of networking and men prefer face-to-face and phone calls to network with their peers. Men are seen as task-oriented, while women are seen as relationship-oriented, and while task orientation might have something to do with face-to-face and phone preferences, it is quite inexplicable how emails and social media fit into compassionate and caring communication methods meant to build intimacy and personal relationships. These contrary results might actually signal that women are more inclined towards rationality and professionalism in their approach to networking, while men seem to be more inclined to build personal relationships with their peers even if they are more task oriented. Whatever the explanation is, it is time to think beyond stereotypes about men and women's communication styles. Figure 37 shows the differences in communication preferences for networking between men and women.

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[38] Tannen (1990).

[39] Tannen (1990).

[40] Eagly and Johnson (1990); Gray (1992); Eagly (1987); Eagly and Karau (2002); Martell and DeSmet (2001).
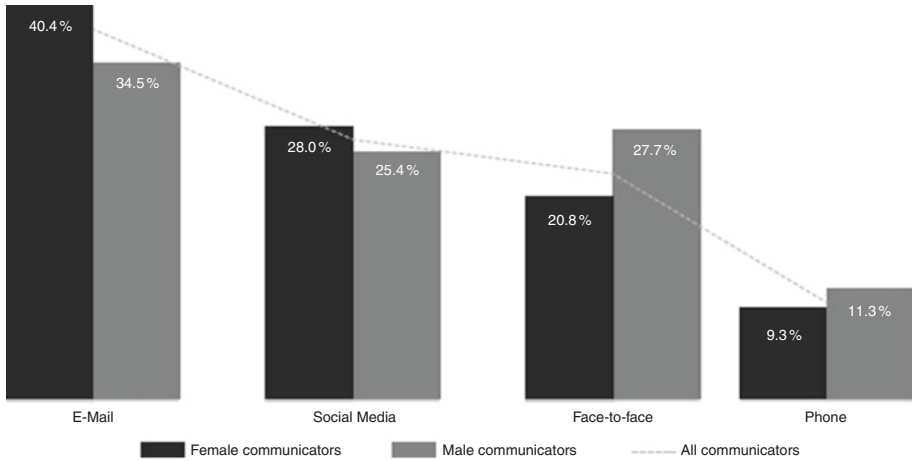
Fig. 37   Networking practices preferred by male and female communicators[41]

Communication Professionals' Views on Leadership

Building on the discussions from the earlier chapters, when we look at views of communication practitioners on what constitutes effective leadership for organisations, we see that the perceived most important characteristic for effective leadership is communicating in an open and transparent way. This is congruent with the widely accepted symmetrical and dialogic prescriptive models of public relations. Providing a clear overall, long-term vision and handling controversial issues or crises calmly and confidently are the numbers two and three in the list of important characteristics for effective leaders. These two are more reminiscent of the male stereotyped styles based on objective orientation. Women have more expectations with regard to all the analysed characteristics of effective leadership (see Fig. 38), but results don't show a preference of female practitioners for stereotyped feminine styles or with men for stereotyped male styles of leadership. That is in line with more recent studies in gender and leadership styles.[42]

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[41] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 65. n = 2,738 communication professionals across Europe. Q: Which form of professional networking do you practice most often? Pick one or state another form. In a typical week, I use most of my networking time (on the) ... Highly significant differences for all items (chi-square test performed without 'another form', p ≤ 0.01, Cramér's V = 0.093).
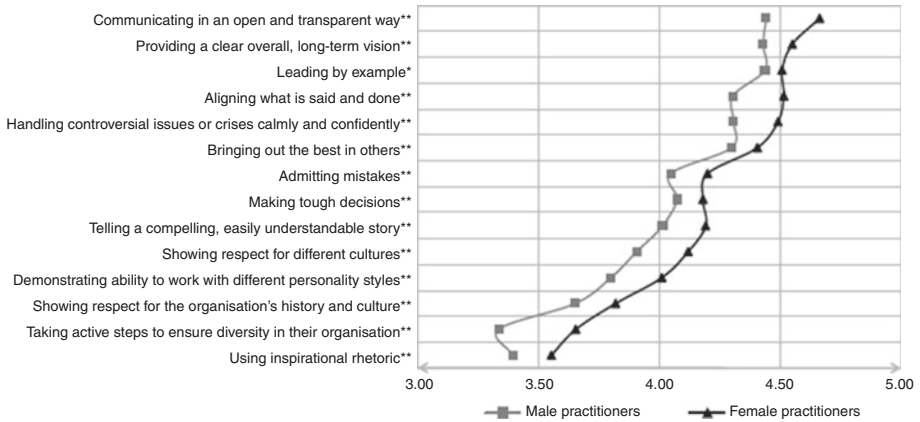
[42] Cuadrado et al. (2015).

Fig. 38 Difference in expectations of effective leadership of male and female professionals[43]

In other words, effective leadership entails – among others – communicating in an open and transparent way, showing the importance of communication for organisations today.

What It Means to Be Solid

What does it mean for a communication professional to be solid in today's world? Individual solidity first of all means that you have to able to handle *paradoxes*. The paradox is seen as one of the most important features of our hypermodern world and our hypermodern organisations.[44] A hypermodern society is a society that is characterised by hyper consumption (an increasingly large part of life is characterised by consumption), hypermodernity (characterised by continuous change and flexibility) and hyper narcissism (the expectation that every individual behaves responsibly automatically). A hypermodern culture produces contradictions; for example, a firm belief in the market and consumption that

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[43] Zerfass et al. (2014), p. 81. $n^{\min}$ = 2,695 communication professionals across Europe. Q: Listed below are specific behaviours often seen as being characteristic of effective leaders. When it comes to being an effective leader, how important is it to demonstrate each of the following characteristics or behaviours? Scale 1 (not at all important) – 5 (very important). Mean values. * Significant differences (independent-samples t-test, $p \leq 0.05$). ** Highly significant differences (independent-samples t-test, $p \leq 0.01$).

[44] Lipovetsky (2005); Roberts and Armitage (2006).

goes hand in hand with fierce criticism of the market and consumption. A firm belief in science and technology and at the same time fierce criticism of the ongoing progress of technological possibilities that are developed. A firm belief in the flexibility of the individual and the organisation paired with fierce resistance to change and a nostalgic longing for the past.

Communication professionals find themselves constantly amidst all those contradictions. Between management and employees, between the organisation and their opponents, between experts and the press to name a few. Communication professionals are supposed to give answers about how to deal with these hypermodern contradictions. You have to be solid and strong to do that. You have to be sensitive to all positions and to listen to all who have to say something about the organisation or an issue. You have to be sensitive to ethical considerations of the time and savvy about public opinion fluctuations to guide the organisation in the dynamic world of traditional and new media.

Being solid also means you as a communication professional need to be *reflective*, reflective on yourself, on the organisation and on the culture and society you and the organisation are a part of. You have to understand your own feelings, those of others and the dynamics of the system you are part of. Personal solidity is at the heart of reflective communication management.[45] You have to be able to see the organisation from the position of the outside world, from the public sphere perspective and coach all members of the organisation in how to deal with that. Locally, regionally and globally. This fundamental boundary position requires personal integrity, credibility for all parties involved and an ability to deal with diverse and different populations. Dealing with inequality and power differences between groups inside and outside the organisation and trying to effectively bridge them with communicative solutions is also part of solidity.

Perhaps the most important part of personal solidity for communication professionals is to be *prudent*. Prudence is a bourgeois virtue in our age of commerce, says Deirdre McCloskey, distinguished professor of economics, history, English and communication at the University of Illinois. She defines prudence as good judgement or practical wisdom. Prudence is connected with words like wisdom, common sense, savviness, rationality, self-interest, foresight, calculating, caution, policy and good sense.[46]

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[45] Holmström (1997); Van Ruler and Verčič (2005); Holmström et al. (2009).
[46] McCloskey (2006), pp. 253–254.

Prudence does justice to the complexity of the internal and external environment communication professionals find themselves in. Being prudent helps to deal with complex issues and problems in practice and to gain relative independence from the top management of the organisation and also of the publics and stakeholders you are dealing with. Prudence leaves room for being asymmetrical *and* symmetrical at the same time, for bonding *and* bridging and for strategic *and* communicative action. Being prudent acknowledges the complexity of strategic communication and strategic framing – or the more popular term of spinning – that are ineluctable parts of communication management. Being prudent releases the professional from the burden of the accusation of being always on the edge of unethical behaviour.

Maybe the most important aspect of being solid is to understand that *conflicts of interest* are a fundamental part of living together as humans and therefore also of organisational life. Solving one conflict often gives rise to another one. Tensions inside and around the organisation are a constant and unsolvable. Coping with these conflicts and with trying to reach consensus at the same time is the key aspect of the communication function of organisations. The ideals of symmetry and consensus go hand in hand with the practice and the reality of conflict.[47] Being strong, sensitive and savvy about that makes a satisfied communication professional.

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[47] Holmström (1997, 2005); Holmström et al. (2009).

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