



THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

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Key findings from the European Communication Monitor 2010 prove that an inclusive leadership style correlates positively with influence and job satisfaction

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gitimacy. Empirical evidence on the development of the profession and drivers for success has been identified by the fourth edition of the European Communication Monitor (ECM) survey. With 1,955 participants from 46 countries, the ECM 2010 is probably the largest transnational survey of public relations ever conducted worldwide. The majority of respondents (72 per cent)

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report that their function has gained importance during the recent recession, although only 22 per cent of them report that they were able to gain resources as compared to other departments and functions. 37.2 per cent of respondents say that their resources suffered more, and 40.8 per cent that they were able to stay on an equal footing with other departments and functions. Most interestingly, communication professionals with a strong focus on supporting organisational goals by facilitating business processes (that is by influencing consumer preferences and motivating employees) have reported a significantly better development of resources during the recession than those who favour the indirect way of building images, brands and internal cultures. This correlation points to limitations in some of the established and mainstream paradigms in corporate communications which capitalise mainly on image and reputation (that is Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) rather than focussing on the support of business processes to achieve the organisation's defined goals in a broader sense (that is Van Ruler & Verčič, 2005; Zerfass, 2008).

The relevance of communication for organisational success has become more visible than ever throughout the turbulent ups and downs of the European economy in early 2010. While some industries such as the automotive sector were able to regain trust, others found themselves in the middle of a new quest for le-

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BACKGROUND OF THE SURVEY The European Communication Monitor is an annual research project conducted since 2007 by a group of professors from 11 renowned universities across Europe within the framework of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), in partnership with Communication Director magazine and the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD), and sponsored by monitoring specialist Infopaq and the international agency Grayling. In May 2010, over 30,000 practitioners were invited to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire had been tested previously by 53 practitioners across Europe. Every



European region is represented across the 46 countries: Northern Europe (28.8 per cent), Western Europe (34.7 per cent), Southern Europe (25.2 per cent) and Eastern Europe (11.3 per cent). Topics included communication strategy and planning, indicators of excellence and power, contribution to organisational objectives, development of the discipline and communication instruments, strategic issues, critical aspects of social media, leadership styles, salaries and job satisfaction, as well as the development of communication management in different types of organisations, countries and regions. The report is available either as a chart version on the web (www.communicationmonitor.eu) or as a book (Zerfass et al., 2010).

COMMUNICATORS ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR JOBS

In general, communication professionals in Europe are satisfied with their job, although there are differences across the regions. Working with interesting tasks, acknowledgement of the work by superiors and clients and the status of the job are the main contributors to satisfaction. 69.2 per cent of the respondents claim to be happy with their job overall, but only four out of ten professionals are satisfied with their career opportunities, work-life balance and salary. Being female and working in higher positions increases the chance of satisfaction. Higher salaries and higher resources during

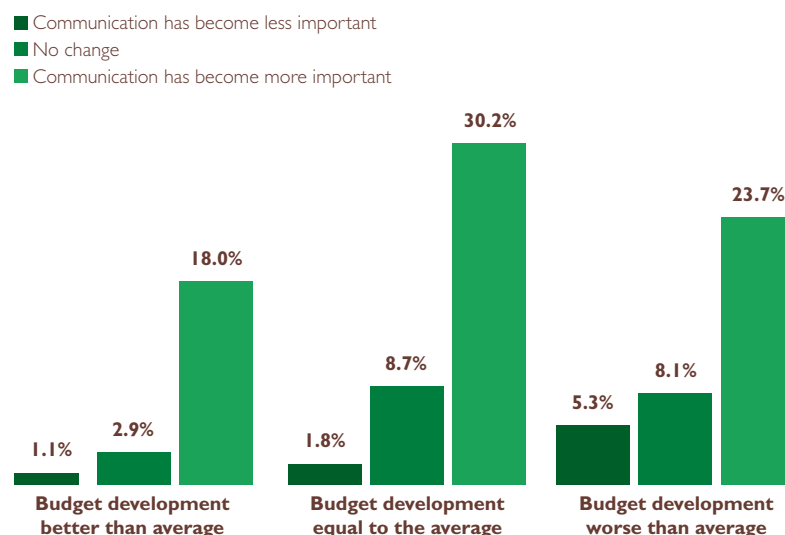
the recession also positively influence job satisfaction. Despite this evidence, practitioners in Eastern Europe (the worst paid) are the most satisfied with their working conditions, with Southern Europeans the least. Respondents in the latter region lag behind in all

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dimensions: they complain about inadequate salaries and lower job security. Cultural and socio-economic differences and a diverging maturity of the profession across Europe may explain these differences. Practitioners in Western and Northern Europe, and males all over Europe, are better paid.

LEADERSHIP STYLE The ECM 2010 survey supports previous research (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009) that communication professionals enact different leadership styles. They may draw on their authority (transactional style), develop a vision and appeal to followers' ideals and values (transformational style) or identify challenges and involve followers in shared decision-making and stimulate them to participate in the process (inclusive style). Both organisational structures and cultures have a significant impact on the dominant leadership style. Transactional style dominates in governmental organisations (29.5 per cent), transformational style in private companies (38.1 per cent). Inclusive style can be found most often in joint stock companies (45.3 per cent) and non-profit organisations (46.9 per cent). Statisti-

Table 1 Development of the importance and resources of communication departments during the economic downturn

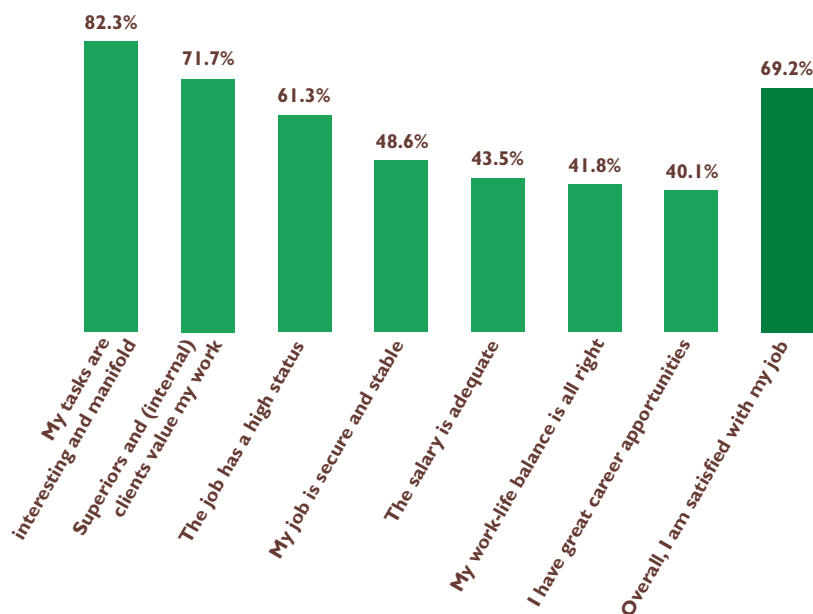


n = 1,533 PR professionals in communication departments (Zerfass et al. 2010, p. 58)

cal analysis unveils that leadership style correlates with job satisfaction and power of communication professionals. Inclusive leaders are significantly more satisfied with their job and they perceive themselves as having more influence in the organisation. They are taken more seriously by senior management and they are more likely to be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organisational strategic planning than those respondents who prefer one of the other paradigms of leadership. Consequently, an inclusive approach to leadership may be taken as an example of good practice for communication directors in Europe.

THREE TOP CRITERIA FOR EXCELLENCE European professionals perceive three criteria to be the most important for the excellent performance of a communication departments: the ability to develop and maintain good relationships with stakeholders, the capacity to mobilise people, and to be formally involved in top management deci-

Table II Job satisfaction among communication professionals in Europe



n = 1,955 PR professionals from 46 countries (Zerfass et al., 2010, p. 21)

sion-making. No significant differences of criteria arise from position, education or nationality, with only years of experience influencing the importance conceded to the hierarchical position of the head of communication. Criteria are quite homogeneous across Europe and its practitioners. However, less experienced practitioners seem to underestimate the relevance of formal structures

Table III Implementation of basic prerequisites for social media communication

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Social media guidelines for communicating in blogs, Twitter etc | 29.3% | 31.3% | 39.4% |
| Tools for monitoring stakeholder communication on the social web | 27.9% | 26.3% | 45.7% |
| Description of social media services offered by the department/agency | 26.8% | 29.5% | 43.7% |
| Training programmes for social media | 20.5% | 27.5% | 52.0% |
| Key performance indicators for measuring social web activities | 18.0% | 27.2% | 54.8% |

■ Already implemented ■ Planned for 2010 ■ Not planned yet

n = 1,955 PR professionals in 46 European countries (Zerfass et al., 2010, p. 79)



and power, especially when they have only worked in the field for less than five years. Quite strikingly, four out of ten professionals state that excellent communication departments should be independent from the overall decision processes within the organisation. Normative ideas of public relations as neutral mediators or even as advocates of external (public) interest within the organisation seem to prevail. These concepts fall behind the theoretical insight that any planned communication within the context of organisations is a part of the overall game and should position itself in exactly this way, linking its goals to overall corporate goals of profitability and legitimacy (Zerfass, 2008), and making its own role transparent to every stakeholder.

When asked about measures to enhance the performance and competitiveness of the communication function over the next three years, the respondents prefer training

“Investing in research projects and in academic research in communication management and public relations are valued much less.”

communication and business skills as well as networking and supporting high-potential individuals within the team. Supporting high-potentials is considered significantly more important in Eastern than in Western Europe. Respondents all over Europe seem to define professionalisation of communication management particularly in terms of the improvement of personal and interpersonal skills of individual communication employees. Investing in research projects and in academic research in communication management and public relations are valued much less. This result seems to reflect a profession that defines itself more in terms of interpersonal

Table IV Perceived factors of excellence for communications departments

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Good relationship with key stakeholders | 85.8% |
| Capability to mobilise people | 82.1% |
| Formal involvement in the strategic management process | 81.8% |
| Knowledge of communication rules | 75.8% |
| Processes for planning and evaluating communication | 69.7% |
| Informal networks within the organisation | 65.9% |
| Capability to use content production tools | 63.7% |
| Hierarchical position of the senior communication professional | 54.1% |
| Independence from organisational decision-making | 41.4% |

n = 1,955 PR professionals in 46 European countries (Zerfass et al., 2010, p. 38)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ➔ Communication departments lost comparatively less resources during the recession when communication became more important for their organisation and they had a clear vision of how communication supports organisational goals.
- ➔ A majority of communication professionals think their job is interesting, valued by superiors and has a high status. However, most of them are less happy with their career opportunities, work-life balance or salaries.
- ➔ The inclusive style of leadership correlates positively with job satisfaction and influence; communicators should consider this paradigm as a good model, but realise that different types of organisations may need other methods.
- ➔ Good relationships with key stakeholders, the ability to mobilise people and formal involvement in the management process are perceived as the most important factors in defining an excellent communication department.
- ➔ While social media receive increased attention, only a minority of organisations has started to establish a governance structure for this field.

communication and relationship management rather than a profession that views itself from a macro perspective of culture, systems and society where other knowledge and skills are necessary.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND CHANNELS Half of the respondents state either that coping with the digital evolution and the social web and/or linking business strategy and communication are most relevant for themselves within the near future. The digital topic has overtaken the business link issue, which had been ranked number one for the

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past three years. Paralleling this strategic dimension, online communication (websites, e-mail, intranet), media relations on the web and social media applications (blogs, podcasts, communities etc.) have made a great leap forward during the last twelve months on the instrumental level. Predictions for the future are

“Communication professionals regularly overestimate the growth of new communication channels.”

even more enthusiastic. However, a longitudinal analysis of predictions from previous surveys shows that communication professionals regularly overestimate the growth of new communication channels. Online communication was expected

to gain in relevance by 25.9 per cent from 2007 to 2010, but the difference between the findings in both surveys was only 14.4 per cent. The importance of social media grew by 15.2 per cent, instead of the 41.4 per cent expected four years ago. Nevertheless, the overall shift is significant and must be dealt with.

In spite of the enthusiasm for social media communications, less than one third of organisations have already implemented necessary prerequisites like social media guidelines, monitoring routines or even key performance indicators to define and evaluate measures of success. This differs significantly within the various European regions. Although a majority of communication professionals claim they have strategic control of digital and social media, resources are often assigned to the marketing function. Less than half of the respondents working in joint stock or private companies have budgetary control over social media. Communication professionals still have to stake their claims. By doing so, they might be able to take pole position in the run for those positions that are responsible for the overall social media strategy and social media governance in organisations. Combining communication expertise, a clear vision of goals linked to organisational strategies and an advanced, inclusive leadership style will be a good prerequisite for this. ■



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Photos: University Rey Juan Carlos; University of Ljubljana; University of Leipzig

