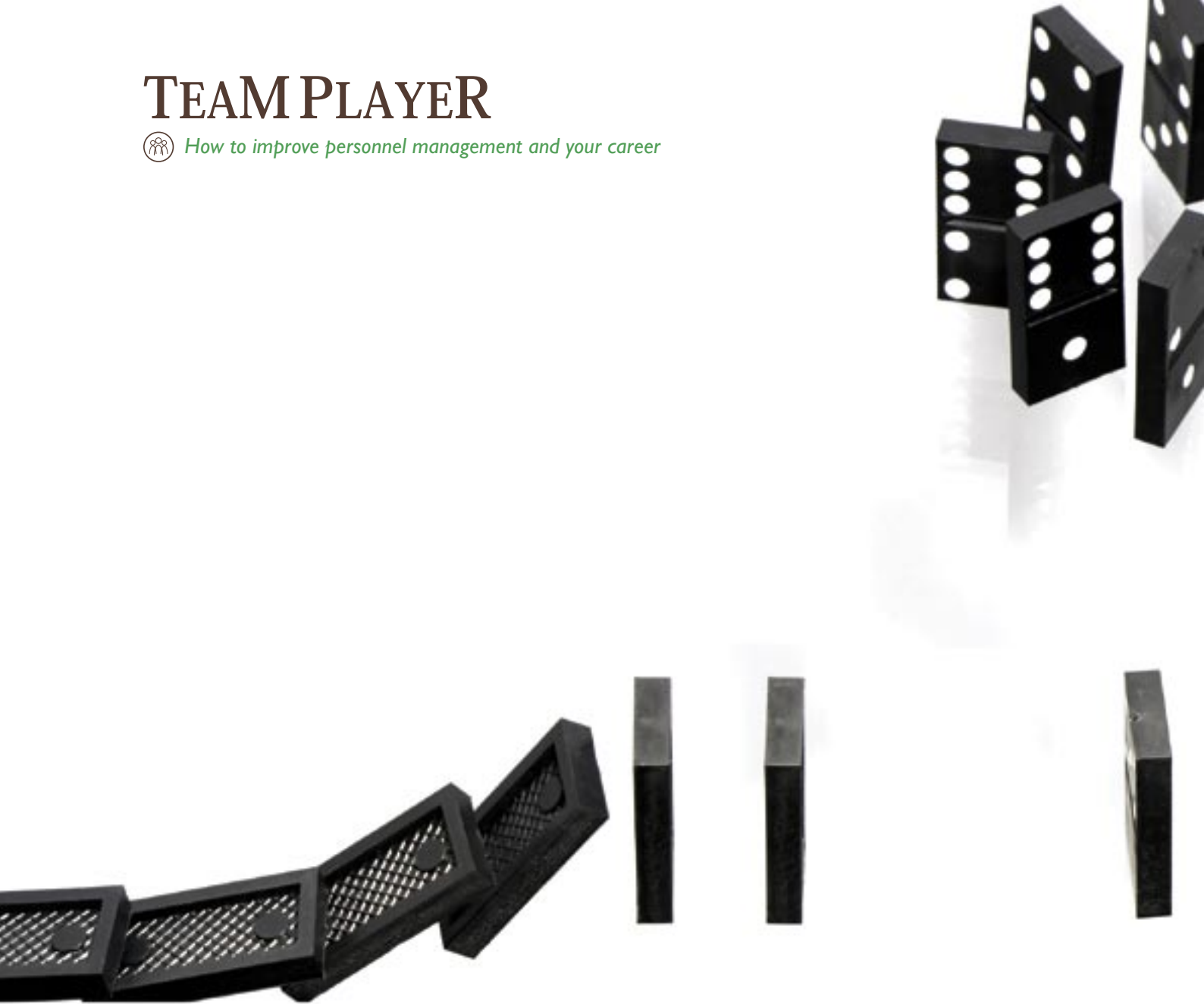


# TEAM PLAYER

 *How to improve personnel management and your career*



## INCOMPLETE POWER

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*The European Communication Monitor 2011 draws an ambiguous picture: while most communication professionals enjoy a broad level of responsibilities and rising salaries, only a minority believe that they generate financial and immaterial assets for their organisations*

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*by Dejan Verčič, Ángeles Moreno and Ansgar Zerfass*



The European Communication Monitor is an annual survey of public relations and communication management in Europe and is the largest of its kind in the world. Its fifth edition in 2011 indicates the end of the crisis, with salaries on the rise and the function becoming stronger than ever.

Practitioners report that the fall of earnings identified in 2010 has ended, and that we are back to figures from before 2009 and the crisis. A positive sign is that a quarter of respondents are now above the 100,000 euros mark.

But while five per cent of respondents earn more than 200,000 euros, a fifth of practitioners in the survey only earn up to 30,000 euros annually. There are wide differences between the north and west, and the south and east of Europe – salaries are significantly lower in the latter two regions. There are also persisting differences based on gender: the average (median) salary of women is lower than salaries of men on every hierarchical level. Members of the EACD (the European Association of Communication Directors) are better paid: 10.2 per cent earn more than 150,000 euros annually.

Although formal power is not equally distributed across the continent, the general trend is clear: most practitioners report to the CEO and increasingly have a seat at the boardroom table. This vertical rise in the power of the communication function is, however, not accompanied by a full acceptance of other management disciplines, and this horizontal dimension of power among peers is the goal for the coming years.

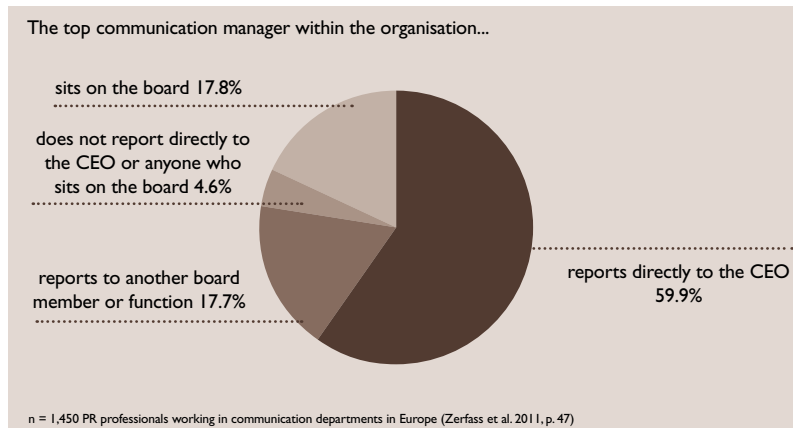
### ECM 2011 – BACKGROUND OF THE SURVEY

The European Communication Monitor (ECM) is the most comprehensive analysis of the profession worldwide with 2,209 participating professionals from 43 countries. Operating since 2007, this is the fifth survey and it was conducted in March 2011. The study has been organised by EUPRERA (European Public Relations Education and Research Association) together with the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and Communication Director magazine, and sponsored by Infopaq and Grayling. Every European region is represented: northern Europe (27.9 per cent), western Europe (29.2 per cent), southern Europe (32.4 per cent) and eastern Europe (10.5 per cent). Respondents were, on average, 41 years old. More than 57 per cent had worked in communication for more than 10 years, half of them were heads of the communica-

Photo: www.dreamstime.com



**Table I Reporting lines and hierarchies of top communication managers**



tion function in their organisation, and more than 70 per cent came from communication departments (and the rest from agencies). Topics included in 2011's survey were the credibility of public relations and alternative concepts, decision-making, leadership style and role enactment, power of communication departments, ROI of communication, strategic issues and trust, development of disciplines and communication channels, social media (governance, skills and activities) future qualification needs and training and salaries.

**RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWER** It is clear that communication professionals are getting to sit at the top table and are entering the dominant coalition; the group of people who really lead organisations.

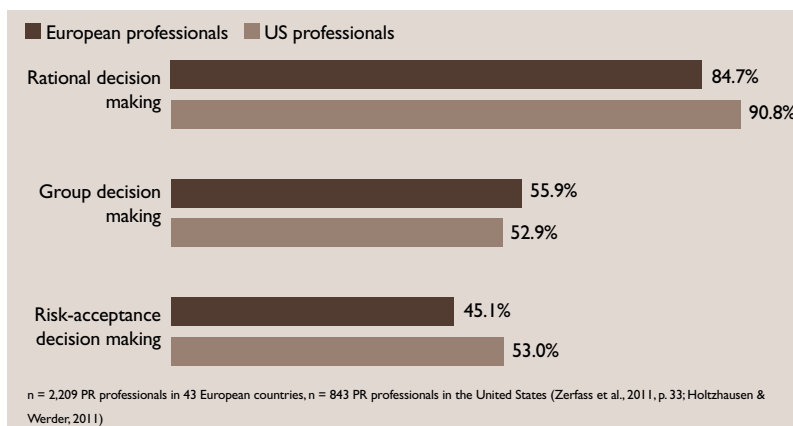
The communication function is also clearly taking on broader responsibilities for the management of relation-

ships with most or all stakeholders. The communication function is solely responsible for media relations in only five per cent of responding organisations, and for only media and internal communication in a further 12 per cent. In more than 80 per cent of organisations, the communication department coordinates communication and manages relations with three or more stakeholder categories. There are regional differences, with the north having broader responsibilities than the south, but the overall picture clearly shows that the communication function has long since passed the publicity- and media-management stage of development.

It may well be that this broadening of responsibilities has contributed to the hierarchical growth in power. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents reported close working relationships with the CEO, with more than 80 per cent of them being responsible for at least three kinds of programmes and stakeholders (media, marketing, internal, financial or lobbying communication), and many for all kinds. And, in nearly one out of five organisations, the top communicator is a member of the board (see table I).

But gains in hierarchical power are not necessarily cemented in horizontal relationships with other functions and departments: 30 per cent of respondents think that their department is replaceable, and one quarter that it doesn't play an important role in the overall performance of the organisation. Horizontal relations are the strongest with marketing departments (77 per cent), strategy and organisational development units (62 per cent), and human resources departments

**Table II Decision-making styles utilised by communication professionals**



(54 per cent), weaker with legal departments (44 per cent) and financial departments (39 per cent) and the weakest with the auditing and controlling units. This indicates an incomplete power of communication as a management function, a danger to be addressed in future.

**DECISION MAKING.** The communication function is clearly aligning itself with business strat-

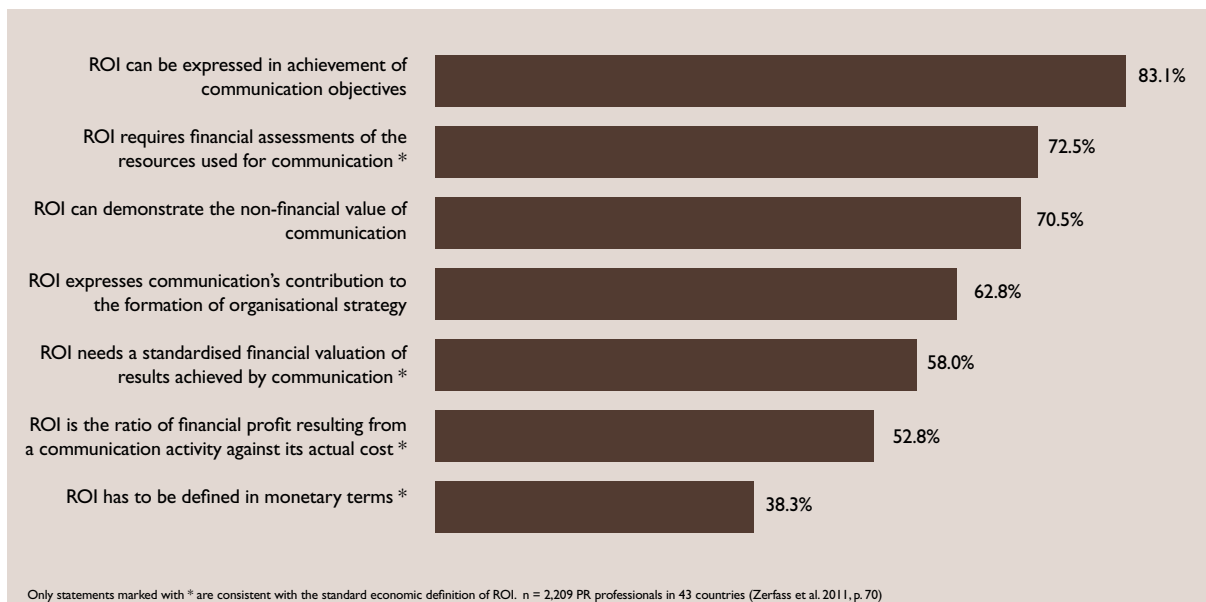
“Risk taking is associated with innovation; therefore....we will need a cultural change within the profession.”

egy: over 90 per cent of respondents say that they focus on organisational goals when planning and enacting communication activities. Over 70 per cent also feel responsible for influencing the definition of the goals that the organisations choose. This line of thinking is further supported by respondents who

report that they perform the advanced ‘strategic facilitator’ role, which is defined as simultaneously providing communication support to organisational goals as well as helping to define the goals. But there is a substantial difference in leadership style between Europeans and their colleagues in the United States (see table II). While practitioners on both sides of the Atlantic report a preference for rational decision making based on an evaluation of all information available, Europeans seem to be risk averse: only a minority accept that a risk not taken is an opportunity lost. Risk taking is associated with innovation; therefore, in the interest of the healthy development of European communication management, we will need a cultural change within the profession.

**MISUNDERSTANDING ROI** The strategic alignment of communication with business strategy and other management functions has brought with it management-speak. Almost every second practitioner claims to use the term ‘return on investment’, a concept developed for proving the economic value of activities. Six out of 10 communicators in Spain, the UK and Sweden use the term to evaluate their communication activities, while only three out of 10 do so in Norway, Slovenia and Germany. The term is more commonly used in the higher echelons of the communication profession than in the lower, and, interestingly, more in southern Europe (followed by eastern and northern Europe) than in western Europe. Research-

Table III How communication professionals (mis)understand the ROI concept

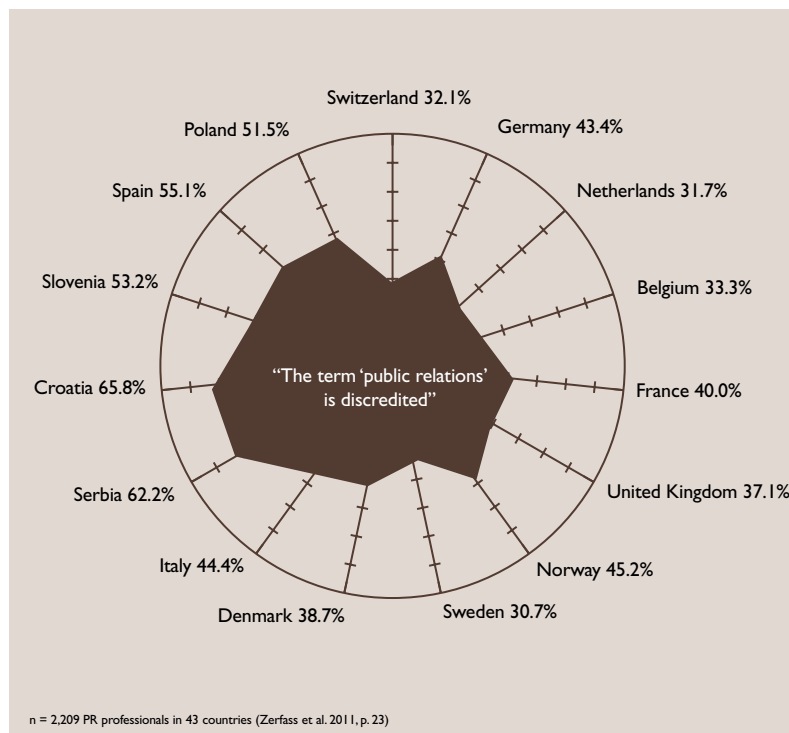


ers asked respondents about the ways in which they understood the term ‘return on investment’ and the results are very interesting (see table III).

Only about half of all respondents agreed with the standard management definition of ROI, which is the ratio of financial profit resulting from a communication activity against its actual cost, and less than half with the notion that ROI needs to be expressed in monetary terms. This raises questions about communicators who aspire to become managers, yet are not versed in management terminology and concepts. A more thorough operational management education is needed.

**TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM** While the term ‘public relations’ is commonly used to describe communication management activities (at least in the English language), the term is rated as very poor in Poland, the United Kingdom, Norway, Croatia, Denmark, Slovenia, Serbia and Germany (see table IV). Even in the rest of Europe, at least three out of 10 practitioners report negative perceptions of the term. This negative perception of public relations carries with it consequences for practitioners and their work, and is largely correlated with negative images of public relations in the media.

**Table IV Negative perceptions of the term “public relations”**



**FULL RESULTS**

**EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION MONITOR 2011**

EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS INTO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE  
RESULTS OF A SURVEY IN 43 COUNTRIES

A detailed report is available online at [www.communicationmonitor.eu](http://www.communicationmonitor.eu), and as a book published by Helios Media: A. Zerfass, P. Verhoeven, R. Tench, A. Moreno, & D. Verčič (2011): European Communication Monitor 2011. Empirical Insights into Strategic Communication in Europe – Results of a Survey in 43 Countries, Brussels: EACD, EUPRERA, ISBN 978-3-942263-12-2

Practitioners in Europe prefer other labels for their work, with ‘corporate communication’ (68 per cent positive), ‘strategic communication’ (61 per cent positive) and ‘communication management’ (56 per cent positive) leading the pack. The terms ‘integrated communication’ and ‘organisational communication’, often used by academics, are less popular in the field of professional practice. It is, however, too early to deduce consequences for the practice as nomenclature is determined by global trends, and we need similar evaluations for the Americas and Asia in particular before being able to speculate on the global trend.

The survey also identified two main issues of importance. Over half the respondents (55 per cent) see the technological changes that they and their organisation face as the key challenge for the next three years. This was identified as ‘coping with the digital evolution and the social web’ and was cited in first place as

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- ▶ The communication function is gaining influence in Europe: six out of 10 top professionals report directly to the CEO and 17.8 per cent of communication professionals are board members
- ▶ Coping with digital evolution and the social web continues to be the most important issue
- ▶ Two disciplines to watch are internal communication and personal coaching: communication professionals predict a growth in importance above average, a stable trend since the 2009 edition of this survey
- ▶ Although almost every second practitioner claims to use the 'return on investment' (ROI) concept, the research shows that basic knowledge about management concepts and accounting is missing in the profession
- ▶ Professionals across Europe report negative connotations of 'public relations' in the mass media and, as a consequence, most favour alternative labels for the profession – especially corporate communication, strategic communication and communication management

a priority strategic issue until 2014. The second most relevant issue is the on-going challenge of 'linking communication efforts with business goals'. We could say that technology and accountability lead the change process within the communication function. Yet, at the same time, the survey showed that there are large gaps between qualification needs and the kind of training offered today in European organisations. While over 80 per cent of respondents see knowledge of the effects of traditional and new media, relationship building and communication technologies as being important in five years, only 21 per cent of their or-

ganisations offer training in media effects, 17 per cent in relationship building and 21 per cent in communication technologies. While over 70 per cent of respondents see organisational change and development being important in five years time, only 15 per cent of organisations offer training in these. The subject of ethics is in a similar position: over 70 per cent see it as being important in five years time, but only 17 per cent of organisations offer any training on ethical issues.

Professional communication is gaining power in organisations, although according to this study, it still needs to be consolidated. Rethinking the way communicators think and talk about themselves and how they are educated and trained is the next necessary step towards a full recognition within management circles. The European Communication Monitor identified several gaps between reality, needs and perceptions that need to be addressed in order to fully develop the potential of the communication function in European organisations. Moreover, it provides a baseline for similar studies on other continents. The next challenge for researchers across the world is to initiate such research, so that we can analyse and contextualise developments of the communication function from a global perspective. █



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Photos: Private

