

Communication Management Competencies for European Practitioners

LEADERSHIP *critical thinking*
Corporate Strategy

Understanding Trends

Empathy

LISTENING

PLANNING

Cross Cultural Competence



Website: <http://www.ecopsi.org.uk>

Portal: <http://www.p4ace.eu>



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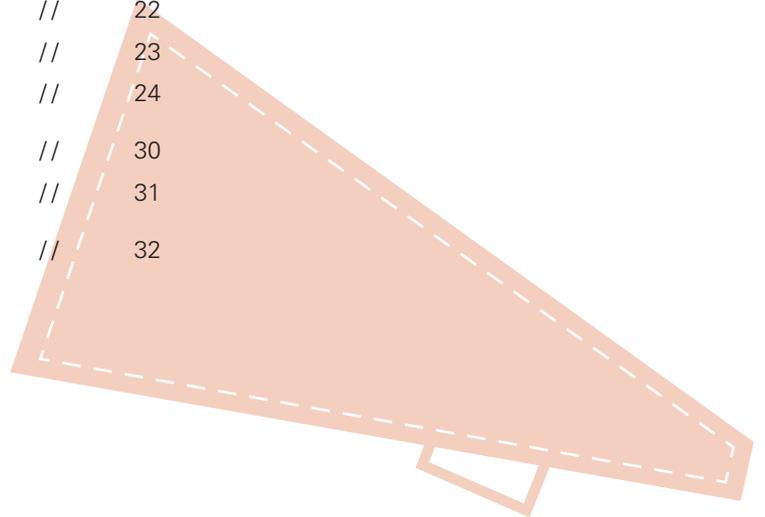
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The full report is available as free PDF version at www.ecopsi.org.uk.

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The ECOPSI (European Communication Professionals Skills and Innovation Programme) is a European Union funded project that includes partners from the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Slovenia and Turkey.



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Executive summary

What is the ECOPSI programme?

The European Communication Professionals Skills and Innovation Programme (ECOPSI) is a research project that explores the competencies required by communication professionals in Europe. This innovative program is a partnership of six leading European universities in communication research and education located in Germany, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and the UK. The programme is led by Leeds Metropolitan University. This two-year research project is the first of its kind and is funded by the European Union.

Why is this project relevant?

The context for this project is a communication sector in Europe that has grown and developed significantly in the last 20 years. This expansion has been influenced by political, economic and cultural shifts which have seen profit and non-profit organizations equally recognize the role and significance of communication in achieving organizational goals. These include managing reputation and image as key assets of organizations.

What are the project's aims?

The ECOPSI project aims are:

- To map and understand the actions and activities of communicators specifically in this European landscape;
- To build knowledge and understanding of what they do, but also what skills and knowledge they need to develop to have a shared meaning and understanding of the practice.

What are the key findings?

The findings from the research suggest and support the hypothesis that public relations and communication is a maturing discipline with many shared experiences but little organized life-long learning or evidence of recognized continuing professional development (CPD) pathways. There are on-going gaps and deficiencies in the development of the individuals as well as broad variation in how practitioners identify needs and access appropriate interventions. This presents numerous opportunities for deeper and on-going professional training and development to build consistency and support good practice in moving away from a hands-on, learning on-the-job approach to more focused knowledge acquisition and development.

From the findings Social Media knowledge is an acknowledged weakness that people feel they need to improve in and the industry also needs to look closely at how it can foster intercultural relationships and cross-cultural working by setting up accredited and recognized programmes of exchange, secondment and internship. Coaching and mentoring has a significant part to play in the development of communicators, as it potentially offers more formal, organised and supported career development that is both on-the-job and in-situ. This, together with committed involvement in networks and knowledge exchange activity and a review of the current content of more formal training/qualifications may help to bridge on-going and self-acknowledged gaps in the development of communication practitioners.

The project has produced a detailed benchmark report of communication competencies in Europe available at www.ecopsi.org.uk and two significant practitioner outputs, a Portal of resources, materials, facts and figures.

The Portal (for) Advancing Communication Expertise (p4ace, available at www.p4ace.eu) - and within it a p4ace diagnostic tool for practitioners.

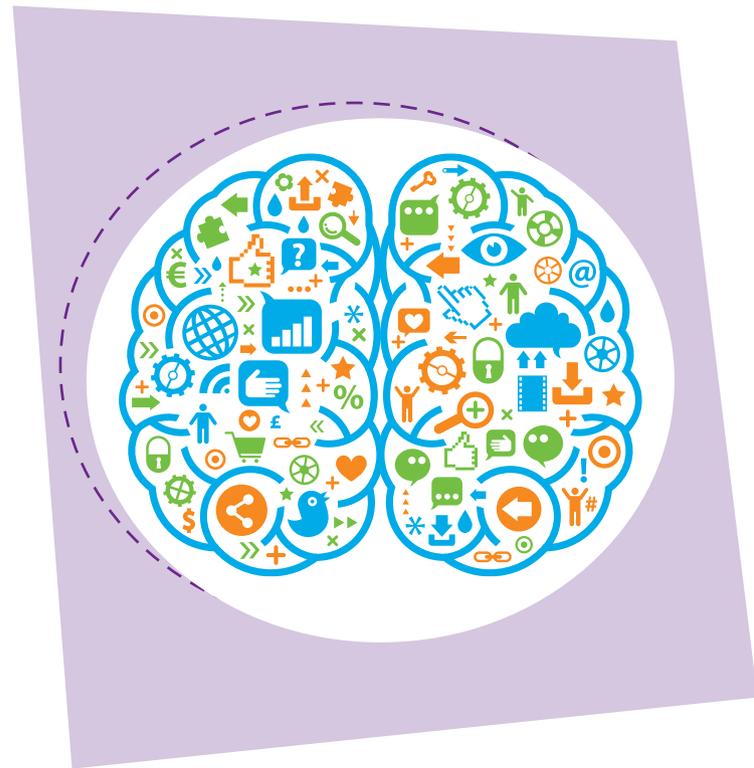


The background to the project

Competency is a good thing. It means you can do it. Think of sports, playing an instrument or being able to fly, if you are competent then you will pass the general view that you can handle the task, issue or challenge in front of you. So what does competency mean when we talk about our work? Is it simply a case of once learnt we never forget and don't need to work to maintain and develop the competence? Our recent study has highlighted that there are significant gaps in the shared knowledge and understanding of the issues when it comes to our own professional or work related capabilities, particularly in communications.

We recognize there is a changing context for communications for example the position of the Chief Communication Officer (CCO) on the board of large organizations is becoming more common as communications is being seen as integral to the financial and commercial success of organizations (Arthur Page Society, 2008). The CCO champions the benefits of effective communications through demonstrated return on investment while the Internal Communications Managers are increasingly being tasked to help support, implement and drive organizational change through employee engagement and communication activity (Moss and DeSanto, 2011). Other Communication professionals, such as Crisis Communication Managers, face a new reality where a simple mistake can escalate into a crisis situation in our hyperconnected society (Heath and Palenchar, 2009). Similarly, Social Media Managers are now responsible for maintaining the integrity, trust and reputation of their companies in the rapidly emerging digital world (Moss and DeSanto, 2011). These new corporate positions clearly demonstrate that communication practitioners now require a complex set of competencies to be successful in the global workplace which is currently undergoing phenomenal change, driven largely by pressure to improve profits and to make cost efficiencies.

The ECOPSI programme (European Communication Professional Skills and Innovation Programme) is focused on mapping the current competencies required by communication professionals in Europe as well as understanding their future development needs. The aim is to influence both theory and practice and has involved 12 months of fieldwork. This innovative programme is a partnership of six leading European universities in communication research and education located in Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and the UK. The ECOPSI programme is the largest European funded communication project and involves a working partnership with the EACD (European Association of Communications Directors).



What we did

The programme involves a Europe-wide situation analysis, summarised in the ECOPSI Benchmark report (Tench, Zeffass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Okay and Verčič, 2013) that includes primary data collected from communication practitioners across Europe. This data has been collected in two forms; (1) quantitatively, through an online survey of nearly 2,200 practitioners in 42 countries and (2)

qualitatively through a small number of focus groups and 53 individual interviews with communicators from four role groups: chief communications officers, crisis communicators, internal communicators and social media managers, across 6 geographically distinct regions of Europe. This booklet highlights the key findings from the online survey and the interviews.





NOS



Key findings from the survey

Analysis

The annual European Communication Monitor survey was used as the platform to test the hypotheses of the ECOPSI project which related to the education, skills and competencies of communications practitioners (Zerfass et al 2012).

The findings have been broken down into five sections for analysis and discussion: (1) Types of professional training and development in Europe; (2) Professionalisation and accreditation; (3) Understanding and responding to competency needs in Europe; (4) social media specialist competence; (5) The development of future professionals.

Types of professional training and development in Europe

As professional communicators are moving from mostly operational to more managerial, educational and

reflective levels, building competencies and skills is the next big challenge both for individuals and organisations (Tench et al, 2012; Sha, 2011; Jeffrey & Brunton, 2011). In a complex world, one would assume that communication professionals align their development with academic learning. But besides initial university education, communicators in Europe rely on professional associations and commercial training providers for further professional development. Moreover, current levels of knowledge and needs for further development are mostly evaluated through informal self-assessments: comparing oneself with colleagues and peers in other organisations is the most important method across all sectors (65%). Breaking out of this fallacious circle by consulting academic knowledge or using formal self-evaluation systems by organisations is only valued by 27% and 17% respectively (Chart 1).

Chart 1:
How communication professionals evaluate knowledge and development needs

Most important means to self-assess knowledge and needs



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2012 / n = 2,185 PR professionals. Q14: Which of the following means do you use to identify the level of your professional knowledge and potential development needs? Please pick the three most important! Figure displays percentage of respondents who chose items as Top-3 issue.

What is interesting to see is that days spent on education and training are significantly longer in Southern and Eastern Europe than Western or Northern Europe: personal training lasting more than 15 days is planned by roughly 10% of Western and Northern Europeans with a median of 4 to 5 days but by 22% of Eastern Europeans and 27% of Southern Europeans (median: 6-10 days). Spain and Serbia spend the highest amounts of time on development activities, while France and the United Kingdom spend the least. Numbers, however, do not speak for themselves and there are several possible alternative explanations outlined below. Further research is needed to prove some of these explanations.

- The East and South have professionally much to catch-up and are therefore investing in education and training to do so;
- The intensity of work may vary in the East and South compared with the North West, so it is more practical to take time from one's organisation for several days on development;

- Payment packages are different and Westerners and Northerners get more in cash while Easterners and Southerners are compensated also through provisions for training;
- Inadequate basic academic education in the East and South demands more investment in staff training by employers; and
- Governments sometimes use education and training policies as a labour market tool.

Professionalisation and accreditation

Research has identified various drivers which foster or hinder achievements in the field (Chart 2). A large majority of the respondents state that a lack of understanding of communication practice within the top management (84%) and difficulties of the profession itself to prove the impact of communication activities on organisational goals (75%) are the main barriers for further professionalisation of the practice. The key challenges for European communication professionals are to explain the communication function to top management and to prove the value of communication for organisations.

Chart 2:

Professionalisation of communication: Explaining the function to top management and proving value for organisations are key challenges



Understanding and responding to competency needs

The survey revealed significant gaps between the development needs of communication professionals in Europe and the training opportunities currently offered by their organisations (Chart 3). The only field in which supply meets demand is traditional communication skills, i.e. written, oral and message production. The largest gap (almost 31%) is in management knowledge (current affairs, social and political trends, legal, ethical). This is particularly important as this is exactly the type of knowledge delivered at universities which communicators and their employers use the least for their development. Major gaps also exist in business knowledge (markets, products, competitors) and management skills (decision making, planning, organising, leading) with 22% each.

Interestingly, these are also the three areas where most participants report a need for personal development. The areas are consistently top rated even among practitioners with more than ten years of experience which indicates that on-the-job training is simply not enough, although for the majority of management capabilities mileage counts.

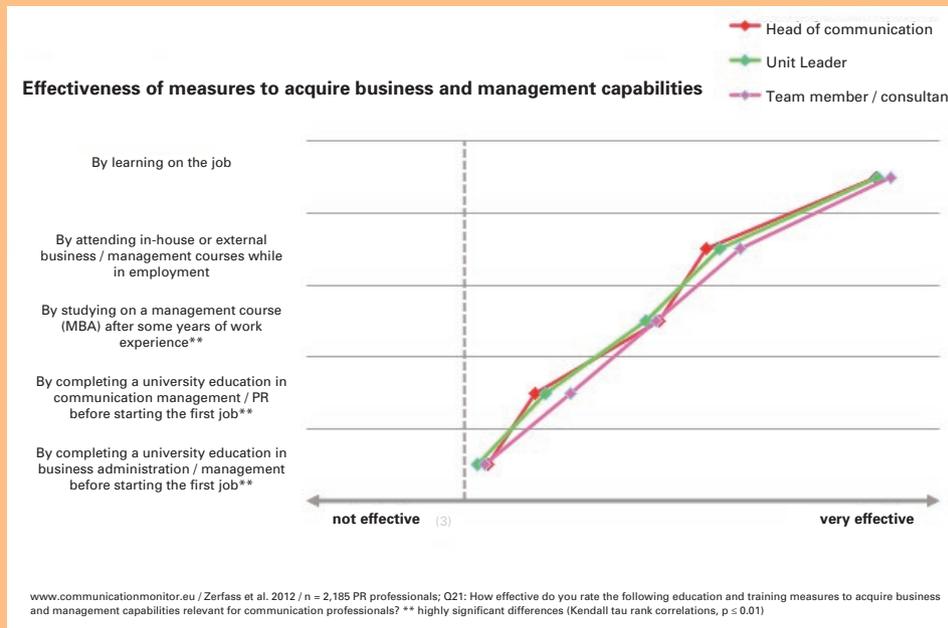
As expected, needs for development are the strongest in Eastern and Southern Europe, particularly for management skills, management and business knowledge. Perceived need for education and training is consistently the strongest in joint stock companies, except for communication skills where government communicators take the lead.

Chart 3: Relevance of competency fields for communication professionals

Skills and knowledge	... need to be developed	...training offered / facilitated in own organisation	Gap between need and offering
Management skills (decision making, planning, organising, leading, human resources, self management)	45.8%	23.7%	-22.1%
Management knowledge (current affairs, social and political trends, legal, ethical)	42.2%	11.7%	-30.6%
Business knowledge (markets, products, competitors)	38.5%	16.2%	-22.3%
Business skills (dealing with budgets, invoices, contracts, taxation)	32.8%	17.0%	-15.8%
Communication knowledge (theory and principles, e. g. audiences, program development, campaigning, evaluation etc.)	27.4%	10.6%	-16.7%
Communication skills (written, oral, message production)	18.6%	19.4%	+1.4%

www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2012 / n^{thin} = 1,673 PR professionals working in communication departments. Q20: Thinking of yourself, your current capabilities and your future development, which of the following skills and knowledge areas do you believe are in need of developing? Does your organisation already offer training programmes in these fields? Scale 1 (no need to develop) - 5 (strong need to develop). Considered scale points 4-5.

Learning on the job is preferred by professionals on all hierarchical levels



From such a self-perception it is understandable that the respondents rate learning on the job as being the most effective way for gaining management capabilities relevant for communication professionals (86%), followed by attending in-house or external business/management courses while in employment (67%, see Chart 4). However, less prevalent capabilities like establishing structures and processes, managing financial resources and controlling are usually not part of these approaches to further development. Those aspects might be trained when taking an MBA after some years of work experience or completing a university education in communication management before starting the first job, two options which are favoured by 59% and 44% of the respondents. Studying business administration before starting the job is an option recommended by only one third of the professionals.

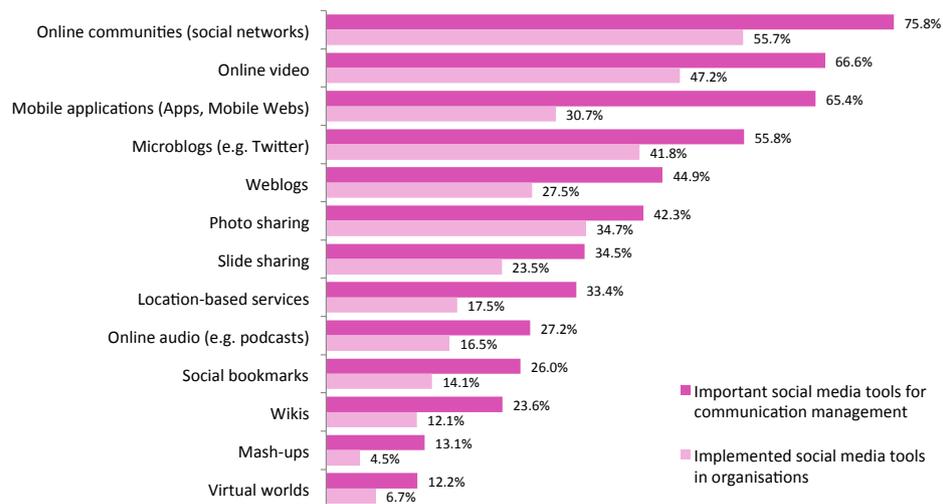
However, there are significant differences between countries regarding the support for different education measures. The United Kingdom values any kind of academic education in communication or management the least. Spain rates an academic education in communication and Serbia an academic education in management higher than any other country. In general, it can be concluded that academic education and expectations of communication professionals regarding management, business and communication qualifications are not matched and that this is a serious problem for both sides to address: i.e. for academia to (re)claim relevance and professionals to get access to the type of knowledge they need.

Social media specialist competence

The survey reveals a large gap between the perceived importance of social media tools for communication and the actual rate of implementation in European organisations (see Chart 5). Most obviously, mobile applications have entered the top three ranks of important social media platforms, but at the same time the backlog of implementation is higher than in any other field.

European communication professionals consider online communities or social networks as by far the most important social media tools available. With more than 75% support by respondents, it is leading the list of important social media tools. Online communities are followed by online videos ranking second in importance (67%), mobile applications like apps and mobile webs (67%), micro blogs (e.g. Twitter) ranking fourth (56%) and weblogs ranking fifth (45%). However, less than 56% of the communication departments actually use online communities in their communication, a gap of more than 20% compared to the importance this tool is given by the practitioners. The biggest difference between importance (65%) and implementation (31%) is found for mobile applications, a gap of almost 35%. A cross-matrix analysis shows that mobile applications, weblogs and photo sharing are considered the most important opportunities in social media communication. Surprisingly communication practitioners have overestimated the growth of social media use by their organisations. In 2011 they predicted a bigger increase in importance than was actually recorded that year.

Chart 5:
Social media tools in communication management: Importance and implementation in European organisations



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2012 / n = 1,925 PR professionals. Q10: Can you indicate the level of importance today for communication management (in general) of the following tools? / Q11: To what extent has your organisation implemented these instruments in its daily communication activities? Scale 1 (not important / not used at all) - 5 (very important / used significantly). Considered scale points 4-5.

So what does this context of change mean for practitioners and their skills and competency development? Quite logically, digital skills increase when the age of the professionals questioned decreases. Younger professionals report higher personal skills in using online and similar technology than their older colleagues (Chart 6). Reported digital skills also differ according to the area professionals are working in. Professionals working in overall communication, international and public affairs, media relations and marketing communications score lower than professionals working in strategy, internal communication and of course online communication.

Despite the unsatisfactory level of digital skills, only every second respondent thinks that training is useful (Chart 7 on page 16). Informal approaches to enhance those skills are clearly favoured. Eight out of ten European professionals think that the best way to learn about online tools is to use them as part of the regular work as well as privately. These two ways of learning are by far the most popular among communication practitioners.

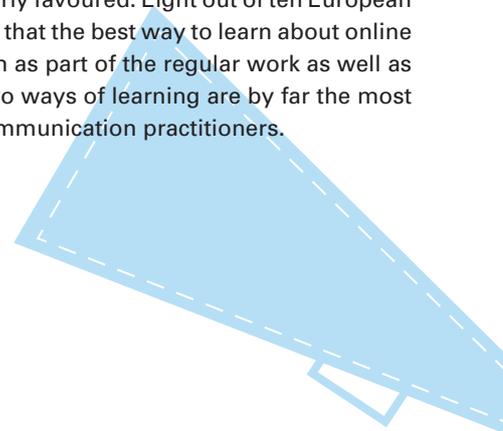


Chart 6:
Young professionals are more competent in the digital world

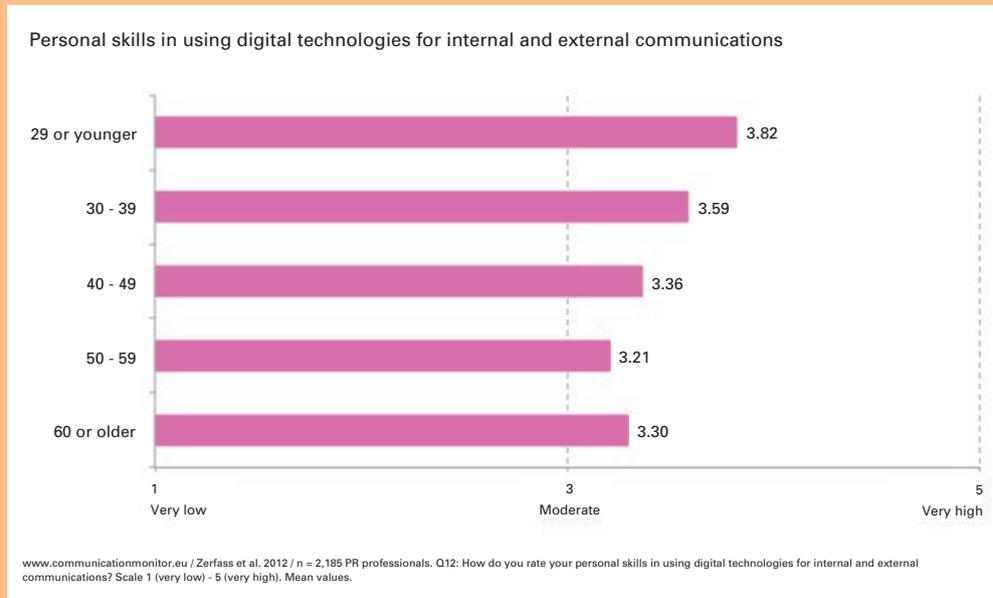
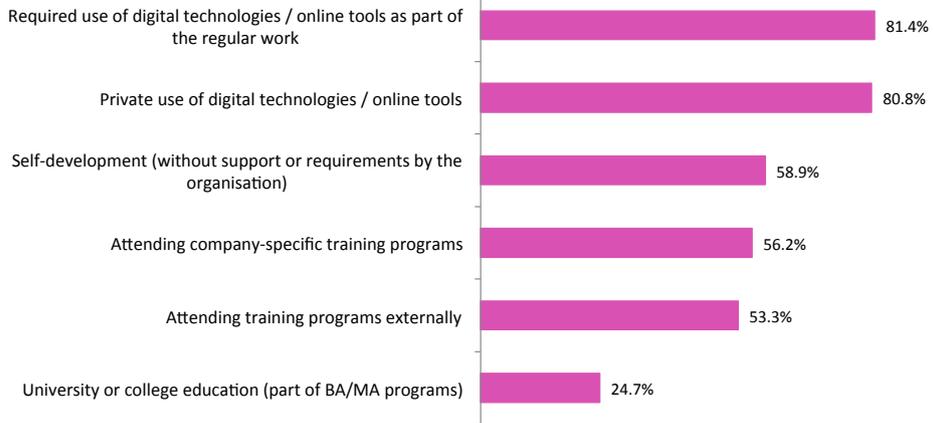


Chart 7:

Informal approaches to enhance digital skills are clearly favoured by professionals; only every second respondent thinks that more formal training is useful

Suitable ways to learn online skills for communication practitioners



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2012 / n = 1,925 PR professionals. Q13: In your opinion, what is the best way that communication practitioners learn how to use technologies? Scale 1 (not useful) - 5 (very useful). Considered scale points 4-5.

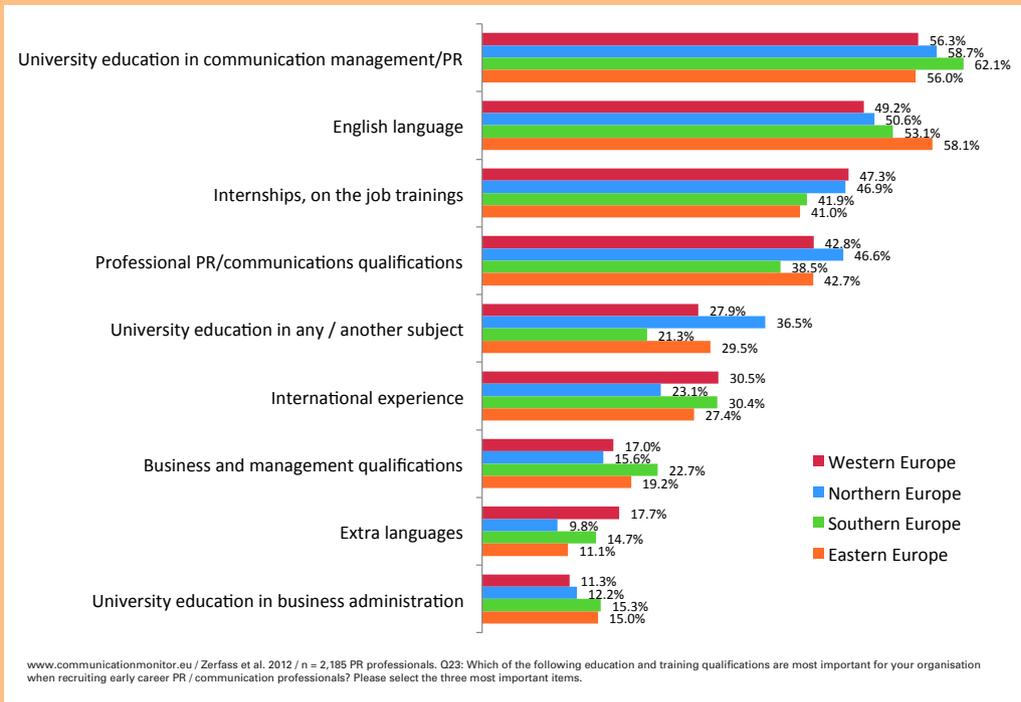
The development of future professionals

It is clear from the findings that strategic communication is a professionalising occupation. For example, university level education in communication management or public relations has been the most important qualification in Europe (Chart 8 on page 17). University education is most valued in Southern Europe (62%), followed by Northern Europe (59%), Western Europe (56%) and Eastern Europe (56%).

There are interesting differences in selection processes for young professionals between different countries. In the United Kingdom, university education in public relations is rated only half as important as the European average (30% versus 59%). There are several possible explanations

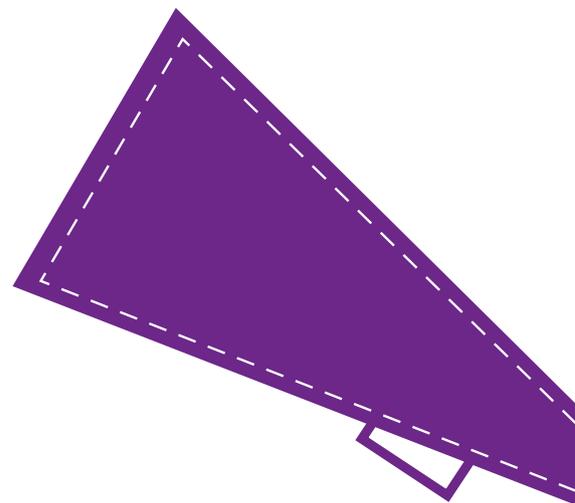
for such a situation: public relations may be perceived in the UK as not having any disciplinary foundation and studying it at the university level is less valuable than other subjects. Another possibility is that some practitioners in the UK continue to prefer generic graduates open to on-the-job training, or they are displaying in built prejudices in that they did not go through such an educational programme. These findings contradict public relations graduate first destination statistics which show an annual 97% employment rate. This suggests potential dissonance between what the practitioners say and do in terms of recruitment of graduates.

Qualifications are valued differently in European regions



Practitioners in Germany and Switzerland are also below the average in valuing university education in communication management and place the highest importance on internships and on the job training, probably reflecting a deep respect towards vocational education in these countries. Professional communication qualifications in PR are most valued in the Netherlands (57%) and international experience in Italy (44%).

These differences in preferences reveal differences in educational and occupational traditions and present a great challenge to attempts for greater mobility in occupations across Europe – here in the case of strategic communication. By contrast, university level education in the field is highly valued in Norway (79%), Spain (77%), Sweden (74%) and the Netherlands (73%).



Key findings from interviews

Analysis

In depth interviews with practitioners were held to evaluate the components of knowledge, skills (hard and soft) and personal attributes that go to make up the competencies for the four defined communication roles in the ECOPSI Communication Role Matrix (Table 1 on page 20).

The interviews were also an opportunity to:

- Understand how to support the acquisition and development of knowledge and skills relating to management and business;
- Probe on specifics about the future competence of communication practitioners in the areas of cross-cultural and new media competencies

Profile of interviewees

Chief Communication Officers (CCO)

- All had line management responsibility
- Varied team size (3-150)
- Reported to Board/CEO
- All German CCO with PhD
- Spain CCO with MA or MBA

Social Media Managers

- In post 6 months to 3 years
- Quarter work on their own
- Small teams (Average 3, Largest 12)
- Report to CCO or Marketing department
- Multiple postgraduate qualifications

Internal Communication Managers

- In post 3 years or less, but with company longer
- Quarter with no line management responsibility
- Varied team size (1-60)
- Report to various departments such as HR, Communications, Marketing, Employee Relations
- Small number with postgraduate qualifications

Crisis Communication Managers

- Small teams (Average 6)
- Report to Board or senior management team
- A number had consultancy backgrounds

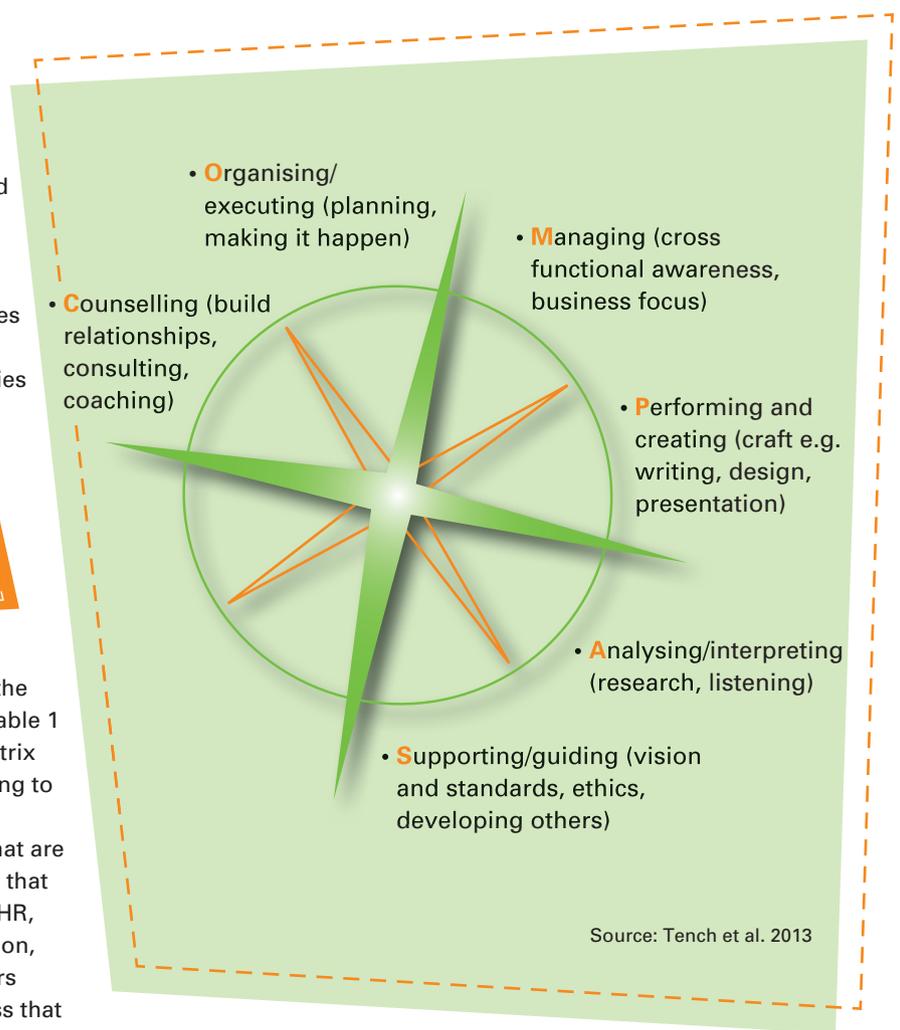
Communication role matrix

The ECOPSI Communication Role Matrix outlines (see Table 1 on page 20) the competencies required for the four defined communication roles that are the focus of this study and was developed from the literature. The matrix lists the knowledge, skills (hard and soft) and personal attributes needed for these roles. The acronym **COMPAS** is used to define the competencies in the Communication Role Matrix and stands for:



Interviewees described their thoughts on the matrix during this data collection stage (Table 1 on page 20). The Communication Role Matrix was largely viewed with positivity in helping to capture what it is that a communications professional does and the requirements that are necessary to perform in the role. It is clear that there are a number of audiences, such as HR, potential students of PR and Communication, new recruits to the profession, practitioners themselves and other areas of the business that can potentially benefit from the diagnostic tool (see www.p4ace.eu).

There was however, also criticism regarding the comprehensiveness of the matrix, with some interviewees feeling that this reduced its value to that of an exhaustive and repetitive list, too general to pick up the particular nuances of their specific role. Other more isolated comments questioned where certain knowledge and skills had been placed within the matrix and the ability of the matrix to capture progression and levels of seniority



within their particular role. However, despite these criticisms there was much positivity towards the matrix in terms of its usefulness in helping to capture what it is that a communications professional actually does and the requirements that are necessary to perform in the role.

Table 1: ECOPSI communication role matrix

COMPETENCY	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS		PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	
		HARD	SOFT (Human and Conceptual)		
C ounselling (build relationships, consulting, coaching)	Languages Intercultural theory and issues Learning curves of co-workers Personality profiles	Diversity Consulting Consensus building Negotiation	Team building Conflict resolution Persuasive communication Motivation	Empathy Trustworthiness Team minded (worker) Negotiation Sympathetic Political intuition Authenticity Integrity Patience/tolerance	Participative Sociable Authority Calmness Self-criticism Responsiveness Self awareness Humour
O rganising/executing (planning, making it happen)	Corporate strategy Financial systems Planning systems Project management	Writing Strategy Planning Project management Time management Administration Organisational skills Creativity with budgets	Strategic thinking Planning Decision making	Composure Energy Competitive Leadership Enthusiasm Perseverance/resilience	Self-reliance Multi-tasking Proactivity Agility/Flexibility Results orientation
M anaging (cross functional awareness, business focus)	Management Economics Branding Law Knowledge about own organisation Business systems General knowledge Risk management Stakeholder management Public affairs/political dynamics Change management Language of the Board Understanding of own business model	Mapping (organisational network systems) Leadership	Negotiation Influencing Delegating Managing people Sense of timing (when to communicate)	Confidence Global and strategic vision Diplomacy Experience Courage Daring/Risk Taking (and being willing to fail and learn from this) Stress resistance Adaptability	

Table 1: ECOPSI communication role matrix (continued)

COMPETENCY	KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS		PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES
		HARD	SOFT (Human and Conceptual)	
<p>Performing and creating (craft e.g. writing, design, presentation)</p>	<p>New technologies Communication processes Web 2.0 tools and effects on organisational communication Media systems and structures Intercultural aspects of communication messages and products Global media environment</p>	<p>Writing Editing Design skills Computer writing skills Multi media skills Visioning Verbal coherence/ concision</p>	<p>Communication Presentation Creative problem solving Story telling</p>	<p>Communicative Entrepreneurial Polyvalence/supporting diverse and differing perceptions Initiative Lifelong learner Innovative and creative Enquiring Openness Pioneering</p>
<p>Analysing/interpreting (research, listening)</p>	<p>Research and analysis methods Human Resources (HR) policies and links to communication Prediction/forecasting Monitoring tools Web monitoring tools Listening, understanding and interpreting trends, linking them to business strategies Recognising trends</p>	<p>Critical thinking Reading comprehension Research Social environmental analysis</p>	<p>Forecasting Listening</p>	<p>Curiosity Questioning Good judgement Strong instincts</p>
<p>Supporting/guiding (vision and standards, ethics, developing others)</p>	<p>Corporate governance Ethics/ethical frameworks Legal issues</p>		<p>Visioning</p>	<p>Ethical and socially responsible Authority Integrity Honesty Influence Reputation Sincerity Objectivity Sensitivity/humanity</p>

Interviewees were asked to identify from the Communication Role Matrix (or to add it to it) the three most important knowledge, skills and personal attributes needed for their roles. The findings are outlined in the next sections.

Knowledge

The three most important knowledge areas across the four defined roles are outlined in table 2. The items are ranked in order of most frequently cited.

Most interviewees stated that they had acquired the most important knowledge areas for their role on-the-job, in either their current or previous roles. This would appear

to be logical given the business/company specific nature of the three most important knowledge areas. Learning by doing (the job) was perceived as very important and for some the only true way to gain and develop applied knowledge. This knowledge was not, however, acquired in isolation. The support of colleagues, role models, bosses and formal and informal mentors whilst on-the-job was also acknowledged and, to a lesser extent, the importance of belonging to relevant networks and forums. Both senior and younger colleagues were acknowledged, (particularly those that were perceived as more Internet savvy). Involvement in cross team projects was another way in which knowledge had been acquired.

Table 2: The top knowledge areas via Role

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER	CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGER	INTERNAL COMMUNICATION MANAGER	SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER
Knowledge about organisation	Knowledge about organisation	Knowledge about organisation	Knowledge about organisation
Listening, understanding and interpreting trends, linking them to business strategies	Listening, understanding and interpreting trends, linking them to business strategies	Listening, understanding and interpreting trends, linking them to business strategies	Listening, understanding and interpreting trends, linking them to business strategies
Project management	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy	Corporate strategy
Communication processes	Project management	Human Resource (HR) policies and links to communication	Web 2.0 tools and effects on organisational communication
	Web 2.0 tools and effects on organisational communication		Web monitoring tools

For those that listed other knowledge areas as the most important such as Project management or Communication processes, the contribution of in-house and external training was highlighted, along with more formal education such as undergraduate and postgraduate/MBA programmes. Some companies had extensive internal training programmes or Internal Academies that some interviewees had clearly valued and utilised; others had

not had access to these training resources and highlighted the role of self-study. Social Media Managers emphasised that they had developed their Web 2.0 or Web monitoring knowledge largely through self-study using the Internet and Blogs because this was the most up-to-date source of knowledge. Self-study in other knowledge areas was through more traditional channels such as books and publications.

For those that pointed to the contribution of previous roles to their acquisition of knowledge, previous agency and consultancy experience was perceived as being particularly valuable. Experience in similar roles to those currently being performed was also seen as important.

The majority of interviewees also needed to learn specific areas of knowledge for their current role in order to be successful. The most popular responses included areas of knowledge specific to the nature of the company or business they were working for. This included knowledge about the sector, details of company products, internal processes/procedures, understanding of how the business makes money or business strategy. Negotiating, Knowledge of managing senior members of staff and Coaching were all other areas of knowledge that were mentioned. Additional knowledge areas were Project management, Web 2.0, New technologies, Corporate publishing, Political affairs, Investor relations, Financial aspects and Legal issues.

Skills

Responses to the request to select from the matrix to identify the three most important skills for their role reflect a wealth of diversity both across and within roles. The most agreement as represented by the frequency of interviewees mentioning the same skills was found within the role of Crisis Managers (Table 3).

Table 3:
The top skills needed for crisis communication managers

CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGER
Leadership
Critical thinking
Organisational Skills
Strategic thinking

There was much less consensus in the frequency of responses across the other roles, but for CCO's Strategic thinking was by far the most popular response. For Internal Communications Managers Listening was the most agreed upon skill and for Social Media Managers, Planning and Multi-media skills were viewed as important. Two interviewees (Internal Communications Manager and CCO) quoted Storytelling as one of the most important skills and both had just attended 'good' courses to develop their knowledge and application of this skill.

The acquisition and development of the skills most important for role holders was achieved in a number of different ways and through a variety of different channels. University and high school were more frequently credited with attribution than they were in the accumulation of knowledge. On-the-job experience in current and previous roles and self-study using books and online resources was also seen by many as key ways to develop skills. Mentors, role models, previous and current bosses (either through their observation of handling certain situations or through more formal or informal coaching activity) and exchange with colleagues and membership of professional associations (such as Melcrum) were also valued. A number of interviewees also mentioned their family as influential in their development of certain skills necessary for their role (negotiation, motivation). Internal and external courses were less frequently mentioned than in the area of knowledge development but several interviewees acknowledged the value of management or leadership training to help develop their skills in this area.

The majority of interviews also learned new skills for their roles. The most frequently mentioned of these were Negotiation and Delegation perhaps reflective of a change in status from worker to manager/leader. CCOs said that they had not had to learn any specific skills and a couple of them qualified this by saying that you do not get to the position of CCO without already having the skills necessary to do the job.

Personal attributes

Opinion varied among respondents as to whether personal attributes are something that training and development can help to improve. Most were of the opinion that some of them can but that others are inherent in a person's character, intuitive or instilled into them through upbringing. If respondents did feel that personal attributes could be improved or developed there was an understanding that this can take hard work and concerted effort. Personal motivation to change, learn and develop was said to be important, as was the ability for self-reflection and to know your own weaknesses. Mentorship and coaching were thought to be particularly

effective ways of improving certain personal attributes, as was experience. Development through training was a less common response.

When interviewees were asked to identify the three most important personal attributes for their role, the responses reflected a variety of items (Table 4). CCO's demonstrated the greatest spread in their answers, so much so that only Integrity and Daring/Risk taking featured more than twice across all 14 interviews. Crisis Communication Managers responses showed the most consensus with Trustworthiness being mentioned by nearly half of all those interviewed.

Table 4: Top personal attributes via role

CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER	CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGER	INTERNAL COMMUNICATION MANAGER	SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER
Integrity	Trustworthiness	Empathy	Curiosity
Daring/Risk Taking	Empathy	Courage	Empathy
*(Empathy; Results orientation; Lifelong learner; Authenticity; Innovative and creative)	Multi-tasking	Curiosity	Daring/Risk Taking

* A selection of the responses mentioned by 2 interviewees (at the most).

Key Trends

The interviews identified 5 emerging trends that are relevant for European Communication professionals.

- Issue 1: Jumping on the social media bandwagon with a strategic purpose
- Issue 2: Impact of cross-cultural competency on businesses
- Issue 3: Managing high volumes of information
- Issue 4: Working with new media forms
- Issue 5: Achilles' heel in management and business qualifications

Issue 2: Impact of cross-cultural competency on businesses

Some academic research suggests that the modern practitioner should maintain an understanding of culture in a variety of different settings (Hatzios 2006; Toth and Aldoory 2010) while other research suggests that cross-cultural competency is not as important as other competencies (Zerfass et al, 2007- 2012). Our research wanted to get a deeper understanding on this debate. The majority of practitioners agreed that cross-cultural competency is an increasingly important skill. A minority of practitioners were keen to add that in their current role this skill was not important because the concentration of their particular organization is based wholly on the domestic market. This is the case for Gülaçar who works with a gas distribution company in Turkey as a Corporate Communication Managers. She said...

“ Yes, cross-cultural competency is crucial, but not for me currently since her company is a 100 per cent Turkish organisation. ”

The interviews shed light on different cultural aspects of the regions taking part in the study and their impact upon the communication profession. In The Netherlands interviewees observed a broad range of stakeholders involved in communications and that vague hierarchies within and across organisations can mean that delegation is difficult. The Dutch are also perceived to be direct in their communication which can mean that they need help in learning how to give constructive feedback. In Slovenia it was observed that professionals may need help with visioning because there has been a lack of planning for the longer term. In Spain weakness in performing presentations, said to stem from deficits in primary education, highlights a skill that needs to be strengthened along with time-management, where it is felt that a lot can be learned from consultants or taught courses. Strengths in creativity and problem solving are believed to represent valuable skills of Spanish communication professionals along with high penetration and use of social media.

The interviews also revealed that cross-cultural competency is used in a wide variety of settings within the workplace. The importance of localizing a global message in order to reach certain markets and audiences, whilst remaining true to the authenticity and heritage of the organization, was one way in which the need for this skill was said to be emerging; another, was through the desire for diversity within and across teams, in order to make them more reflective, effective and motivated. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to respond to new contexts was also explained (particularly by Internal Communications Managers) through the need to adapt to, and interpret, increasing rates of organizational and cultural change as well as wider sector or societal change.

A number of ways were suggested to develop this skill. A popular means was through a prolonged stay of working abroad to gain international experience, perhaps through an exchange or secondment programme, in order to gain hands-on practical knowledge and skills from working in another country and context. Observing others and mentorship would also be helpful in strengthening skills in this area. A number of the practitioners had, in current or previous roles, undertaken in-house training in cross-cultural issues that were found to be helpful. Others felt that training for this skill should be incorporated into formal undergraduate and postgraduate PR and communication education as well as in MBA qualifications because they did not feel that this was adequately covered in the current curriculum.

Issue 3: Managing high volumes of information

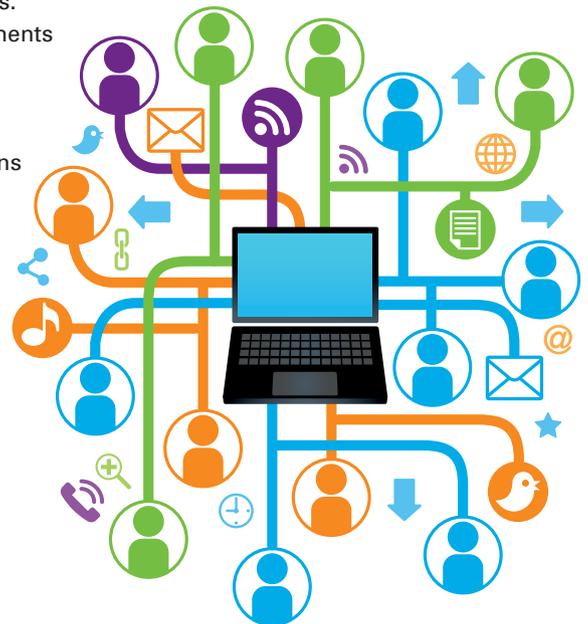
We live in a high-tech information age where we are constantly bombarded with information. Those companies and employees who can make sense of this explosion of data and apply the findings to create innovative solutions that meet the needs of their individual stakeholders will now have a competitive advantage in the market. Against this backdrop, future practitioners will need a variety of skills and knowledge in their toolbox to be successful in the workplace. With information being available on a multitude of platforms, practitioners will need to check facts as well as critically assess and filter information. Bert who works as Vice-President of Communications for Shell in the Netherlands supports the above points and believes that...

“Employees will also stand out and be successful if they are able to tweeze out the relevant information from a society that is overloaded with information.”

He encourages... “future practitioners to find the right format to present the information.”

Companies now face a new array of empowered stakeholders who can easily rally around a common goal through the use of digital platforms. Practitioners will need skills in analysis, monitoring, being quick to read and respond and knowing when and when not to act. It was also felt that general commercial acumen would be needed along with a good foundation in communications.

Some practitioners felt that there might need to be amendments and additions to the current curriculum of formal taught PR and communication courses to make sure that these skills needs were met. The importance of on-the-job experience was again reiterated as well as the view that communications professionals will need to continue to work hard with the business to help organizations acknowledge and realize the benefits of the communications function.



Issue 4: Working with new media forms

An emerging trend is the growing importance of working as a member of a virtual team which brings both opportunities and threats. Some are of the school of thought that since the speed of communication is increasing it is important to assess and interpret content faster as well as be able to react immediately to information that affects your company. As a result, the importance of virtual teams will increase since they are faster and more flexible. Uwe who works in Daimler AG in Germany said...

“ In the future there will be no time to wait until every team member can find a timeslot in his/her calendar. ”

Others fear that it can erode interpersonal skills and that technology should not be seen as a replacement of face-to-face interaction. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the current technology to facilitate virtual teams was not up to standard. Improvements in both the capacity and guidance in the strategic application of such platforms, programmes and equipment would be helpful in supporting virtual teams in the future. Internal training, mentorship and working in project teams would also help to strengthen skills and knowledge in this area.



Issue 5: Achilles' heel in management and business qualifications

Our study confirmed the existence of a potential gap for communication professionals between the acquisition and development of knowledge and skills relating to management and business. Nearly all interviewees agreed that there was a gap, although some qualified that this did not relate to them (or to their colleagues) but to professionals working at a lower level. For some this disconnect stemmed from a need for communications departments to work more closely and engage more fully with other areas of the business. Tamara who works with a mobile telecommunications company in Slovenia believes the responsibility lies of the individual. She believes...

“ If you are not intrinsically interested or if you do not read relevant publications on the Internet such as the Harvard Business Review or do not ask colleagues from other disciplines then nobody can help you. ”

She continued to say that was not ashamed to ask for help when she did not understand something such as the definition of a key performance indicator. Mentorship was seen as an important way of knowledge transfer that had the advantage of being both on-the-job and set within the context of the business. Participation in cross team projects could also help. Internal and external courses were felt to be useful with a number of interviewees having recently completed 'finance for non-financial managers' courses. It was also pointed out how job rotation, secondment and sharing knowledge within professional networks might also build up and develop this knowledge.

For others the gap was perceived to stem from failures in the formal education of communication professionals to incorporate this area into current undergraduate PR and communication qualifications, or because significant numbers of employees come to the Communications profession from a wide variety of non-business backgrounds such as journalism (Spain) or the social sciences (Germany).

Some felt that this gap could be filled effectively by studying at post-graduate level for an MA or MBA qualification, although there was also criticism of the suitability of such courses for working professionals. Other professional courses (such as the CIPR) were also mentioned but again only to point out their deficiencies in plugging this knowledge gap. One interviewee from the UK had indeed opted to pursue another professional qualification (Institute of Directors) because they believed this to offer better grounding in business and financial issues.

Other areas of weakness included finance, economics, human resource management and legal issues, as well as risk management, political affairs, psychology and the management of others.



So where does this leave us? The future

The ECOPSI programme significantly expands knowledge about the current competencies of communication professionals in Europe as well as understanding of their future needs. A number of headline discussion points emerged from the study namely:

There is little organized life-long learning or evidence of recognized CPD pathways and the value of formal undergraduate and postgraduate education is questioned. The profession needs to challenge both what Communication and PR education currently consists of and how it is delivered.

Social Media knowledge may be an acknowledged weakness that people feel they need to improve in, but this does not mean that most practitioners want or need practical skills or training in this area. What the majority feels they need is greater understanding of its strategic application. There was significant evidence of intergenerational team working with valued contribution from younger members deemed more technology savvy.

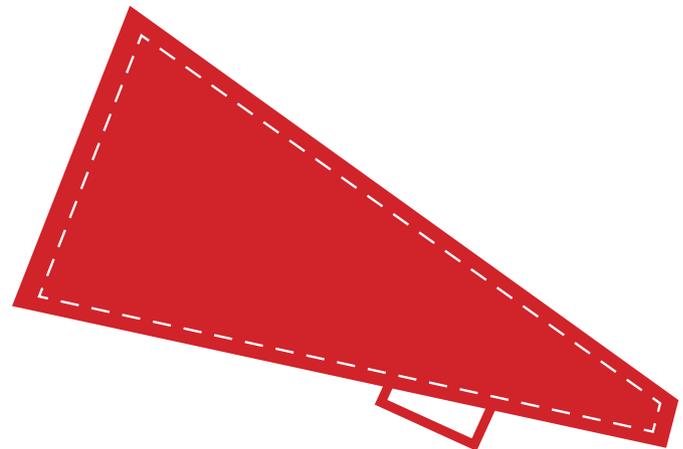
The industry needs to look closely at how it can foster intercultural relationships and cross-cultural working by setting up accredited and recognised programmes of exchange/secondment/internship with different companies in different countries. Existing student exchange programmes, such as Erasmus were found to be held in particularly high regard.

Models of coaching and mentoring within the sector need to be devised and shared in an attempt to offer more formal, organised and supported career development that is on-the-job and in-situ. This could involve internal and external schemes, which again could be certified or accredited by a professional association or body.

The value of observing others and learning from them is noted. Networks and Forums are a recognized support for practitioners at senior and lower levels but there may well be a gap in the middle ranks where professionals are more guarded of sharing knowledge, experience and weaknesses.

There is evidence of an emerging future need to be a 'generalist communications specialist'.

From the findings it is evident there are synergies in the understanding and interpretation of the four roles studied within the 53 interviews carried out across the six regions, despite an emerging future need to be a 'generalist communications specialist'. This suggests and supports the hypothesis that public relations and communication is a maturing discipline in the European context with many shared experiences. Despite this development for the practice there are on-going gaps and deficiencies in the development of the individuals as well as broad variation in how practitioners identify needs and access appropriate interventions.



Understanding our shortcomings

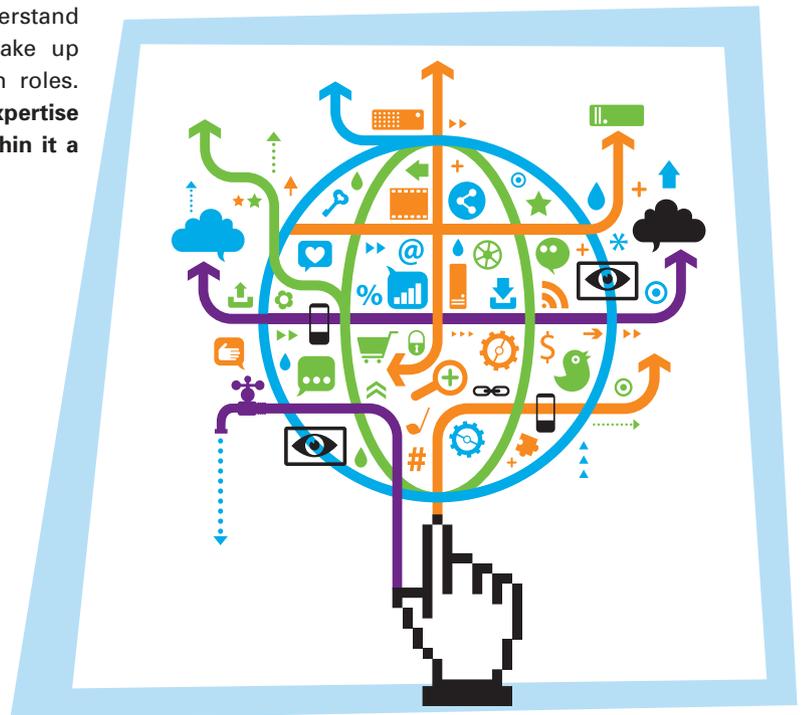
What does this research and its detailed findings mean for practice? It clearly suggests there are numerous opportunities for deeper and on-going professional training and development to build this consistency and support the practice in moving away from a hands-on, learning on-the-job approach to knowledge acquisition and development. Formal in-house coaching and mentoring and recognized training for both internal and external coaches may have a significant part to play, together with committed involvement in networks for communications professionals and knowledge exchange activity.

To support the process, the ECOPSI programme has produced a series of support facilities and tools that all communications practitioners can access for free.

- (1) Firstly, a Portal of resources to support continuing professional development, including directions of where to go to learn, study and further understand the skills, knowledge and attributes that make up the competencies for various communication roles. **The Portal (for) Advancing Communication Expertise (p4ace, available at www.p4ace.eu) - and within it a p4ace diagnostic tool for practitioners.**



- (2) Secondly, an opportunity to join an ECOPSI network of practitioners across Europe who have engaged in this project and also want to continue monitoring and evaluating their career progress and development as well as to network and buddy with peers.
- (3) And finally, a unique, free self-diagnostic tool (see www.p4ace.eu). This comprehensive tool uses the findings of communication practitioner roles across Europe to develop the tool which enables practitioners to evaluate first their perception of the role against their peers on a range of attributes and then to self evaluate their own capabilities on each measurement. This allows the individual then to benchmark themselves against their peers and see how they can further develop their abilities. The tool provides each participant with an attractive, visual competency inventory and a report. **To find out more visit the website at www.p4ace.eu.**



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