

Research Brief Series

BEYOND TACTICS THE STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNICATION

Global Research Report

The Next Level

The Business Value of Good Internal Communication

August 2019



The report The Next Level, produced by IC Kollektif, examines the value and practice of internal communication (IC) from many angles around one central theme: the business value of good internal communication. This publication is part of a series on topics addressed in the 164-page global report. This brief presents the Global Capability Framework developed by the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management with academics and professional organizations. The following was written by Anne Gregory, PhD, Chair in Corporate Communication, University of Huddersfield, UK, and originally published in the report. The full global report is available at ickollektif.com/report.

If Only They Understood Us

We live in an increasingly VUCA world – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. First used by the American military to describe the extreme conditions encountered in Afghanistan, it is now applied more generally to the environment in which we all live.

Volatility means that the speed of change is increasing and its dynamic causes great turbulence and disruption. Uncertainty refers to the fact that there is a lack of predictability and the prospects for surprise are greatly enhanced. Complexity describes the nature of issues; their inter-relatedness, the lack of obvious cause and effect and the levels of confusion that surround governments and organisations. Ambiguity means that it is more and more difficult to grasp reality; there is fuzziness and haze about facts and it is very easy to misread situations and conditions.

More recently a D has been added to VUCA. It's now a VUCAD world, with the D meaning Deceitful. There are now 'alternative facts,' we live in a post-truth age. Politicians and other leaders tell lies which both they and the people they are speaking to know are not true.

In the middle of all this, there is the communication professional. Their role is to try and make sense of the maelstrom going on around them, interpret it and bring a useful analysis into their organisations to allow senior managers to make informed decisions. Their role is also to provide trusted

advice to senior managers and other colleagues on how to engage both with their internal constituents and external stakeholders, so their organisation gains the support it needs to continue to survive and thrive. Maintaining the 'licence to operate' in this sea of complexity is the task at hand.

One of the things that really makes me angry is when people, sometimes within our own profession say that 'what we do is not rocket science'. It's absolutely true. What we do is far more difficult and sophisticated. Rockets are complicated, but given a





It is little wonder then that one of the most common complaints of communication professionals is “if they only understood what I could contribute, I wouldn’t be stuck with all this tactical stuff”. However, a big challenge for communicators is the elevator test – describe in a paragraph what our strategic contribution is. Often the response is to describe what we do (tactics) rather than what our contribution can be.

detailed manual and the right resources, it is possible for a non-specialist to build one. Communicators deal in VUCA, where the parameters are difficult to negotiate and the twists and turns of what might and does occur are as complex as the human minds that we engage with.

The communication profession is the living embodiment of complexity. Communication is complex, fluid and often misunderstood. It is a function, but it is also constitutive of organisations and organising in a way that other professions are not. It is perfectly possible for organisations to operate without buildings, money or products, but it is not possible for them to exist without communication.

It is little wonder then that one of the most common complaints of communication professionals is “if they only understood what I could contribute, I wouldn’t be stuck with all this tactical stuff”. However, a big challenge for communicators is the elevator test – describe in a paragraph what our strategic contribution is. Often the response is to describe what we *do* (tactics) rather than what our *contribution* can be.

In 2014 the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management (GA), the global confederation of professional bodies in the field, responded to a call from its members to develop a framework that described the *competencies* needed from practitioners working globally and in a complex environment. A key study was undertaken by the GA compiling a detailed Global Body of Knowledge (GBOK) which combined descriptions of public relations work from multiple sources and organised them into Knowledge, Skills, Attributes, and Behaviours (KSAB) required at junior, middle and senior levels of practice (Manley & Valin, 2017).

While this was welcomed by many as a move forward in helping to set boundaries for the profession, others in the GA-affiliated professional bodies found the lists too extensive, inflexible and culturally insensitive. Moreover, they described current and past tasks rather than anticipating developments in practice. In response, GA was further asked by its members to develop a Global Capability Framework, which would help to benchmark the *capabilities* needed by the profession worldwide.

The capability approach is different from the competency approach. *Competencies* tend to be extensive and build a picture of the profession from the bottom up, describing in great detail the knowledge, skills, and attributes needed by the practitioner and consider these in terms of what the *individual* possesses.

Capabilities build a picture of the *profession* in terms of the potential of the professionals who work within it. Capability frameworks recognise that the practice is different in various parts of the world and indeed, practitioners in the same country will choose different career paths and so different capabilities will be required and come to the fore depending on context. Capability frameworks have a limited number of statements that in total describe the work of the profession.

The Global Capability Framework was launched at the World Public Relations Forum in Oslo in April 2018. It was the combined work of academics in nine countries (Fawkes, J., Gregory, A., Falkheimer, J., Gutiérrez-García, E., Half, G., Rensburg, R., Sadi, G., Sevigny, A., Sison, M.D., Thurlow, A., Tsetsura, K., & Wolf, K. (2018)) working across six continents along with their professional associations. Together, they agreed that the capabilities listed on the next page represent the profession globally, although each had a slightly different set of capabilities which were unique to their own country settings.





Universally the framework stands as a set of statements that define the profession irrespective of the individual specialism of any practitioner (note there is no reference to marketing communication or internal communication), or what kind of organisation they work for or wherever they work in the world.

The framework (as shown on the next page) lists capabilities under three headings:

- those that describe the specific contribution of the functional specialism of communication (or public relations if this is the preferred term)
- those that describe communication's contribution to the organisation
- those that describe the nature of being a professional. This latter group might be seen to be in common with other professions such as accountancy or nursing

Each capability has a list of sub-capabilities, as shown on the following pages, and which can be accessed via the full report at hud.ac/ect.

The framework itself has been widely welcomed.

For individual practitioners, it means they can assess their capabilities and plot their professional development depending on their needs.

Employers can use the framework to map the capabilities of team members and undertake a gap analysis for both team development and recruitment.

Academics will use it to inform curriculum design.

Global Capability Framework



Communication Capabilities

- To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values
- To identify and address communication problems proactively
- To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics
- To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies.



Organisational Capabilities

- To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities
- To build and enhance organisational reputation
- To provide contextual intelligence.



Professional Capabilities

(those expected of any professional)

- To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor
- To offer organisational leadership
- To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and societal expectations
- To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning.



Capabilities that describe the specific contribution of the functional specialism of communication (or public relations if this is the preferred term)



Capabilities that describe communication's contribution to the organisation



Capabilities that describe the nature of being a professional. This latter group might be seen to be in common with other professions such as accountancy or nursing

Sub-capabilities are shown on the following pages. The full capability Framework can be accessed at hud.ac/ect.

Global Capability Framework

CAPABILITIES	SUB CAPABILITIES
To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values	<p>You set clear communication objectives that are aligned to organisational objectives and then see them through</p> <p>You act as an architect of communication plans, enacting the purpose, values and policies of the organisation</p> <p>You understand how communication can – and cannot – help an organisation realise its objectives</p>
To identify and address communication problems proactively	<p>You create short and long-term narratives to facilitate communication with multiple organisational stakeholders</p> <p>You identify opportunities to design organisational communication, and outline core content</p> <p>You develop integrated communication operations</p>
To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics	<p>You use research to listen to and understand situations before, during and after communication and relationship-building activities</p> <p>You manage research design, data collection and analysis to improve communication outcomes</p> <p>You establish evaluation systems to demonstrate the impact of communication</p>
To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies	<p>You have command of communication specialties, such as investor relations, and understand the optimum channels for specific stakeholders</p> <p>You communicate effectively across paid, earned, shared and owned (PESO) channels</p> <p>You have or can source strong written and visual skills to create and tell stories that engage and connect with diverse publics</p> <p>You synthesise complex concepts and convert them to simple, clear and relevant content</p>
To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities	<p>You identify, analyse and listen to stakeholders and their communication needs</p> <p>You develop stakeholder engagement strategies and partnerships that are mutually beneficial</p> <p>You communicate sensitively with stakeholders and communities across a range of cultural and other values and beliefs</p>

Global Capability Framework

CAPABILITIES	SUB CAPABILITIES
To build and enhance organisational reputation	<p>You identify, analyse and strategically advise on key issues and risks for the organisation</p> <p>You help the organisation to define and enact its purpose and values</p> <p>You help shape organisational culture and its processes</p> <p>You understand and manage key intangible assets (e.g. brand, culture, sustainability)</p>
To provide contextual intelligence	<p>You see the bigger picture - socially, culturally, politically, technologically and economically</p> <p>You identify strategic opportunities and threats, issues, and trends</p> <p>You operate in a connected world, demonstrating broad understanding of local and global diversity in culture, values, and beliefs</p>
To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor	<p>You combine a long-term perspective with the agility to manage crises</p> <p>You offer strategic counsel to executive management, particularly regarding the interests of multiple stakeholders</p> <p>You influence organisational decision-making and development</p> <p>You negotiate with empathy and respect for all parties</p>
To offer organisational leadership	<p>You are part of or have access to, the executive management team and help build internal alliances within the organisation</p> <p>You demonstrate communication leadership by encouraging management based on dialogue</p> <p>You demonstrate business and financial acumen through sound knowledge of the organisation's business and core processes</p>
To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and society's expectations	<p>You consider business objectives in the light of society's expectations</p> <p>You clarify the consequences of a proposed action on others, ensuring potential outcomes are understood by decision-makers</p> <p>You understand and apply ethical frameworks</p> <p>You recognise and observe the societal obligations of professional</p>
To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning	<p>You take responsibility for your own continuous professional development, through a range of activities including training and education</p> <p>You participate in industry events, represent the industry in public, and educate others on the role and value of public relations to employers and clients</p> <p>You are able to offer professional guidance which involves, motivates and contributes to personal and team development</p>

References

Fawkes, J., Gregory, A., Falkheimer, J., Gutiérrez-García, E., Halff, G., Rensburg, R., Sadi, G., Sevigny, A., Sison, M.D., Thurlow, A., Tsetsura, K., & Wolf, K. (2018). *A Global Capability Framework for the public relations and communication management profession*. Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management Research Report

Manley, D., & Valin, J. (2017). Laying the foundation for a global body of knowledge in public relations and communications management. *Public Relations Review*. 43(1), 56-70

About the report - *The Next Level* is the first publication of its kind bringing together C-suite leaders, in-house communication professionals/executives, and academics across all continents. Based on primary and secondary research, the report takes the conversation about internal communication to the strategic management level. Via solid insights, advice, frameworks and resources, *The Next Level* covers critical topics and issues dealing with today's challenges and future needs to truly help practitioners better position themselves as trusted counsellors and advisors and communicate on the same strategic level with senior management. Find out more and download the full global report at: ickollectif.com/report.

About the Research Brief series - 'Research Brief' is a publication series based on the findings of the global research report *The Next Level*. The series takes a step further as each edition puts a specific topic at the forefront, by consolidating critical information found on this subject in the 164-page report, in a clear and concise document. Each edition of the series is available at <https://www.ickollectif.com/next-level-research-brief>.

About IC Kollektiv - IC Kollektiv is an award-winning global organization dedicated to the strategic management of internal communication as a business function. The independent non-profit is based in Montreal and shares knowledge, insights and research from around the world on the practice of IC with people in more than 165 countries. For more information on IC Kollektiv, please see our website ickollectif.com.

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