The Communicative Organization

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Abstract

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A communicative organization always has communication on the agenda. The organization has a widespread understanding that communication is a prerequisite for an organization's existence, ability to reach goals, and success. A communication system that is both thorough and well-functioning is fundamental to the organization. Many different voices are valued and actively listened to in order for the organization to develop, adapt to change, and lead progress. Dialogue is valued as a means of achieving sufficient mutual understanding in order to act wisely. Managers and employees have communicative competence and take responsibility for communication. The organizational culture aligns with business objectives, and it acts as a support for the employees in their communicative assignments. The communication professionals are communication experts, external analysts, and the drivers of the organization's communicational development.

Seven steps towards becoming a communicative organization

1. Develop an understanding of communication.
2. Review value creation, goals, and measurement.
3. Reflect on the competencies, placements, and tasks of communication professionals.
4. Create an open communication climate that fosters trust.
5. Put management's communication on the map.
6. Help managers in their roles as sensemakers – modernize internal communication.
7. Support employees in their communicative tasks.

Foreword

"The communicative organization" is a unique research project, undertaken by researchers at the Institution for Strategic Communication at Lund University from 2014 to 2018. This project is unique in the large amount of empirical material upon which it is built. Until now there have been few research projects within strategic communications (and related areas such as public relations, corporate communication, and organizational communication) that are based on similar amounts of material. A study that is close in size is James Grunig et al.'s well-known Excellence study from the 1990's. The broad scope of the empirical material of this present study has made it possible to contribute to more nuanced knowledge of progress, shortcomings, and challenges in today's communicational work. The project is also unique in its analysis not only of communication professionals, but also of managers and employees, and their perceptions. Many previous studies within strategic communication have tended to focus solely on one group at a time.

This project has studied eleven Swedish companies and public organizations. The study comprises both a quantitative survey study (over 8,000 answers) and a qualitative interview study (approximately 170 people). Both private and public Swedish organizations were involved in the project:

- City of Gothenburg – municipality
- City of Helsingborg – municipality
- City of Malmö – municipality
- City of Stockholm – municipality
- Eon Sweden – International privately-owned energy supplier
- Ikea of Sweden – Develops and makes the IKEA furniture range available to stores and customers all over the world
- NCC Sweden – A leading construction and property development company
- PostNord – Offers communications and logistics solutions to, from and within the Nordic region (mail delivery)
- Region Västra Götaland – A County Administrative Board in western Sweden
- The County of Västernorrland – A County Administrative Board in the northern part of Sweden
- The Swedish Police

The aim of this project is to improve understanding of the importance of communication for reaching goals and attaining success in an organization. Another underlying aim is to contribute to new understanding of future demands and challenges of communication for communication professionals and organizations.

The main sponsors of the project are The Swedish Communication Association and The City of Helsingborg. The project has also been sponsored by the participating organizations. Agreements between the sponsors and Lund University grant the university ownership of all empirical material and independent design of the project. These agreements have been important in ensuring the independence and autonomy of the researchers in relation to the organizations that were studied. The model of research funding is unusual in social scientific research, although more common in the natural and medical sciences. We see this model for financing social scientific research as an important development in broadening the possibilities of conducting relevant research.

The project leader for the research project is Mats Heide at the Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University. The following researchers were involved in this project: Rickard Andersson, Jesper Falkheimer, Howard Nothhaft, Sara von Platen and Charlotte Simonsson. Rickard Andersson is a PhD student who will be defending his dissertation on communicative organizations in the summer of 2020.

We are very grateful for the sponsorship of this research project. We firmly believe that new knowledge of organizational communication and the communicator's profession is best developed in collaboration between researchers and professional communication professionals. In these meetings, creative thoughts, ideas, and solutions often arise that would otherwise not have been possible.

Helsingborg, February 2019
The authors

Introduction

This project has been based on the premise that it is difficult to demonstrate the value of communication and the work of communication professionals to the organizations for which they work. Communication professionals around the world often find that their contribution to the organization's operations is questioned. This can be awkward, as the effects of communication are often indirect and slow tomaterialize.[1] For example, measuring reputation or organizational culture, and clearly identifying communication as the most important factor, is difficult. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to measure and demonstrate the effects of communication.

The term communicative organization was first introduced in 2010 by Global Alliance, the world's largest network for communication professionals, as a way of raising the status of communication. The value of communication for organizations is the core of this project. Being able to demonstrate the value of communication is demanding; being able to show this value in quantitative or monetary terms is often expected. Nevertheless, research shows that senior management and managers in general understand that communication is important for the organization's success.[2] This is reaffirmed by our project.

Circulating our findings

One of the goals of this project is to circulate the findings and analyses of our study to members of The Swedish Communication Association and to employees of various organizations. The findings have been summarized in seven reports (in Swedish) that can be downloaded from The Swedish Communication Association's website:[3]

Report 1: A discussion of the term

Report 2: Communications climate: A critical operational resource

Report 3: Perceptions of communication and communication professionals in organizations

Report 4: Outlooks on leadership's, managers', and employees' communication

Report 5: The media's image – value creation and media representation

Report 6: Voices of the communicative organization

Report 7: Final report – The communicative organization

The results of this study have been discussed at conferences with the participating organizations, and have also been presented within these organizations. In 2018, the project's findings and conclusion were also presented at, among other things, breakfast seminars for members of The Swedish Communication Association.

During the project, we have also participated in and presented a number of papers at international research conferences. Interest shown by our international research colleagues has been considerable. The empirical material is extensive and we will continue to work with it and present new findings.

Up to now, our research has been published in four articles in the foremost scholarly journals of the field: *Corporate Communication: An International Journal, International Journal of Strategic Communication and Public Relations Review.* The following articles have been published:

- Falkheimer, J., Heide, M., Simonsson, C., Zerfass, A. & Verhoeven, P. (2016). Doing the right things or doing things right? Paradoxes and Swedish communication professionals' roles and challenges. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 21*(2), 142–159.

- Falkheimer, J., Heide, M., Nothhaft, H., von Platen, S., Simonsson, C. & Andersson, R. (2017). Is strategic communication too important to be left to communication professionals? Managers' and

coworkers' attitudes towards strategic communication and communication professionals? *Public Relations Review, 43*(1), 91–101.

- Heide, M., Simonsson, C., von Platen, S. & Falkheimer, J. (2018). Expanding the scope of strategic communication: Towards a holistic understanding of organizational complexity. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 12*(4), 452–468.

- Andersson, R. (2019). Employee communication responsibility: Its antecedents and implications for strategic communication management. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 13*(1), 60–75.

Objective of this report

The primary objective of this report is to provide a concise and easily understood summary of our most important findings and conclusions. We have experienced a strong desire from managers, employees, and communication professionals for researchers to develop simple models or tools that can help them to quickly solve problems and move forward.

While we are, of course, sensitive to the need for quick, concrete solutions, it is unfortunately not so easy to quickly change the position of communication professionals in organizations. This is also why we do not believe in quick and easy changes: instead, we believe in *long-term changes made in small steps*. Very often, changing the way that managers and employees view communication is the necessary change, and this is a process that takes time. Also, we do not believe in simple standard solutions and "recipes" as they tend not to work in organizations that are complex, ever-changing, and characterized by their own specific contexts.

In this report, we describe the factors that we consider important for organizations that strive to be communicative. We also focus on the challenges of organizations' communication and try to present the most realistic picture possible. Obviously, a great deal of creativity is needed to bring about changes in organizations. The American philosopher Jerome Bruner describes creativity as "figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you currently think."[4] With this report, we hope to inspire all smart communication professionals to be creative in ways that can improve strategic communication.

The Communica-tive Organization

Researchers have criticized communication professionals for being stuck in an outdated concept of communication that emphasizes media, content, and the dissemination of information. This concept of communication contributes significantly to preventing strategic communication becoming a critical part of the organization's core business. This outdated concept of communication is also governed by a media logic which prevents communication professionals from becoming strategic actors in the organization. Communication professionals need to be more eager to help put a communications perspective on processes, strategies, decisions, documents, and so on.

Rather than trying to simplify and reduce communication to a question of content, messages, and media, communication professionals should complexify communication and their own role and meaning in the organization. The relationship between communication and the organization can be understood as abstract and complex. Communication is about sensemaking. This means that, instead of being understood as some sort of information delivery, communication should be seen as a social process through which meaning is collectively created and negotiated. Through communication, organizational members and external parties both create and negotiate understandings and notions of the organization. It can therefore be said that communication is central in the formation of the organization's operational space and limitations. This perspective also highlights the fact that the organization itself can be created and negotiated in communications processes. This highlights two things. On the one hand, it demonstrates the importance of influence, coordination, and control of these communication processes by senior management and communication professionals. On the other hand, it shows the importance of common understandings and collective decision-making, where employees and external stakeholders have a significant impact on how the organization is understood and perceived. The sensemaking perspective thus illustrates that strategic communication is partly about influence, coordination, and control of communication processes, but that it is important not to forget that understanding and perceptions are continuously formed in communication beyond content, messages, and media, that are under the direct control of senior management and communication professionals, and to act on this basis.

What is a communicative organization, according to the interviewees?

During the interviews with employees, managers, and communication professionals of the organizations in our study, we asked the interviewees whether they had heard the term "communicative organization" and if so, whether they could describe what it meant. The findings from our interviews showed two main perceptions. The first perspective described the term as an open culture wherein communication flows just as well within as it does outside the organization. The other perspective described the communicative organization as a relatively meaningless buzzword that competes with many others. The citation below from a manager in a public organization illustrates how "the communicative organization" can be seen as a buzzword that competes with others:

The question that pops up in my head is: oh no, is this going to be another matter of just one perspective? It happens all the time: Now we are the digital organization! Now we are the social organization! Now we are the learning organization! Now we are the flat organization! And now we are apparently the communicative organization! So, this feels like it's just another one of those puzzle pieces. Can't we try instead to describe how everything fits together?

There is a clear risk that the term will be used in this way, instead of being seen as part of a larger whole. We believe that an important prerequisite for being able to work successfully as a communicative organization as a concept is that senior management, together with other departments such as HR, must be convinced of the benefit and strength of this concept.

The interviewees who already had a notion of the term communicative organization frequently pointed out that transparency is a main characteristic of a communicative organization. Interviewees also emphasized that senior management must be willing to create a communicative organization. Without this will, it is impossible for an organization to become communicative. It is also interesting that interviewees pointed out that the communicative organization is not a décor or varnish, but that it is meant to improve the organization, in a number of ways. Senior management clearly needs to show interest in and dare to enter into discussions with the employers in order to create mutual listening. A communication manager further clarifieds what having a dedicated senior management that wants to invest in making the organization communicative actually entails:

An open organization that does not provide doctored answers – it is open and permissive. It should be brave in the sense that [senior management] dares to take criticism. The more open you are, the more open you are to criticism. Therefore it also needs to be a fairly secure organization.

Another feature that recurred in the interviews is dialogue, or two-way communication. Here is one employee's reasoning:

The term communicative organization signals to me that we don't send one-way information, but that in some way we send some kind of two-way … that the arrow goes both ways. I'm quite doubtful whether we have reached that. I don't think so. But that's what I think it signals. That the goal needs to be there. That we have communication – dialogue in the organization. Otherwise, we would call ourselves something else.

This interviewee also emphasized the close relationship between internal and external communication. In other words, in a communicative organization, there is an understanding that internal and external communications are closely related to, and mutually affected by, one other.

The communicative organization – our definition

The term "the communicative organization" was first introduced by Global Alliance in 2010 at their seventh forum, called the Stockholm Accords. Global Alliance is the world's largest network of communication professionals and researchers who are interested in public relations (PR) and communication management. Although the term has been around for a while and has become popular in organizations, it has no established definition. One typical view is that communicative organizations are those that have an environment of strong communication, both externally and internally, and that this communication gives them a competitive advantage.[4]

We would like to suggest a definition of "the communicative organization" built on the results of this study and the insightful discussions we have had in conjunction with presenting our research project findings.

DEFINITION – THE COMMUNICATIVE ORGANIZATION

A communicative organization has constant communication on its agenda. It is widely understood within the organization that communication is a prerequisite for an organization's existence, goal fulfillment, and success. Having a well thought-out, well-functioning communications system is fundamental. Within the communicative organization different voices are valued and actively listened to; this allows the organization to develop, adapt to changes, and be a leader in its field. Dialogue is valued as a means of achieving sufficient mutual understanding to be able to act in a tactful way. Managers and employees have communicative skills and take responsibility for communication. The organizational culture is in line with the organization's business objective and supports the employees in their communicative tasks. The communication professionals are communication experts and drive the organization's communicative development.

Seven steps towards becoming a communicative organization

It is imperative that the senior management and leaders of an organization take communication seriously and realize its importance and complexity, in order for it to become a communicative organization. Senior management needs to genuinely want to strive for a more communicative organization. It is also imperative that responsibility for communication is decentralized. In other words, the communicative organization cannot be sustained solely by the communication professionals' input and work. Employees and managers also have communicative work to do, which in aggregate is greater than the communication professionals' input. Each and every interaction between employees and both external and internal parties has effects that accumulate into macro-effects. In other words, beliefs that are created, altered, or consolidated at a meeting between employees and customers can produce much greater effects, for example in terms of reputation or trust. This reasoning is also in line with the latest view on strategic communications. In a special edition of the scholarly journal *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, dedicated to the development of strategic communication, the editors present the following updated definition:

> Strategic communication encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity. Specifically, strategic communication is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals.[5]

Because strategic communication is crucial for an organization, employees need communicative skills. Communication professionals play a critical and important role in the process of ensuring that communicative skills are present in the organization. Everything needs to be based on a common value system and culture that help employees to navigate communications with people both inside and outside the organization.

We have compiled a list of seven steps that should be followed in order, in time, to produce a communicative or-

ganization. It is not an easy goal to reach. Becoming a communicative organization requires drive and determination. The list that we have compiled should therefore not be seen as some sort of quick-fix solution offered by some consultants. Instead, the list can serve as a mental model that can help place the communicative organization in your field of view. How the practical work around each point should be arranged depends on each individual situation, and we consider that an organization's communication professionals are best suited to establish plans of actions for this.

> **SEVEN STEPS TOWARDS BECOMING A COMMUNICATIVE ORGANIZATION**
> 1. Develop an understanding of communication.
> 2. Review value creation, goals, and measurement.
> 3. Reflect on the communication professionals' competencies, placements, and tasks.
> 4. Create an open communication climate that builds trust.
> 5. Put senior management's communication on the map.
> 6. Help managers in their roles as sensemakers – modernize internal communication.
> 7. Support employees in their communicative tasks.

When we compare the seven steps in the list with similar lists depicting how communication and communication professionals can be strengthened in organizations, we see that the Swedish view of strategic communication differs from its international counterpart.[6] The Swedish view is strongly influenced by worker participation legislation (codetermination), labor unions, open records, and so on. There is also greater focus on employees and their competencies and the right to codetermination. For example, coworkership is a concept that was first coined in Sweden by, among others, Stefan Tengblad.[7]

In the next chapter, the seven steps presented in the box above will be explained in more detail, and we offer further practical advice on how communication professionals can think and work within each of the steps.

Seven steps towards becoming a communicative organization – elaboration and advice

In this chapter we take you through the seven steps to becoming a communicative organization, presented in the previous chapter. Each step is explained in more detail, and we end with an "action chart." This chart contains suggestions for what you as a communication professional can and should do to succeed with each respective step.

1 Develop an understanding of communication

There are fantastic opportunities for communication professionals to work with communication in organizations! Our study clearly shows that both managers and employees see communication as something positive. They also think that well-functioning communication is crucial to the success of an organization. In our survey, 90 percent of respondents agreed that "Communication is an increasingly important success factor for organizations" and "communicative ability is an increasingly important competency in working life." This is, of course, an excellent starting point for communication professionals.

However, our interviews with communication professionals also show that communication is often seen as some sort of cure-all that is meant to solve all problems, even if the basis for decisions is poor. The communication professionals pointed out that trust in communication in organizations is often exaggerated. The perception of communication is also far too simple. Communication is seen as some sort of transmission process, in which information with a certain message shall be sent from a sender to a recipient, and that this message is expected to have a direct and definite effect. The reasoning here seems to be that many problems can be solved with clear messages sent through carefully selected media channels.

This is where we have identified a *communication paradox* – communication is seen today as an important key to success for organizations. This understanding creates a strong basis for working with communication. However, at

the same time, the way communication is viewed is far too simplistic. We believe that instead of simplifying the nature of communication, communication professionals need to actively work to *complexify* communication.

Managers and employees constantly communicate in an organization in order to describe and explain what the organization actually is. What is its mission? How should its goals be achieved? What norms and values govern operations? What is the organization's history? Communication that actually creates and preserves an organization takes place partly verbally through conversations between employees, and partly in writing through various forms of texts, such as articles on the Intranet, strategy documents, and action plans. Stories are a special form of communication that are important in this context. Humans are narrative beings; through stories we can create order and understanding of our experiences. All organizations have stories, weak or strong, about the organization and its "important" people.

Communication that is directed towards external stakeholders, such as through marketing and PR campaigns, takes place in ways that correspond to those above. While this affects the stakeholders to a certain extent, it has greater effect on meetings between stakeholders and employees, such as when buying products or services, or when residents converse with civil servants in their municipality. In addition, perceptions of an organization are created through descriptions in the mass media, and through conversations of people discussing the organization.

We consider that listening is one of the most important areas for development is today's organizations. Today, most organizations claim to strive to achieve dialogue, engagement, collaboration, and trusting relationships. Despite this, research shows that most organizations devote the greater part of their resources to *speaking* – that is, that they want to send information and reach various groups – instead of *listening*. In reality, it is rather strange that we believe that we can create commitment and collaboration without first engaging in listening. Macnamara conducted a comprehensive study of listening in organizations, and concluded that, on average, 80 percent of resources are devoted to speaking or disseminating the organization's message.[1]

We did not specifically focus on listening as Macnamara has done, but we can see many of his results in our own study, and see signs that listening both within the organi-

zation and in its relation to the outside world needs to be fostered. The interviews show that active listening within the organization contributes to employees feeling that they are seen and acknowledged, and that it also facilitates greater openness about weaknesses, improved creativity, and greater developmental ability. A recurring challenge in organizations is lack of feedback from senior managers and leaders. The interviewees stated that although senior managers and leaders give their opinions and provide information, the interviewees rarely receive any kind of feedback. It seems to them that their contributions disappear into thin air, with it being unclear whether or not senior management and leaders have actually listened.

The findings of our study also show that listening to the outside world is an area for improvement. For example, only 60.5 percent of interviewees agreed in whole or in part with the following statement: "At my workplace, we often discuss what is said about the organization on TV, in newspapers, and on other external channels." Paying attention to and discussing what is said about your own organization should be an important way of listening to the outside world, and identifying areas in need of improvement. In his study, Macnamara found that lack of listening is also noticeable in social media. Although social media is specifically intended for two-way interaction, it is mainly used to reach out and be seen – a tendency that we noticed in our study as well.

Of course, some listening does take place in organizations, but there is usually no system or structure for it. Macnamara believes that lack of listening cannot be managed through a simple tool. Instead, he argues that a *listening structure* is needed, consisting of characteristics such as an open organizational culture and specific resources, techniques/media, skills, and structures specifically targeted at listening.

Our study shows that some of the organizations that we studied are overconfident in the ability of technology to solve communication problems. This overconfidence is directly linked to the outdated transmissions view of communications. This view of communications originated in the so-called *magic bullet theory*, which was introduced by Harold Lasswell in the beginning of the twentieth century.[2] The "magic bullet" metaphor points to the idea that a transmitter can direct a definitive message (bullet) to passive recipients that directly receive and accept the message. It

is also assumed that the message has a given effect. Researchers today agree that this view of communication is a delusion and a myth.[3] We believe that there is a risk that new technology will reinforce and reintroduce the transmission view of communication. Communication professionals, and others in organizations, tend to be overwhelmed by the opportunities provided by social media, and research shows organizations do not take advantage of the existing opportunities for relationship building and dialogue.[4] This applies both to external and internal communication. The use of so-called *big data* is a return to the *magic bullet theory,* and researchers talk about a "*contemporary one-step flow,*" i.e. that adapted information is directed towards individuals through information technology.[5] *Big data* is about targeting the dissemination of information through mass media, and uses algorithms, controlling the personalization of messages.

In other words, until now we have seen many attempts at dialogue through new technologies and social media, but there are few examples of cases where this dialogue function is successfully used. The question is whether the culture and leadership of the organizations have been a part of this change, and have changed themselves in order to support the conditions for dialogue and listening provided by social media. In order for interaction, dialogue, and listening to be attained through new media, it is absolutely crucial that there is an open communication climate and a leadership that supports it.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> - Stop seeing communication as a transmissions process. Adopt a sensemaking view of communication.
> - Listening is strategic work. Create a "listening architecture."
> - Feedback is essential, as otherwise the organization goes quiet.
> - Focus both on the possibilities of technology and on its limitations.

2 Review value creation, goals, and measurement

Communications managers sometimes complain that their position in the organization is weak, that they do not have as much authority as other players to achieve what is expected

of them. Weakness in the communication function is often caused by a lack of understanding. Moreover, according to the communications managers, leadership does not "understand" the subtle contributions that communication can have to the success of an organization.

It is true that power is not only allocated in organizations. Many actors in an organization fight for scarce resources. Roles that can point to hard facts and clear numbers can more easily establish control. However, our research suggests that the communication role's problem is not only superficial. Although our empirical material shows that communication professionals believe that measurement and evaluation are important, it also shows that they tend to work very little with them. If you were to ask 500 communication professionals what areas need improvement and what resources they have, you would notice a big difference. On the one hand, 10.4 percent (of 492 respondents) said that "evaluation of communication" is the area that is in greatest need of development and improvement, but on the other hand, only 0.6 percent (of 489 respondents) said that they spend most of their resources in terms of time and money in this area. Our research also suggests that in many organizations the communicator's role and function is unclear. Despite generally acknowledging that communication is important, managers and employees do not really know what communication professionals do, or even what they should do, in the overall system.

Management author Fredmund Malik, of the bestseller *Managing, performing, living,* reminds leaders that behind power lies *responsibility*.[6] Although formal positions in organizations grant some degree of hierarchical authority, genuine power comes from responsibility for results. Communication managers who are reluctant to set clear strategic goals will continue to face difficulties. This is perhaps understandable. Why should colleagues, who work under the pressure of demanding, quantifiable goals, fully respect a colleague whose responsibilities are defined only in the weakest of terms?

The problem is that many communication managers seem to think that goals create a dilemma between having a clear responsibility and doing meaningful work. Although a communications manager may be praised for undertaking targeted work, he or she may believe that these goals will be a distraction from being able to provide proper support to other functions in the organization. Even greater is the risk that real, tangible contributions will be impaired by these false goals

that communication managers strive for (see Wehmeier).[7]

Given the social dynamics described above, there are few alternatives to targeted communication management. More and more communication departments have to work with objectives and key performance indicators. Others are under pressure to do so, or want to develop their own measurement systems before senior management comes in and imposes its own. The real challenge is therefore to bring together the communicator's and the manager's understandings of the value of communication.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> - Commit to achieving results
> - Formulate valid and measurable goals.
> - Measure goal achievement, demonstrate results.
> - Learn.
> - … and by doing so, work towards becoming a communicative organization.

3 Reflect on the communicator's skills, placement, and assignments

Although communication is celebrated in organizations, there are some managers and employees who express dissatisfaction with the effect of the communication work, and consequently also with the communication professionals and their efforts. Just over 60 percent of the managers and 25 percent of the communication professionals in our study agreed with the following statement: "Too many resources are placed in communication in relation to what the organization gets out of it." Here lies a clear challenge for communication professionals, which is also confirmed by international studies. Our research shows that managers believe that communication professionals' main competence area is the technical/operations, such as working with communication channels and media relations. This is also the area in which most communication professionals work.

At the same time, both managers and communication professionals state that strategic communications skills, such as support for managers and change communication, are the most important for the organization to achieve its overall goals. There is thus a clear gap between the senior management's expectations of communication, their perception of the com-

munication professionals' best competencies, and what the communications actually work with. To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that communication professionals often find it difficult to demonstrate the value of communication and work on communication (which we also discuss above and in the chapter Value-creating communication).

The gap between the perception of communication professionals' competencies and communication that delivers value is the greatest challenge for Swedish communication professionals. This gap is a general trend, though there are of course communication professionals who do hold a strong position in their organization. Research by Zerfass and his colleagues show that communication professionals may have shortcomings in their use of communication tools (i.e. models and methods). Communication professionals typically use traditional PR tools for planning and implementing communication. However, they rarely use tools from the areas of marketing communication, such as Google Trends and readability tests, and from strategic management, such as balanced scorecards. The researchers mentioned above also show that senior management and leadership are typically more satisfied with the more complex and less frequently used models. Finally, they argue that a clear toolbox signals rationality and increases the possibilities for the communication department to become and be perceived as a strategic partner in the organization.

Reviewing which competencies the communications department of an organization has and needs is of high importance. Which competencies are needed; do they depend on the communication professionals' goals and the value they place on their work? Research shows that much of an organization's value creation takes place between employees and external parties, such as customers, users, members of the public, journalists, and politicians. Given this, communication professionals need to reflect on where in the organization they fit in, where most of the resources should be placed, and what sort of support they should offer.

It is also important that communication professionals reflect on their tasks. Where is most value created, what should we mainly work with, and what is our mission? This is important for both the communication professionals themselves and for the rest of the organization. In one article, we challenged communication professionals to ask themselves the question: Doing things right or doing right things?" *Doing things right* means placing all your energy on

performing the operational tasks of the communications department. *Doing right things* means constantly reflecting on which tasks the communications department should primarily focus on, in order to contribute value to the organization and its core business.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> - Drive the development of communications and stop acting like an operative support function.
> - Review competencies and which areas should be prioritized.
> - Strengthen the communication professionals' internal brand – make a communications plan and act on the basis of that plan to achieve goals.

4 Create an open communications climate that fosters trust

One of the managers interviewed gave his opinion of the basic requisite for a communicative organization – an open communications climate:

[…] the absolutely most important requisite for our internal communications is working with our workplace culture. Being open and transparent – having people who dare to say what they think and feel. I think it's absolutely vital.

Communications climate refers to the social tone that characterizes workplace interaction. In a closed climate, this tone can be defensive or even aggressive. Secrets, territorial attitudes, and silence characterize the communication. A closed climate is threatening, and creates uncertainty among the employees, who do not trust each other or the information circulating in the organization. An open climate, on the other hand, is characterized by straight and honest communication. Both managers and employees are able to actively listen and provide constructive feedback to each other. This is also an environment where a variety of options are accepted and it is allowed to make mistakes. In an open communication climate, individuals feel seen, heard, and affirmed, and it is easy to collaborate, as relationships are trusting. Our findings show that the participating organizations have a fairly open communication climate. Colleagues and

employees have a good relationship, and people trust the information found in internal channels. Our study also shows that an open communication climate leads to employees taking greater responsibility in their role as ambassadors to external target groups (see step 7). As the communication climate is part of the organization's culture and values, an open climate cannot be "launched" from one day to the next, and an increasing number of organizations are therefore now starting to work with values. The problem with these initiatives is that the values are not always translated into language and actions that are meaningful to the employees, and they therefore do not have any significant impact on employee activities. There is a tendency to take an open and purposive communications climate for granted, and in many cases the climate question is unproblematic. However, today's work life is social. We work *together*. Many organizations are significantly dependent on their employees' ability to interact and build relationships in order to achieve their goals. Considered this way, the employees' interaction and the communication climate are a strategic resource that communication professionals can contribute to by educating and coaching both employees and managers.

A communicative organization builds on trust – that the employees trust senior management and leaders, and that senior management and leaders trust that their employees do their best in their job.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> - View communications climate as a strategic resource.
> - Make it easy for managers and employees to reflect on how they communicate with one another.
> - Link your communications climate with other ongoing initiatives.
> - Work with both value and behavior. Culture changes take a long time, and new behaviors that in turn shape the new culture should therefore be encouraged.

5 Put senior management communication on the map

Clear senior management communication is the basis for creating a coherent and effective business. How senior ma-

nagement views communication and how they themselves communicate also sets the framework for communication and climate in other parts of the organization. Previous studies have also shown that senior management's communication about the organization's vision, future, and current situation is an important driving force in creating affiliation and engagement amongst employees.[9] In our study, we have also been able to see that employees' willingness to take communicative responsibility improves if they are satisfied with senior management.[10] Thus, there are several reasons for senior management to prioritize communication with employees in the organization.

Despite this, our findings point towards senior management communication as an area that can be improved in many organizations. Both the survey and interview results show that employees are considerably less satisfied with senior management's communication than with their immediate manager's. This is in some ways to be expected, as senior management and the immediate managers have entirely different levels of contact with the employees. Nowdays, senior management communication is one of the areas where the results between different organizations vary the most. This shows that a communications gap between senior management and the employees is not a rule of thumb.

What then are the shortcomings of senior management's communication? Lack of clarity is one weakness that appeared in both our survey and our interview results. Thirty-six percent of those who responded to the questionnaire disagreed with the following statement: "Senior management are clear in their information to the employees." The interviews confirmed that lack of clarity is a problem that can at times be connected to a lack of information. Just as often, however, interviewees thought that the problem was the opposite: that senior management gave too much information and it was unclear what should be prioritized and what should be forgotten.

Another weakness is lack of visibility. Visibility is often seen as an important part of acting as a visionary, inspirer, and management by example. Our interviews showed that visible leadership could also mean a lot for the employees' experiences of feeling seen and listened to. During the interviews, employees often returned to the question of whether senior management "really knows how we have it," and they emphasized that "senior management would have to be out in our operations more to really understand." Being visible

can, however, feel like a futile task for senior managers in large organizations: even though they spend a lot of time visiting facilities, they will only have met a fraction of all the employees.

Participating and listening are a third area for improvement. Senior management communication is, of course, not just about sending out messages, but is just as much about listening and prompting participation. Some interviewees, however, argued that the demands for participation are unreasonably high: "…everyone thinks they have the right to participate and influence decisions." Sometimes, managing participation means that senior management needs to create reasonable expectations of what employees can influence, although this may also be a matter of lack of feedback. Employees feel that they are expressing their views but they do not receive any response, and it is unclear how the information is being handled by senior managers.

KEEP IN MIND!
- Investments in communicative leaders need to include senior management.
- Set ambitious but reasonable goals for senior management's communication, and follow up regularly.
- Senior management needs a plan for how to communicate as a group, not just as individual leaders.
- Create stories about senior management's communication – communicate about their meetings and contacts with employees in the intranet.
- Clarity is not always created through more information, but through clearer priorities and fewer messages.
- A visible senior management makes employees feel seen.

6 Help managers in their roles as sensemakers – modernize internal communication

In many ways, middle managers and first-line managers have a multi-faceted internal communications role – they need to handle communication and relationships both vertically and horizontally in the organization. Their role is to

lead and communicate with their own group of employees, and also to coordinate contacts with other departments and communicate strategic management issues. It became clear in our study that many managers are in a sort of communicative firing line, with a large amount of information that can be difficult to relate to and communicate in a good way. Nevertheless, the survey and interview results show that employees are, generally speaking, satisfied with the immediate manager's communication – at least as regards everyday, business-related communication. Many employees are positive about their manager's accessibility, openness to feedback, and support in their daily work.

However, the results point to the fact that there is room for improvement in terms of managers' communication in strategic and organizational issues. In the survey, for example, we see that managers received the lowest "grade" on the statement about their ability to explain the consequences of organizational activities on the employees' work. The survey also shows that a relatively large number of employees call for better communication between different departments and units, which at least to some extent can be seen as a task for the managers to handle. Although we currently have technology that makes disseminating information easier, our findings show that too many managers are still locked in a communication role as "bearer of news." The conditions and ability to create meaning and participation in strategically important information are missing.

The trouble with the multifaceted communications role is linked to high levels of trust in what is often called "line communication." Line communication is sometimes compared to a waterfall or a cascade process, in which messages from senior management need to be communicated step-by-step through the different management levels, before finally reaching the employees. The interviews made it clear that line communication is a sort of hub in internal communication, that is relied upon for relayed information and messages. Nevertheless, line communication was described as "unreliable," "imprecise," random," "unstructured," and "watered-down." Too often, there seems to be a belief that line communications should, more or less, work by itself. Line managers would, however, need more support from communication professionals, a management that communicates clear priorities, and a good dialogue from senior management about the meaning of messages and how they should be communicated.

This is not only about creating better requisites for the line managers, but it is also about the extent to which basing internal communication on a hierarchical line is relevant. In principle, line communication is based on the idea that the organization is rational and hierarchical, which is not compatible with the pursuit of active coworkership, digitalization, networking, flexibility, and speed. Some interviewees also argued that the norm of managers not being able to do rounds with information demonstrates an antiquated, or much too hierarchical view of communication. There are of course some cases, not least to do with organizational change and negative information, where it is important that employees get information directly from their manager. However, using digital media and placing more direct responsibility on employees to find information themselves could modernize and develop internal communication. Interestingly, organizations have often come further in their use of social media with external stakeholders than they have with their own employees.

Organizations need to also think more about which information feeds and relationships are important. Horizontal relationships are often as important as the vertical in today's complex organizations. A "flatter" or more modern internal communication would not mean the disappearance of the line manager's communicative role as a dialogue facilitator; on the contrary, it would increase the chances of taking that responsibility and not getting stuck in the role of distributer of information.

KEEP IN MIND!
- Develop the line managers' conditions and ability to communicate strategic and organizational issues.
- More "USPs" (Unique Selling Points) are needed in internal communication. The employees' interest in strategic, organizational issues need to be raised and maintained – there is no "automatic" there.
- Leave the idea of downward line communication as the internal channel, and instead create an internal communication that supports coworkership, participation, and flexibility.

7 Support employees in their communicative work

More and more organizations recognize the communicative importance of employees for properly functioning internal and external communication. As a result, it is becoming increasingly common to explicitly describe the employees' communicative responsibility in communication and employees policies. This development means that it has become increasingly common to see employees as a kind of organizational ambassador. Organizations are increasingly calling on their employees to think that they "embody" the organization in every meeting with stakeholders, and that they are "the face of the organization." If we look at the research, an ambassador is described as an employee who represents and defends the organization, and who listens to how it is perceived by external stakeholders.[11] The ideal ambassador "internalizes" the organization's communication vision, values, brand, and identity to the extent that it "delivers" and "embodies" them when meeting with external stakeholders. The research highlights "understanding the importance of communication" and "communicative competence" as two keys for employees to fill this role.

Surveys and interviews both show that employees have a fairly good understanding of their significance for internal and external communication. For example, the majority of the employees in our survey reported that they are aware of their communicative responsibility and that they usually respond to incorrect rumors about the organization. Furthermore, the interviews showed that the employees consider themselves to have a responsibility to represent the organization when meeting external stakeholders. However, the interviews also revealed other dimensions of how employees perceive ambassadorship. The perspective found in these interviews is one that contributes to the management logic that often influences general strategic communications work and, in particular, work with the employees' communication. This logic contributes to managers and communication professionals focusing on trying to clarify the expectations and requirements regarding communication that the organization has on employees. Clarification of expectations and requirements is, of course, very important, but it is important not to forget how employees perceive these types of expectations and demands on their internal and external communications, if you want a more nuanced and realistic view of the possibilities the work presents.

If employees are to act as ambassadors, it is important that they feel they can stand behind the organization they are expected to represent. Here, they often evaluate how managers communicate and act, and how they believe that external stakeholders will assess them in the role of organizational representative. If they find that managers do no act as credible ambassadors themselves, or if they believe that external stakeholders will have a negative perception of the employees because of what they represent, then the employee's willingness to be an ambassador will go down. This demonstrates the symbolic importance of senior management and managers internally within the organization.

Another important factor that arose from our interviews was the significance of feelings for ambassadorship. Here, feelings should be seen from a communicative perspective – as an important part of an employee's "delivery" in interactions, rather as a reaction.[12] Representing the organization means managing emotions so that employees can "deliver" a professional approach to interactions with stakeholders. The interviewees described this phenomenon, while also mentioning that they feel it is an important part of the ambassador role. However, it is important that employees who, over time, constantly have to manage their emotions in order to be good ambassadors receive support in doing this.

Finally, the interviews showed that the ambassador's boundaries are often unclear, and that work therefore tends to "follow the employees home." Experiencing that they are forced to be ambassadors 24/7, for example regarding internal discussions or policies that state that employees should always be ambassadors, can also reduce employees' willingness to act as ambassadors.

> **KEEP IN MIND!**
> - Get rid of buzzwords and empty phrases – be more concrete.
> - Educate to increase communicative awareness and competence – but do not forget other factors such as senior management and managers' behavior, the emotional stress of meeting with stakeholders, and so on.
> - Consider communicative awareness and competence when recruiting.

Value-creating communication

How does communication create value? And how can that value be demonstrated to the decision-makers and dominant coalition in the organization? These questions have been discussed by academics and practitioners for years and decades. Our understanding of value created by communication connects to the debate, but goes further insofar as a communicative logic opens new ways of understanding.

Traditional management logic versus communicative logic

Our common understanding of organizations is still by and large determined by a traditional management logic that conceptualizes organizations in a *technomorph* way, i.e. like machines, with clear boundaries and a linear process (see Nothhaft & Wehmeier, 2007; Malik, 2004).[1] Organizations do something. They transform input into output. This is the transformation process. At the same time, they control themselves and keep track of what they are doing, e.g. their spending, the use of resources or the achievement of goals. This is the management process. In the traditional management logic, the transformation process and the control process taken together define the organization. In traditional management logic, organizations are determined by a purpose and defined by the *rational pursuit of that purpose.*

As scholars and practitioners sought ways to construe and demonstrate the value of communication, they understandably did so by reproducing management logic. They tied the value of communication either to the transformation or to the control process.

The transformational value of communication, in this argumentation, quite simply lies in its contribution to

what the organization does. Every product sold because of communication, if it would not have been sold without communication, creates value. A premium on the price that can be charged because of brand, image or reputation constitutes value. Every accident that would have cost the organization, yet is prevented because of simple posters reminding employees to wear safety equipment, creates value. Every customer support request that would have consumed resources in dealing with it, but is prevented because of user-friendly webpage, creates value. A crisis avoided, a lawsuit circumvented because of favorable media coverage creates value.

The control value of communication, on the other hand, lies in the ways it helps organizations achieve states which are of value in the eyes of the *management* (since otherwise they would not allocate resources to the goals). So, if the management is willing to invest one million crowns to achieve goal X, and smart communication efforts make it possible to achieve the goal X, or even achieve it for less, communication has created value. Whether the value materializes depends on whether the management was right in their investment decision – goal X must generate return on investment, in other words, there must be direct effects

– but in the management system of the organization communication has created value. In the management process, *alignment* of people's minds with the mind of the management constitutes a value of its own.

Once you think about, it becomes clear, however, that organizations are not machines with humans as cogwheels. The question where an organization begins or ends is not easily answered. Take chitchat in the coffee-room, for example. Does it belong to the organization or does it merely take place in the organization's space in a more or less parasitic way? It depends. Some managers would say 'No, chit-chat is a side-effect of humans coming together, but it's not part of the organization.' Others say: 'Yes, it's definitely part of the organization, it's like the grease on the axle that makes the organization work.'

The second answer is an important step forward, but it still remains within the control paradigm. And the trouble with traditional management logic is that it tends to mask out everything else. Brand value-models, for example, constitute the attempt to show that the 'real' value of a brand has grown over a period of time. Communication controlling-models like the Balanced Scorecard, conversely, help in tracking to what degree communicative objectives agreed with the top management have been achieved. What is rarely an object of measurement and evaluation, or even a discussion, are the many behavior patterns that are taken for granted in a healthy and functional organization, but are eroded in a dysfunctional workplace.

The first and most important step towards conceptualizing the full value of communication, therefore, is to stop

Table 1. Logics and its consequences.

	Traditional management logic	Communicative logic
VALUE CREATION	Focus on owner's /investor's interests	Focus on the interests of all stakeholders
	Value linked to a product –economic, tangible assets	Value related to brand, trust, competence –intangible assets
	Linear value chain	Complex value network with several co-creating actors
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	Direct link between business goals and communication goals, communication is performed by a separate function	Indirect link between business goals and obliquity, communication is performed by the entire organization
STRATEGY	Strategy – something we have, is planned and controlled by the senior management	Strategy – something we do, emerging and realized by our employees
THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS	Communication professionals as executor – delivering "communication"	Communication professionals as a strategic partner – support and drive the development of communication

thinking of organizations in a technomorph, machine-like way. There is communicative value beyond contribution to the transformation and control process – although these contributions are important, of course. Beyond transformation and control, the value of communication lies not so much in *what* is communicated, but *how* we communicate. The so-called CCO-school of thought emphasizes, for example, that it is communication that makes the organization work and, even more fundamental, how it (re-)creates the organization.

It is important to note that that the value of communication is in every case *real*. The difference between transformational and management value is that the first is tied to *what the organization "produces"* (e.g. turning leather into shoes, flying passengers from A to B), while the second is tied to how the production process is controlled (e.g. establishing the brand on the Swedish market, keeping costs down and turn-arounds short). The difference between transformation and management value on one side, communicative value on the other, is that the third level requires communication managers *to step out of the organization* as constituted by transformational and control processes. On the communicative level, communication managers engage with what "real people" do in offices and meeting rooms, police cars and delivery trucks, on factory floors and streets. The sensitivity to this level is what differentiates the informing organization from the genuinely communicative organization. What happens, in other words, is that communication managers engage with what is not yet captured by the organization. Communication managers then attempt to translate, into the organizational logic, what is not understood or taken for granted in the organisation

What advanced communication managers understand, however, is that circumspect translation into organizational logic does not mean subjugation under management logic. As has been argued, one of the big problems with traditional management logic is its hegemonic tendency. Traditional management logic tends towards capturing and controlling everything that has been identified as having a bearing on organizational processes. If it turns out that rumors impact the performance of the organization, it follows that rumors must be controlled. People need to be told, so the logic of control, what to think and say and what not. This logic works in many areas, but in communication management it quickly becomes counter-productive. Telling people not to

spread rumours is like telling people not to think of white elephants. To "manage" communication, a communicative logic is required. Heide and Simonsson contrast the communicative logic with the traditional one as follows:[2]

A mode of cultivation, not control: Context control and obliquity

The communicative logic is a logic of *indirect cultivation*, not direct control. Organizations with a communicative logic, we argue therefore, will find it easier to stay in touch with the human realities underlying management and transformation processes. Their organic as opposed to mechanistic qualities are also the reason, of course, why they tend to cope better with demanding environments.

An idea that is closely associated with a communicative logic of cultivation is the concept of context control.[3] One way of thinking about context control is the recipe 'Make it easy to do the right thing.' If a city wants to prevent littering, for example, it could put up signs everywhere and warn citizens that throwing your garbage on the street is prohibited and might result in a fine. It could also put up more trashcans in order to make it easy to properly dispose of your litter. More than 300 towns and villages in Europe are currently experimenting with new ways of controlling traffic by not controlling it, i.e. by taking away traffic signs, switching off traffic lights, and in some cases even by levelling curbs.[4] Less control can lead to more order, in other words.

Another concept similar to context control is the idea to approach problems *obliquely*, i.e. not in straightforward, but in a slightly 'off' way. One example can be found in leadership training. A straightforward approach in leadership training consists of exposing managers to examples of good and bad leadership, maybe let the managers act out in some situations or write essays. In any case, leadership is obviously improved best by addressing leadership questions. A study conducted at the Karolinska Institute suggests, however, that exposure to performance art, in this case a collage of fragments of literary text and music in a program titled 'Shibboleth', might improve several leadership-relevant traits, like stress resilience and responsibility, in a more sustainable and transformational manner than classic management programs.[5] The authors theorize that the transformative effects are partly due to a shift of focus away from the manager's own person towards taking the perspective of others.

Reducing functional stupidity, realistic expectations, a communicative reserve

Management scholars Mats Alvesson and André Spicer developed the concept of *functional stupidity* to capture the tendency that large organizations 'swallow' even intelligent people to such a degree that they cannot think in other terms than the organizational worldview anymore. According to the authors, there 'are three telltale aspects of functional stupidity: '… not thinking about your assumptions (what we call reflexivity), not asking why you are doing something (justification), and not considering the consequences or wider meaning of your actions (substantive reasoning).[6] Alvesson and Spicer make very clear that functional stupidity is by no means only negative. Efficient organizations are efficient because they have found a level of stupidity that is functional. Airline pilots should refrain from contemplating the wider philosophical meaning of powered flight while on final approach, the cockpit is supposed to be 'sterile'. Problems begin, however, when the existing systems and functional routines are not sufficient to cope with a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world (VUCA). And an even greater problem exists when careful thought and meaningful exchange of arguments have been replaced by empty buzzwords and generic initiatives. Communicative organizations strive to ensure a communication climate and culture of listening that is sensitive to concerns not expressed, or not even expressible, in organizational terms, i.e. the language of transformational processes or management. They make sure, in other words, that there is a 'communicative space' or 'reserve', where the organizational hierarchy is temporarily suspended and leaders and followers can meet on equal terms as human beings. They do not pretend to false equality, but they allow and even encourage what Alvesson and Spicer call reflexivity, justification and substantive reasoning. It takes *courage and maturity* for a manager to allow space for reflexivity, justification and substantive reasoning. Staring the truth in the eye is hard, sometimes. It is far easier to hide behind structures, hierarchy, the rhetoric of efficiency and effectiveness, or management lingo.

The dysfunctional effect of too much communication

Like with everything else, more communication is not always better. The idea of the communicative organization is ultimately about a fit between the environment and the organization, its purpose on one side, its reality on the other. Armed forces need to be stricter in their control of communication than universities. But even in a university department, there can be too much emphasis on communication.

In our research, we identified two ways in which there can be too much emphasis on communication; to a point where communication does not create but destroys value. One negative development path is that expectations, either in the top management or amongst employees, become too high. There are top managers, for example, who have come to view communication as a kind of magic. This is what we call the 'todeloo-effect'. A wave of the wand and some sprinkle suffices, and stakeholders cheer even visibly bad decisions, and enthusiastically. With employees it is the other way around. In an organization with too much emphasis on communication, employees expect that 'good communication' resolves all ambiguities.

The other negative development path is that the organization develops not into a communicative, but into a chattering organization. In a chattering organization there is a lot of debate and discussion, but the myriad of exchanges tends to be meaningless because they do not lead to commitment, do not translate into action. Chattering – which should not be confused with perfectly normal human interactions at the workplace – does not create value, but destroys it. Typical signs of a chattering organization are constant affirmations of the importance of dialogue and inclusivity, but a marked tendency towards non-commitment. What is seemingly agreed in dialogues never becomes binding, in other words, because everything is up for discussion at all times. Another sign of chattering organizations is over-inclusivity. What is often forgotten is that the art of effective management also consists of creating jobs that people can do properly without coordinating with others all the time. Over-inclusive chattering organizations shirk that management responsibility by giving carte blanche to connect everyone to everything.

Challenges and possibilities in the future

The future is always a central question for us practitioners and researchers who share an interest both in organizations' communication and in the role of the communication. What future challenges will the communicator face? What future opportunities can contribute to the development of internal and external communication work? It is of course impossible to say anything about the future with certainty. One strong attempt, however, can be found in the annual recurring survey among European communication professionals, the *European Communication Monitor*, which has been conducted since 2007. On the question of which strategic areas will be the most important up until 2021, the *Monitor* has identified the following three: 1) building and preserving trust; 2) linking the organization's strategy with communication; and 3) managing the digital development.[1] We agree with this vision of the future. However, through a final discussion of some of the trends we identified during our four-year research project, in this chapter we would like to place our focus on four additional points that are important for communication professionals in the future:

- New communications roles and demands for professional competencies
- Paradoxes and tensions
- Digitalization and artificial intelligence
- Reflection and further education to achieve excellence.

New communications roles and demands for professional competencies

A communicative organization needs new communications roles.[2] The communicative organization demands both broader and deeper competencies of communication professionals. Society is undergoing rapid changes, and communication professionals need to follow these developments. More media and communications specialists are therefore needed. As the communicative organization means sharing the responsibility for communication with managers and employees, continuous training, advice, and support is needed. The communicative organization also means that communication professionals need to focus more clearly on strategic value-creating tasks that lie beyond the traditional communication tasks that are primarily concerned with increased visibility and publicity for the organization.[3] Crisis management, thought leadership, creating a listening culture, and discovering potential for innovation are all examples of such tasks. However, just working more strategically is not enough. It is also important that communication professionals make an effort to measure the effects of communication in order to clearly demonstrate its value. Communication professionals, generally speaking, have a low competence in terms of measuring and evaluating – they usually only measure publicity – so this is an important area for improvement.[4]

Some may be concerned that a communicative organization is an organization that no longer needs communication professionals, as communicatively competent managers and employees can replace them. This concern is understandable, but not justified. The communicative organization is an *opportunity* for communication professionals to develop their work and hopefully obtain an increased status. In a communicative organization, the importance and value of communication for long-term success is understood.

Paradoxes and tensions

In recent years, *paradox* has arisen as a theory in the field of leadership research, which can be seen as an answer to the fact that contradictory demands are becoming more and more normal, at a time when organizations are becoming increasingly global, complex, and competitive. A paradox is made up of contradictory but mutually dependent elements. People often believe that the solution is to choose either one element or the other, but paradoxes do not consist of mutually exclusive elements, but rather of two sides of the same coin. In our study we have been able to identify a number of difference paradoxes and tensions in communications work. Here are a few examples:

- Producing texts and filling channels with content while supporting and developing managers' and employees' communication.
- Centralizing versus decentralizing the communications role.
- Planning versus improvising communications work.
- Open versus closed communications climate.
- Polyphonic versus monophonic communication (many different voices versus one, consistent message).
- Direct versus indirect goal achievement.
- Reaching out versus listening.

As stated, it is often assumed that the best course of action is to choose either one or the other – not least because consultants and researchers will advocate for different ideas. For example, in this report we have highlighted the importance of supporting managers and employees in their communicative roles. However, this does not mean that it is not important to also produce and create texts, work with visual content, and so on. In the same way, in this report we have presented the advantages of an open communications climate, but a completely transparent communications climate where everyone loudly says what they think is hardly reasonable. One further example is our emphasis on the importance of allowing different voices to be spoken; at the same time, it is of course necessary to maintain a certain consistency in the messages given to external stakeholders (polyphony versus monophony).

Paradoxes and tensions are a natural part of all organizations, and the best way to deal with them is to accept, discuss, and explore them rather than sweeping them under the rug or trying to rationalize them.[5] At worst, paradoxes and tensions may contribute to frustration, conflicts, and stagnation. This can, however, also be seen as sorts of "points of pain." That is to say, paradoxes and tensions can be seen as challenges that have to be faced as they are in some way crucial to the development of a communicative organization. Our point is that you need to think "*both*" instead of "*either or*," and when you think about both, you need to try to create an optimal balance between the elements, such as decentralization and centralization, in relation to the organization's specific goals and conditions.

Digitalization and artificial intelligence

Communication professionals today talk a lot about the digitalization of organizations and the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI). Some are positive about digitalization and the opportunities it brings, while others are more skeptical, and feel worried about what will happen to their roles or that they are under-skilled. Google has recently launched the Duplex service, which is an AI system that can be used to receive and manage phone calls from customers, members of the public, and other stakeholders. Duplex can, for example, help answer questions and book appointment times. This development is still in its infancy, and we will see many more forms of AI and digitalization in the future.

Of course, a lot will change with digitalization and AI in organizations. In particular, contact with stakeholders will be streamlined and improved. Many of these contacts will be handled by AI, though not all, as the technology does not cope with compassion, intuition, jokes, and innovation, and it lacks instinct. Important questions need to be asked in this context: What status does communication with a robot have? What are the potential consequences for the quality of the relationships that are built through communication with AI? Relationship management is at the core of communication's purpose.[6] Digitalization and AI will be able to answer questions related to concrete things, by providing adequate information, but living, breathing people will always be needed to create, maintain, and preserve the organization's relationship to stakeholders and the relationship between managers and employees. In this way, the communication

professionals have an important function and role, both now and in the future.

Reflection and further education to achieve excellence

All development means that a person has to leave his or her comfort zone and test out procedures, tasks, and tools that have not yet been used. As we previously mentioned in this report, communication professionals tend to use very few tools. New tools, methods, and ways of working need to be used in order to develop. When a communicator goes beyond their comfort zone, they will experience uncertainty. Organizational psychologist Karl E. Weick calls this *vu jádé*: "I have never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me."[8] This is the right feeling, and is a good sign that you are working towards development. While this doesn't mean that your actions are necessarily correct, the important thing in this situation is to do something out of the usual. By testing new ideas, you will expand your limits.

In order to develop and test out new methods, communication professionals and communications departments need to map out how their work and resources look today. What are the tasks, and how many resources are allocated to each task? Which tasks are most appreciated in the organization, and by whom? Simply put, communications need to ask whether they are doing things right, or doing right things.[9]

In conclusion – good work, keep it up!

A lot is going well and a lot has happened, though progress in the role of communication professional may seem slow. However, from a larger perspective, a lot has actually happened and moved forward. This applies not least to communication professionals as a profession. Nowadays, few people have the job title "information clerk," which describes a person relaying information with a given message. This title indicates a focus on information management and dissemination, as well as in two-way communication. The switch to the title of communication professional is an important step towards professionalization. Our study also shows that many communication professionals work fantastically and are able to efficiently handle any situations that arise in their organization. We applaud this, of course. Good work, keep it up!
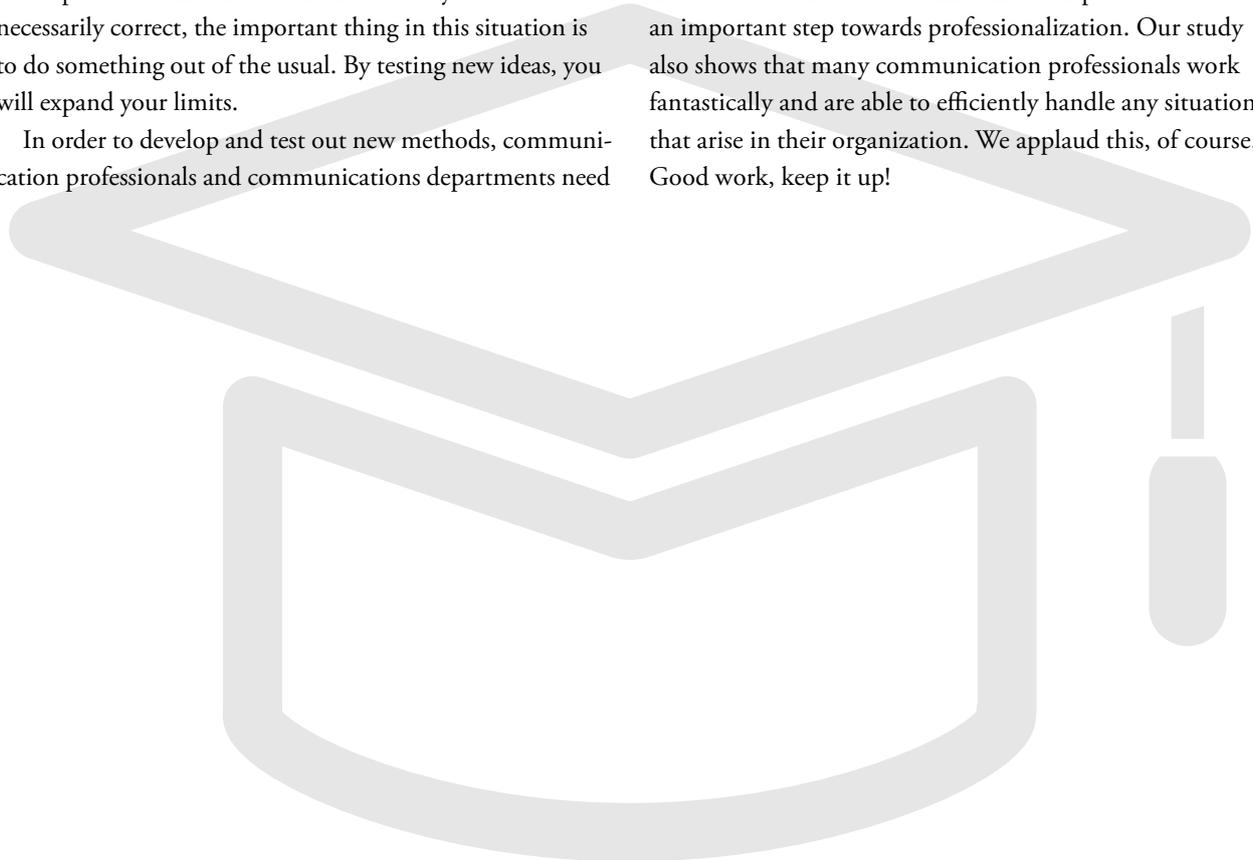
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