



## COMMUNICATION CONTRIBUTIONS FRAMEWORK

A new tool explains how communication departments support organizational success

- ▶ Many communication professionals face the challenge of explaining to top executives, peers and team members how their department contributes to corporate goals. Multiple activities are performed and services delivered – but how can they be structured, reflected upon and prioritized?
- ▶ The Communication Contributions Framework can be used as a tool to overcome these challenges. It helps communication leaders to reflect on their department’s activities, allocate resources, set goals for sub-units as well as develop job descriptions for themselves and for team members. Presenting multiple contributions in a consistent way helps to position and profile communications within the company.

### Communication Contributions Framework

The Communications Contributions Framework shows that the communication department delivers four general contributions to corporate success. Each one is broken down into a strategic and operational dimension. This type of approach is very common in management literature and ensures that communication experts and business executives are on the same page.

Communication managers should emphasize all aspects of their work when reporting how their work contributes to corporate goals. Very often they limit their reporting to operational performance indicators or key projects. Instead, they could emphasize their role in adjusting strategies or in ensuring the license to operate.



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- The communication department **CONVEYS & MULTIPLIES** the corporate strategy to key stakeholders and interested publics. It thus fosters an understanding and buy-in among stakeholders and provides guidance for all employees.
- **ALIGN & CONTRIBUTE** relates to deriving communication targets that are closely aligned with business strategy and supporting daily processes of all organizational functions.
- **STEER & MANAGE** refers to the general managerial activities that every business unit has to fulfil. Like any other department, corporate communications has to work effectively and efficiently.
- **ADVISE & COACH** encompasses communicative support for the top management and other business partners as well as providing strategy advice gained from monitoring the corporate environment.



» This framework helps to present and position the communication department in a holistic way. «

Ansgar Zerfass, Professor and Chair in Strategic Communication, University of Leipzig

## How to use the framework

The Communications Contributions Framework can help communication professionals in several ways:

- ✓ **Reflection:** Use the framework to reflect on the various strategic and operational contributions of the communication department. Ask team members in a workshop to report their activities and services, either agreed upon in target agreements or not, and use the framework to sort them. Discuss different perceptions and take an external standpoint: how do others see the department based on the overall results? Is this how you want your department to be perceived?
- ✓ **Prioritization:** Use the framework to make sure that you have set the right priorities as outlined by the corporate and communication strategies. Allocate resources and define targets for subunits and team members accordingly. Make sure that success stories and performance indicators are reported for each dimension of the framework.
- ✓ **Reporting:** The framework can help to develop a consistent storyline when presenting and positioning your department. By focusing on the distinction between operational and strategic contributions often found in management literature, you will use the same language as the top management and therefore increase acceptance of your department.

## Background

The Communication Contributions Framework is one of many applied results of the research programme "Value Creating Communication" initiated by the Academic Society. A team of researchers at the University of Leipzig headed by Professor Ansgar Zerfass explored how communications adds value to the company. More than 800 journal articles on value creation were reviewed and in-depth interviews with CCOs international organizations conducted. Results have been comprised into several conceptual frameworks. These are empirically tested and presented in the academic realm and professional field.

## Putting the framework to test

The 2017 European Communication Monitor asked more than 500 heads of corporate communications how their communication departments contribute to corporate success.

All four contributions from the framework were confirmed with more than 70% of respondents rating them highly. MANAGE & STEER was rated highest, highlighting the focus on the daily management of the communication function. ADVISE & COACH was rated slightly lower indicating that communication leaders could in future focus more on consulting, coaching and enabling the top management.

Interestingly, the respondents believed that their top management is not aware of the full range of contributions that the communication department can deliver. Thus, applying the framework to report the success of the communication department could help to leverage its full potential.



## Read more

Communication Insights (Issue 3, 2017): How to play the game. Download at [www.academic-society.net](http://www.academic-society.net)

European Communication Monitor 2017. Download at [www.communicationmonitor.eu](http://www.communicationmonitor.eu)



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