

The Business Communicator's role in the boardroom

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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There is no doubt about it: a business communication strategy can no longer stand on its own. It has to form part of the business strategy that supports the direct delivery of business results for an organisation.



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As the role of communication (covering internal and external) continues to advance at board and executive levels, professionals also need to advance their game through value creation and deliver on business KPIs.

Traditionally, we as communication professionals found ourselves in the trenches, crafting and drafting key messages that would help shape stakeholders' perceptions of their leaders and organisations.

Now more than ever, we need to strike a balance between the crafting and drafting role, and acting as valuable strategic advisors to corporate leadership. This does not mean communicators would move away from providing their in-house clients with the tactical help they need to land communication programmes, but there is a real opportunity to advise C-level clients on important and wide-ranging strategic reputational issues.

Having just returned from facilitating a strategic advisor workshop with a global organisation in Sweden, the concept of a 'communication charter' took centre stage; something many communicators do not spend enough time unpacking in their businesses.

A strategy is one thing - and hopefully an integrated communication strategy that ties PR, internal comms, brand, reputation and stakeholder engagement together; but there is still much uncertainty in many organisations as to what communication actually does and, importantly, does not do, which hinders the process of regarding the function in a more advisory capacity.

Transformational communications

One of the biggest barriers is that the role of communication is largely regarded by many as transactional rather than proactive and collaborative (and consequently transformational). This is mostly due to a historic focus by communicators on tactics and execution rather than balancing this with an elevation of the tactics into strategic communication priorities, devoid at that level of tactical planning.

Strategic priorities demonstrate the causal link between the business strategy, the communication mission and priorities, and only later the tactical planning. There are two aspects that have to come together to achieve this.

On the one hand is the 3-tier people component - better definitions of roles and responsibilities, having the right skills in place, and a company-wide understanding of the scope of services offered through communication. In this, it is incumbent upon communicators to shift perceptions away from being seen almost exclusively as the tactical operators brought in at the last minute to help land large scale initiatives, to being business partners who use 'management speak' and are sought after advisors who give input to business decisions and are part of such processes from the get go.

On the other hand, technical expertise is required to elevate the role from tactical to strategic, in order to achieve the desired positioning. To continue to grow into more strategic roles, communication leaders need to take a step back to reflect on their approach – are we leading the way by advising our organisations to move forward ahead of trends and implement cutting edge communication management approaches; or are we reactively responding to every trend?

The only way to stay ahead of the game is by building trusted relationships with internal advocates, so that when we make strategic recommendations, they are adopted timeously and proactively. A trusted advisor does not have to wait six months for approval to take their function to the next level.

One of the biggest wins can be around measurement. Better measurement, especially at an outcomes and value creation level, is able to increase the visibility of communication through demonstrable efficiency and effectiveness of activities. As soon as communication starts reporting in terms business can relate to, an output like a newsletter can be seen as a driver of reputational advancement, rather than a costly piece of paper. It's all a question of perception. And the communicator manages that perception.

Above all, we need to be more agile, and willing to embrace change. There is no doubt we can add strategic value, but not if we are reactive. Not if we take so long to secure buy-in, that the trend has passed by the time approval is obtained. It's time to put aside our traditional self-imposed boundaries and focus on delivering what will truly add value.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

Daniel Munslow is the owner and founder of MOC Consulting and former director on the International Association of Business Communicators' International Executive Board. He has 16 years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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