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Roadmap for a communication maturity index for organizations—Theorizing, analyzing and developing communication value



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ABSTRACT

This study employed a constitutive (CCO) communication approach to advance the dynamic concept of communication maturity for the purpose of theorizing, analyzing, and developing communication value on an organizational level. A literature review resulted in six theoretical areas related to communication maturity: understanding, function, organization, prerequisites, competence and practices including assessments of communication. These were analyzed in a qualitative comparative case study including 85 key stakeholders from eleven organizations. Findings illustrated the relevance of the theoretical areas to stakeholders' perceptions of their respective organizations' communication maturity. A first version of a Communication Maturity Index including four levels of maturity; immature, emerging, established, and mature is proposed. Based on the qualitative analysis, organizations' communication maturity levels varied from emerging to mature. Findings of this study are limited to participating organizations and interviewed stakeholders. The CMI can be further developed in quantitative studies to investigate the constitutive role of communication in organizations and to be used in practice to develop higher levels of communication maturity.

1. Introduction

Scholars across disciplines increasingly assert that communication is the means by which organizations are established, designed and sustained and claim that organizations are dynamic collectives, coproduced through members' ongoing interactions (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Heide, Johansson, & Simonsson, 2012). This constitutive perspective of communication entails that researchers move the focus from studying how communication is organized and managed to how communication organizes and creates value in a society characterized by a multiple communication arenas, rapid change and individual responsibility (Gregory & Halff, 2017; Van Ruler, 2018).

Key stakeholders in organizations differ in how they understand and acknowledge the value of communication and implement strategic communication practices to accomplish organizational objectives and manage change. Earlier research focused on how top management or communication practitioners perceive communication value (Brønn, 2014; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011). The perceived value of communication to an organization is highly dependent on the knowledge, beliefs, and expectations of CEOs and other top managers which may or may not give influence and ability to act to communication practitioners (Reber & Berger, 2006).

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Moreover, even if communication is perceived as important, there is a gap between such perceptions and the slow advancement of professional communication departments and their implementation on the management level. In a study of CEOs and board members' perceptions and expectations concerning the contribution of communication to organizational success, researchers concluded that "Advanced visions of strategic communication developed in academia and practice have not yet arrived in many boardrooms" (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015).

In the present article, we introduce the theoretical concept of *communication maturity*, defined as the development level of organizational leaders', communication professionals' and members' common perceptions and practices of communication in organizations, and take the first steps towards developing a *communication maturity index* (CMI) intended to analyze, and develop the value ascribed to communication in organizations. A maturity index indicates degree of progress made by an organization with respect to the issue that the index is designed to address (Baumgartner, & Ebner, 2010; Kwak & Ibbs, 2000; Succar, 2009).

A literature study identified theoretical areas of relevance for communication maturity, and these areas were used to design a qualitative study in eleven organizations to form dimensions of the proposed communication maturity index. Our study extends the perspective beyond top management by including both a sample of key communication stakeholders and communication professionals, based on the theoretical assumption of the constitutive (CCO) approach that communication value is co-created by all organizational members and is highly dependent on individual experiences and perspectives. Findings of the understandings, experiences, and expectations of these stakeholders hence contribute more comprehensive knowledge about the significance ascribed to communication in organizations. Future studies are suggested to embrace a broader selection of organizational members, including employees.

This article is to be considered a roadmap towards the development of a communication maturity index that attempts to capture degrees of progress of communication maturity. The CMI will be valuable both for research and for practice; for example, it can be used to map developments in organizations over time as well as to benchmark progress in organizations that want to develop their communication maturity on an organizational level.

1.1. The value of communication for organizations

Within research, communication and its value for organizations has been studied from a number of perspectives. One perspective focuses on the development and legitimacy of communication practitioners and of the occupation. Professionalism of communication practitioners (Boynnton, 2002; Pieczka & L'Étang, 2006), and the institutionalization of communication (Grandien & Johansson, 2012; Invernizzi & Romenti, 2009; Swerling & Sen, 2009) are two examples of orientations within this perspective.

One prevailing argument in research is that occupational developments are highly dependent on the acceptance and understanding of the value of communication within the organization and that there is an urgent need to find ways to show how communication contributes to overall organizational goals in order to strengthen occupational standing. In this vein, the excellence theory looks for characteristics of effective public relations and attempts to explain the value of PR to both organizations and society as well as how PR should be practiced to increase the value to both (Grunig, 1992).

Results from the European Communication Monitor, a survey targeting communication professionals, illustrate that the main challenge for the occupation in the coming years is to connect the value of communication to business results and organizational goals (Zerfass, Tench, Verčič, Verhoeven, & Moreno, 2014). The often-advocated argument about the necessity of measuring communication in order to demonstrate communication effects and value also shows that communication practitioners do not measure and evaluate communication in a trustworthy and reliable way and that the interaction between academia and the communication industry is very limited (Macnamara, 2014). Falkheimer, Heide, and Simonsson (2016), however, argue that the urge for communication practitioners to describe the value of communication in economical or managerial terms can be harmful to the development of communication professionalism, since the measurement of communication then tends to be reduced to measuring information distribution and media content.

1.2. Communicative constitution of organizations, CCO

Our study is grounded in the assumption that communication is a prerequisite to create, maintain, and change organizations (Heide et al., 2012). In organizational communication research, scholars have a long tradition of studying and demonstrating how communication is socially constructed and contributes to organizing (Cooren et al., 2011; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The constitutive role of communication is demonstrated by McPhee and Zaig (2000) who highlight four "flows" of communication that together have a formative function and produce an organization: membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning. In 2009, Putnam and Nicotera coined the term CCO (Communicative Constitution of Organization) based on this research tradition, which assumes that communication is the means by which human beings coordinate actions, create relationships, and maintain organizations, and that organizations are constituted in and through human communication. CCO is a framework for examining the role of communication in organizations, based on the assumption that an organization cannot exist apart from communication processes; they are inextricably linked (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Communicative constitution embodies the material (elements), formal (framing or forming), and the efficient causes (principles or rules for governing) that bring organizations into existence.

CCO scholarship is becoming established and increasingly recognized in communication studies and related fields such as management and organization studies (Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017). Researchers from corporate communications, strategic communication, and public relations advocate CCO theory to a) study how communication organizes instead of studying the

controlled handling of communication (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011); b) encompass the facilitation and support of employee communications (Heide & Simonsson, 2011); and c) establishing a meta-competence in communication in organizations by coaching and advising effective communication that create social and economic value (Gregory & Half, 2017).

According to Cooren et al. (2011) CCO theory can contribute to a better understanding of the role of communication to organizations and provide a platform for organizational analyses. We believe that by grounding our study in this perspective, CCO theory can also enrich research in communication that seeks to demonstrate the value of communication to organizations.

1.3. Indexing communication maturity of organizations

By employing a CCO perspective, we depart from the view that communication is residing in communication departments and managed by communication professionals. Rather, communication is enacted and co-created by all organizational members, although some have more power than others in realizing their aims and goals. Thus, in order to move forward from the theoretical assumptions and create a way to theorize, analyze and develop communication value, we introduce the theoretical concept of *communication maturity*. Maturity signifies “a very advanced or developed form or state” (Cambridge Dictionary), and to mature means “to become fully developed, to progress” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Accordingly, we define *communication maturity* as the development level of organizational leaders’, communication professionals’ and members’ perceptions and practices of communication in organizations.

The use of indexes to measure maturity levels is common within a range of different areas, such as quality management (Kwak & Ibb, 2000), information technology (Succar, 2009) and sustainability (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Maturity models are used as an evaluative and comparative basis for improvement, and to derive an informed approach for increasing the capability of a specific area within an organization (De Bruin, Freeze, Kaulkarni, & Rosemann, 2005).

The use of indexes or quantitative scales to measure and evaluate communication is not a novel phenomenon. For example, Bruning and Ledingham (1999) developed and tested a scale to measure organization-public relationships. Another example of a far-reaching attempt to measure the value of communication to organizations is Huang’s (2012) model that includes measures of media publicity, organization–public relationship (OPR), organizational reputation, cost reduction, and revenue generation. This argument is in line with the tradition of auditing communication within organizations since the 1970s (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). Ruck and Welch (2012) claim that organizations need to evaluate and improve communication and that assessment instruments enable organizations to monitor communication effectiveness and that assessment instruments need to reflect advances in practice.

This study aims to extend this line of research by providing a roadmap towards a communication maturity index for organizations that contribute to theorizing, analyses and development of communication value. By focusing on the perceptions of a selection of key stakeholders of communication in eleven organizations, the study will investigate theoretical areas and maturity levels relevant for developing a communication maturity index (CMI).

1.4. Research questions

RQ1: What theoretical areas or concepts are relevant to analyzing and evaluating organizational communication maturity?

RQ2: How do key stakeholders perceive the value of communication in their organizations?

RQ 3: What levels of communication maturity are exposed through key stakeholders’ perceptions?

2. Methodology: First phases of index development – scope, design, populate and test

The development of the communication maturity index largely followed the stages proposed by De Bruin et al. (2005) for developing maturity models in different domains: scope, design, populate, test, deploy and maintain. First, the *scope* of the model was established through literature reviews of possible theoretical areas to include, as well as dialogue with stakeholders from the industry. These activities confirmed that there is a need for a CMI that serves the purposes of theoretically analyzing and practically assisting organizations in assessing and improving the value attributed to communication in organizations. Second, a *design* was suggested and “named by short labels intended to give a clear indication of the intent of the stage” (De Bruin et al., 2005, p. 5). Following this model of developing a maturity index, four levels of communication maturity were proposed to capture a dynamic process: immature, emerging, established, and mature. Third, the CMI was *populated*, i.e. the theoretical areas were elaborated to establish what to include in the maturity assessment. Fourth, the CMI was further explored and *tested* by a qualitative comparative case study in eleven organizations for relevance and the results were discussed in a workshop where the researchers and representatives from participating organizations discussed the scope, labels, maturity levels, and the practical application of the CMI.

2.1. Literature review

In order to identify important theoretical areas relevant to include in a communication maturity index, we performed a literature review. The review entailed literature searches within the field of communication and adjacent areas. We organized the literature into six theoretical themes to achieve a comprehensive overview of relevant areas (see Appendix 1).

2.2. Comparative case study in eleven organizations

A comparative case study design in eleven organizations was employed to investigate key stakeholders’ perceptions of

communication and to identify and validate theoretical areas or concepts as well as maturity levels relevant to include in a communication maturity index. A comparative case study, or multi-site study, collects and analyzes data from several cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This type of method entails analysis that examines themes across cases to identify common and different themes for all cases (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

For this study, we selected organizations with a large variation in size and type (see Appendix 2). The sample of organizations consisted of organizations of different sizes (from approximately 100 employees up to 100 000 employees) and sectors (government organizations, business organizations, municipality and county organizations, and higher education). Organizations in the sample operate locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

2.2.1. Data: documents and interviews

The data consisted of collected documents related to communication, such as the mission statement for the communication department. All participating organizations provided their annual report and communication policy. They also provided written answers to background questions, such as the number of employed communications practitioners (and their gender), how much formal education they have in communication, what is the budget for communications, if the communication executive is part of the senior management team of the organization or not, and how the communication department is organized.

In each organization, we interviewed the communication executive (or equivalent person responsible for communication), the CEO or director-general (or equivalent) and four to five key stakeholders on different levels in the organizations, for example HR-director, administrators, product specialists, managers, mainly from core operations. The interviews were conducted by telephone and were recorded and transcribed. All respondents were asked the same questions in order to assess differences and similarities in how communication practitioners, managing directors, and key stakeholders, understand the value of communication. A total of 85 interviews were conducted. The interview questions were structured around the six theoretical areas identified by the literature review for the communication maturity index, but also included open questions, such as “When is communication most important to your organization?” (see Appendix 1). The respondents were given the questions beforehand. The interviews took approximately 30 min.

2.2.2. Data analysis

The data was analyzed in four steps. In the first step of the analysis, data from each organization (documents, interview transcripts and recordings) was analyzed. These first readings of the material resulted in summaries of the characteristics of each organization as well as a first analysis of each organization in relation to the different theoretical areas. We did not find any new areas emerging from the data at this point. In the second step, we compared the analyses from the different organizations in order to find commonalities and differences across cases. In the third step, we undertook a closer reading of the material from each organization to analyze the consistency of all six theoretical areas across all organizations and integrated the six theoretical dimensions into the communication maturity index. Fourth, we characterized each organization's maturity level in all six dimensions of the index. This part of the process was first conducted individually by the researchers in the project, and then all the characteristics of organizations, summaries, consistency of theoretical areas, and assessments of maturity levels were analyzed in the same way by another researcher, in order to check the consistency of interpretations of the qualitative material. There were a few maturity level assessments that differed among researchers, and they were discussed by all researchers to find common ground for the assessments. Finally, findings were summarized and each of the eleven organizations got a report on their communication maturity in the six areas of the CMI with summaries of the assessments illustrated with quotes from the interviews.

Following the reporting of the data analysis, we conducted an interactive workshop with participating organizations for the purpose of discussing, validating, and adjusting the index. Representatives from all eleven organizations met to discuss the results and the validity of the six theoretical dimensions and the four maturity levels. This workshop advanced the CMI on several points. Most importantly, one dimension, “communication resources” was expanded to include a broader scope, since it was perceived to be a much wider dimension and should contain more attributes. Therefore, it was altered to “communication prerequisites,” incorporating attributes such as time spent on communication for the employees, number of employees per manager, and the communication climate. Additionally, wordings were altered and the maturity levels were adjusted. The result of the workshop was the condensation of the six dimensions of the CMI.

3. Findings: six theoretical areas relevant to communication maturity

In the following section of the article, we present the six theoretical areas derived from the literature search (see Appendix 1) together with the empirical results from the interviews and document analysis. In each section, we integrate the findings from the analysis of the eleven organizations.

3.1. Communication understanding

Communication has been conceptualized as constitutive for organizing (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), as a prerequisite for organizational success (Ruck & Welch, 2012), and as a strategic tool for executives to lead their organizations (Goodman, 1998). According to the constitutive perspective, the mind-set of communication shapes organizational decision making on projects and resources, as well as influences the way organizations manage information (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011).

Most empirical studies, however, do not focus on executives' and leaders' understanding and perceptions of communication, but

rather on communication executives' and communication practitioners' perceptions of their role and function in organizations (Bowen, 2009; Dolphin & Fan, 2000; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011). In the past, communication practitioners defined their influence in organizations in terms of shaping strategic decisions, having access to the senior management team, and being heard (Reber & Berger, 2006). They perceived they were most influential in crisis situations and when preparing communication messages or plans. When they felt they were perceived as "technicians" and when in interactions with senior executives, they reported being least influential.

Only recently have researchers begun to underscore the importance of how leaders perceive the value of communication to the organization and argue that leaders' understanding of communication is of critical importance for how it is practiced in organizations. Brønn analyzed leaders' perceptions of the importance and contribution of communication to organizational success and the abilities of communication executives to contribute to strategic decision making (Brønn, 2014). Zerfass, Schwalbach, Bentele, and Sherzada (2014) compared German top executives' and communication practitioners' opinions on the most important objectives of corporate communication. They found that perspectives diverge, although both groups support a model that describes communication practitioners as a facilitator between an organization and its publics. Another study investigated CEOs' and executive board members' perceptions and expectations concerning the contribution of communication performance to organizational success, the communicative role of top executives, and the objectives and values of corporate communications (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015). Findings illustrated that two-thirds of the top executives reported a high contribution of professional corporate communications to corporate success and predicted a rising relevance within the next three years. Findings also showed that CEOs and board members valued more highly the contribution of personal communication to corporate success performed by top executives than they valued the contribution of professional communication by specialized departments or agencies. The majority of top executives supported a traditional understanding of communication as transmission of information from a sender to a receiver, and researchers noted this as being consistent with their educational background in business administration and the predominant conceptualization of communication in this discipline (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015).

Rarely are organizational members or lower level leaders and managers asked about the importance and value of communication. Welch (2012) investigated employees' views of and preferences for mediated internal communication, defining internal communication as "communication between strategic managers and internal stakeholders designed to promote commitment and a sense of belonging to the organization, to develop awareness of its changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims" (p. 247).

The constitutive perspective of communication is advocated by Gregory and Half (2017), who highlight that all members enact communication, and should be equipped, trained and encouraged to participate in conversations contributing to value creation.

3.2. Stakeholders' communication understanding

Based on the literature above, we analyzed key stakeholders' communication understanding. Principally, respondents perceived communication as highly important and vital for the organization, although representatives of the different respondent groups (CEOs or managing directors, communication executives and key stakeholders at different organizational levels) expressed the value of communication quite differently and from their own perspectives. For example, directors and managers of high level in the organization expressed their understanding of the value of communication as a strategic management function:

I would say that [communication] is critical /.../ both the external and the internal communication are fundamental to the operations /.../ it is about making visible externally what we do and create trust for the authority, in that respect communication is very important, and internally it is about creating a good process, to use the competencies of all employees and be creative and develop together, because the internal communication is important [Director General, organization C]

Representatives from core operations at lower levels in the organizations expressed the value of communication in terms of the work and responsibility of the communication department, and perceived communication as a support and service function:

The communication department has a tendency to choose to work with /.../ more sexy projects than to do quality checks on the templates, which is what we perceive that the communication department is responsible for (Key stakeholder, organization C)

It was clear from the interviews across organizations, that communication with external stakeholders, such as customers, was more prioritized than communication with internal stakeholders:

Customer needs, that is what guides us, not how we organize [communication] internally /.../ Customers have a need and we shall meet that need (Key stakeholder, organization E)

In contrast to this, when asked when communication is most important to the organization, interviewed respondents said during organizational change, change communication is of paramount importance. Some respondents also mentioned during crises:

When something dramatic happened, a trauma of some kind; it could be a fire, an accident; communication is critical, you need to talk to each other and you need information, then you suffer the most from a lack of communication. But that is a special case. Communication in general, if you consider positive processes, communication is most important for the ability to perform, change and develop, and improve (Key stakeholder, organization G)

These are examples of quotes exposing a more constitutive view of communication, that communication is important to change the organization or to manage crises.

3.3. Communication function

The label of “communication function” signifies both ways in which organizations work with communication across for example sectors and cultural contexts, which is affected by for example organizational size, organizational members attitudes and backgrounds, and how the mission of communication departments and communication professionals’ ways of working with communication are described. Research illustrates that the role of communication executives and practitioners varies between organizations and could also be subjected to change within an organization (Grandien & Johansson, 2016; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011).

A CCO-perspective on communication would entail the idea that the social reality of an organization is achieved through interaction and conversations between people (Van Ruler, 2018). In line with this perspective communication professionals would enact a facilitating role (Gregory & Halff, 2017). This is more of a bottom-up perspective, in which all members contribute to the organizing when participating in communication processes. In contrast, strategic communication is defined as the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007). Communication has long been noted as a strategic management function, contributing to organizational excellence (Grunig, 1992). The theoretical framework of institutionalization has been employed in a number of studies to describe the integration of the communication function in organizations as a renowned practice at the heart of organizational operation (Tench, Verhoeven, & Zeffass, 2009). Empirical findings show that European communication practitioners are strategically oriented in the sense that they use strategies and plans and evaluation and controlling tools in their organizations (Verhoeven, Zeffass, & Tench, 2011). The development of strategically oriented communication in organizations is, however, also locally adapted and translated to and preconditioned by the context of individual organizations (Grandien, 2016) even if there can be similarities between, for example, organizational sectors when it comes to how organizations work with communication.

3.4. Stakeholders’ perceptions of communication function

The analyses of the cases showed that it is often unclear what communication activities the operations are expected to be responsible for and need to conduct themselves, and what activities the communication professionals or communications department is responsible for:

I do not know how many communication practitioners there are. I know who is their manager, but I do not know what areas of responsibility and ... I do not really know what they do, if I may say so (Key stakeholder, organization B)

Moreover, key stakeholders were asking for more operational support than they received, and this applied to all types of organizations.

Findings also illustrated that the communication departments and communication practitioners had very different missions in the eleven participating organizations: from a mere marketing function in some organizations, to solely an internal function in other organizations, to a “full service” function in a few organizations.

In addition, the missions of the communication departments were perceived by stakeholders as rather unclear, and stakeholders demonstrated different perceptions of these missions. There was also a difference in how upper-level management and representatives of different parts of the operations perceived the communication departments’ mission.

In two organizations, communication professionals worked with leadership communication training, thus enacting a facilitating function more in line with the CCO perspective.

3.5. Communication organization

In CCO theory, communication and organizing are inextricably linked. Organizational design forms communication practice and vice versa, and both are affected by managerial behavior. The role enactment of practitioners, decision-making behavior, and department leadership style are interrelated and affect organizational structure (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2011). Furthermore, the structural dimension of communication, including consistency and wholeness, “may stimulate the emergence of new types of (consolidated) communication departments, change the role and the influence of communication managers, or give rise to new cross-disciplinary communication functions” (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011, p. 404). This illustrates that organization and function of communication are closely related.

The importance of the communication executive in the senior management team enabling the participation in strategic decision-making has long been advocated as a prerequisite for being able to enhance the strategic contribution of communication to organizational goals. Empirical data from the U.S. showed almost one quarter of examined Financial Times Global 500 companies had a communication executive on the executive board (Verhoeven, 2014). A comparison between business-to-business and business-to-consumer companies showed no differences, and economic indicators did not predict whether a company had a communication executive on the board.

The dynamics of organizing the communication department were studied by Grandien and Johansson (2016) in a business organization and a local government organization. In both organizations, re-organizations (centralization/decentralization) of the communication departments took place because of top management decisions based on efficiency and strategic contribution of the communication departments. One conclusion from this study was that a centralized communication department with decentralized communication professionals created the most value for organizational members as well as the most satisfaction for communication professionals.

3.6. Stakeholders' perceptions of communication organization

The communication organization reflected stakeholders' perceptions of the role and function of communication in the eleven organizations. The most common way of organizing the communication department was to have a centralized communication department and to have a communication executive in the top management team. Some of the studied organizations have both central and local organizations of communication in combination, which was seen to favor the facilitating role of communication professionals.

Findings show that stakeholders of organizational units that had physical proximity to the communication practitioners were more satisfied with the communication department compared to stakeholders with communication practitioners located far away. Also, those who did not regularly work with or did not have access to a communications practitioner were less satisfied than those who did:

She [the communication practitioner] gets caught up in tactical issues and perhaps not so much strategic issues that you could hope for, but she has not been here for so long, so that might be an explanation (Communication executive, organization A)

This business organization was one of the smallest in the sample, and had only one communication practitioner employed.

Another finding is that in organizations or parts of organizations where communication practitioners were part of the management team, key stakeholders from the operations perceived that the communication practitioners had a better understanding of the goals and challenges and operations of the organizations, compared to organizations where communication practitioners were not part of the management team:

I think we have great communication specialists, I would say /.../ the people in our communication team, they are part of what we call cross-functional operational teams. So, basically, they are part of the operational meetings that we have. (Key stakeholder, organization K)

This quote illustrates that communication professionals organized close to the operations can work more seamlessly with critical issues for the operations.

3.7. Communication prerequisites

Communication prerequisites are resources, in e.g. terms of budgets, staff, but also situational conditions in different organizations.¹ Research about how communication creates value for organizations generally focuses on the role of the communication department and not typically on the organizational prerequisites for communication such as, for example, if co-workers have time set aside for communication, if their communicative responsibilities are understood, or if managers are communicative leaders (Johansson, Miller, & Hamrin, 2014). However, research has established the benefits of good internal communication, such as job satisfaction, greater productivity, less absenteeism, reduced costs, improved quality of goods and services, and increased levels of innovation (Desmidt & George, 2016; Hargie & Tourish, 2009).

Concerning monetary resources, there is relatively little research on the finances and staffing of communication departments in organizations. The excellence study (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) put forward that money is not a sufficient condition for excellence in public relations because the value communication adds to the organization also depends on other things, such as, for example, what the budget is spent on, and which people work with communication. The link between downsizing communication departments and decreased value is also questioned since communicative responsibilities are consequently distributed to other organizational functions or departments such as human relations or public affairs. The excellence study, however, also discusses how time and budget often limit communicators to evaluating the effects of communication programs (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 2013).

3.8. Stakeholders' perceptions of communication prerequisites

Results showed stakeholders perceived that there are not enough resources and time for communication, although some stakeholders considered it possible to streamline more of the communications resources. Priorities are necessary in most organizations, according to the interviewees. Findings illustrated that when awareness of the value of communication is increased in the organization, the expectations and needs also increase; as a result, communication departments and practitioners feel more pressure and experience more difficulties in fulfilling the needs of the organization due to lack of resources.

As the quote below illustrates, resources are related to organization:

it became too centralized during some years here, but /.../ we have a good way of working with the network [of communication practitioners], we call it a glocal approach, where we have some global and some local, or a little global and much local [communication practitioners] I would argue, so it is always an interplay, naturally they must appeal to local people and work with the local communication but [communication] is guided by our global strategic ways of working, so it is a mix, this glocal approach (Communications executive,

¹ We first termed this theoretical area "communication resources," as the perceptions of communication value can also be reflected in the budgets and staff assigned to communication in an organization. When these findings were discussed in the workshop with representatives from participating organizations, this area was redefined as "communication prerequisites." Participants stressed that in addition to budgets and number of people working in communications, this area should also include prerequisites for communication for managers and employees, such as time devoted to communication activities, time devoted to meetings, and the opportunity to read news and information on the intranet, etc.

organization K)

It turned out to be difficult for respondents within the key stakeholder group to answer questions about resources for communication; they felt they didn't have knowledge about budgets for communication or what resources their communication department had. They also felt it was hard to assess how reasonable the resources were. This is interesting as it shows that the communication budgets and departments are unknown in the organization, despite the high value that stakeholders attached to communication in the organizations.

Communication executives' in some organizations reported they could adjust the budget according to need, and support the internal resources with external communication resources:

We do not have a problem to argue that we need economic resources to implement important changes in the organization (Communication executive, organization E)

Communication practitioners also said they had opportunities to purchase communication tools from consultants and to use resources for the development of communication skills and training. When it comes to prerequisites such as time, some organizations devoted more time to communication, and managers had smaller teams in order to be able to work systematically with communicative leadership.

3.9. *Communication competence*

Research established that communication competence is critical for both leaders and employees (Barrett, 2006; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Johansson et al., 2014). The educational and advising role of communication practitioners (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Welch, 2013) who also facilitate sense-making in organizations (Zerfass, Linke, & Rottger, 2014) is highlighted as well. The outcome of communication activities is influenced by communicative practices that embody cultural competence and can be hampered by communication paradoxes and contradictions (Johansson & Stohl, 2012). Although a communication strategy may incorporate important components, enactment of the strategy can be impeded by contradictions and result in delegitimizing paradoxical communication due to lack of competence. As a consequence, there is a need to be aware of and competent in managing contradictions and paradoxes (Stoltzfus, Stohl, & Seibold, 2011). The communication executive needs the competencies to enact the strategic role in the organization (Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009). Only when the communication executive possesses strategic management knowledge and engages in managerial work with support from colleagues can the communication be value-generating, according to Yeo and Sriramesh (2009). The facilitating and educational role of communication professionals is advocated by Gregory and Half (2017) who articulate the notion of public relations becoming an embedded meta-competence in organizations.

3.10. *Stakeholders' perceptions of communication competence in their organizations*

Findings illustrate stakeholders believed that managers and employees working with core operations needed to improve their communication skills in order to assume their part of the responsibility for communication:

many people at [organization H] need to work with communication in different ways, so communication needs to be integrated in the operations to contribute /.../ we need to establish good ways of thinking at many levels, and good routines, methods, and processes enabling many to take their responsibility for communication (Communication executive, organization H)

Findings showed that communication practitioners with formal training in more mature organizations were working to build trust through relationship building and driving skills in communications. In these organizations, members of the entire organization have good communication skills, and managers had communication training, sometimes coached and trained by the organizations' own communication practitioners:

To send a message is one thing, but to get people to understand, the communicative leadership, you need to train that continuously. For us as a HR department to communicate and create effects by our documents, routines, guidelines, finding the right arenas and forums, and pedagogically get the message understood is an art, I think (Key stakeholder, organization A)

Stakeholders mentioned that personal relationships and personal "chemistry" between the communication practitioners and the representatives from core operations were central to how they work together. Personal qualities of the communication practitioners were considered very important; therefore, the ability to build relationships in order to coach others needed to be developed. There was an outspoken need from key stakeholders in the study that the communication practitioners needed to improve their skills in digitization.

The communication practitioners with formal education appeared to keep abreast of industry developments and to have good knowledge of the goals and challenges of the organization.

3.11. *Communication practices and assessments*

Communication research has a long tradition of studying the role of communication in relation to organizational outcomes such as organizational climate, relationships between organizations and stakeholders, the constitution of leadership, employee turnover and sickness rates, identity, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), and organizational change (e.g. Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Lewis,

2011; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017). Connecting communication to organizational performance requires methodological and practical knowledge on evaluation and scientific methods (Zerfass, Verčič, & Volk, 2017). In the research literature, such assessment methods are well developed (Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2007, 2014; Zwijze-Koning, De Jong, & Van Vuuren, 2015), and in a number of research fields, studies illustrate the relationship between communication and organizational outcomes.

Research illustrates that effective internal communication is a prerequisite for employee engagement and organizational success (Ruck & Welch, 2012) and that organizations need to evaluate and improve internal communication to improve relationships between senior managers and employees (Welch, 2012). However, communication audits in organizations often focus on measuring satisfaction with the communication process and are management-centric rather than employee-centric (Ruck & Welch, 2012). According to Welch (2013), little scholarly attention has been paid to internal communication education, which results in a vacuum in guidance on the knowledge required for effective internal communication practice.

Research on communicative leadership connects communication between leaders and co-workers to a number of organizational outcomes such as employee engagement and organizational performance (Johansson et al., 2014), co-worker health and healthy organizations (Bäckström, 2009; Bäckström, Ingelsson, & Johansson, 2016), and employee empowerment and voice (Johansson, 2015). Leaders' communication is also of critical importance to strategy implementation (Katsuhiko, 2017).

Researchers studying communication during organizational change perceive communication as a tool for change, as a process in which change occurs, and as social transformation (Barrett, 2002; Johansson & Heide, 2008). The social transformation perspective is similar to the constitutive approach to communication. Leaders' and co-workers' communication constitutes change in complex ways as their talk contribute to changing the organization (Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2017). Communication is important to organizational survival during processes of reductions in workforce, which may negatively influence continuing employees (Johnson, Bernhagen, Miller, & Allen, 1996).

Crisis communication research demonstrates the important role of communication to organizational resilience, the ability to recover after crises (Chewning, Lai, & Doerfel, 2013); however, the way practitioners view crises and adapt tactics and techniques needs continuous development to keep in line with technological developments and changing conditions in society (Marra, 1998). Using the CCO theory of four flows, Jahn & Johansson explain how adaptive capacity in crisis communication is accomplished through self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning during a wildfire and contributed to enhancing resilience (Jahn & Johansson, 2018).

Research on the practices of evaluation and measurement within strategic communication illustrates that measurements to large extent are related to communication objectives not organizational objectives (Watson, 2011, 2012). A recent European study found that practitioners lack the necessary expertise to conduct reliable evaluation and measurement and concluded that communication measurement practices are still in a nascent stage (Zerfass et al., 2017). The authors believe that robust methodological knowledge and application in organizations on communication evaluation is a critical factor for success.

3.12. Stakeholders' perceptions of communication practices and assessments

Interviews revealed that organizations lacked a systematic approach to how they should involve communication aspects and communication practitioners in different processes. But when communication practitioners took an active part in development and change processes, the efforts were perceived to be more focused on dialogue and participation, and stakeholders from the core operations then experienced great benefit from working with the communication practitioners.

I have my own communication practitioner that I often have a dialogue with, because in the unit that I manage, very big issues can come up. Small things can also happen, and I wonder: 'is this necessary to communicate', very often it is good to, how should I say, prevent the problem, inform before it becomes news on the TV. I often have a dialogue with my communication practitioner: 'Do you think this is an issue? How can we solve this?' (Key stakeholder, organization B)

It was also clear that all participating organizations needed to develop their methods for evaluating communication. The study showed that in the participating organizations, digital communication was often measured (e.g. visitor statistics on the web site). Internal communication was evaluated to a very small extent, although most organizations used member surveys where communication items were included. However, in most organizations, results from the surveys were not used systematically to develop communication:

We have facts that we get but do not use, for example the municipality survey to residents, and the internal member survey. They are measurement tools that we will use and try to get results from. Then of course we measure media exposure, positive and negative; and our Facebook posts, what is working, what is not working? Those kinds of measurements, but /.../ we learn most in meetings with managers and others working with communication, by listening to what they need and which challenges they face (Communication executive, organization D)

These findings align with studies that suggest communication practitioners' uses of communication evaluation and measurements are undeveloped (Zerfass et al., 2017).

3.13. Qualitative analysis of Communication Maturity in eleven organizations

The final step in our analysis was to explore what communication maturity levels were exposed through key stakeholders' perceptions in the eleven organizations. We employed a dynamic concept of communication maturity, involving four levels of

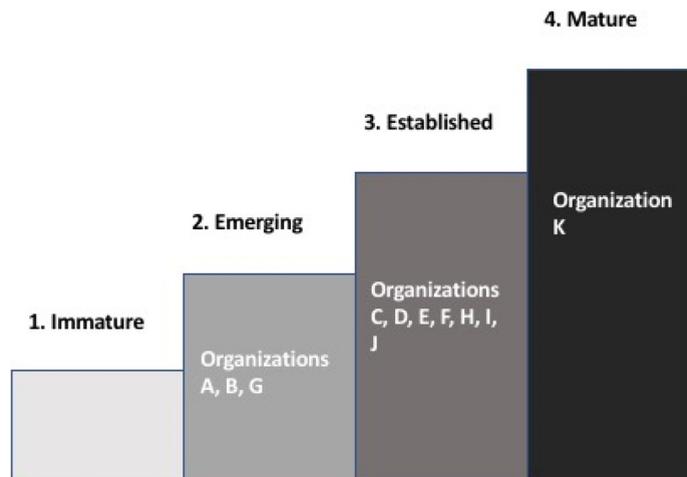


Fig. 1. Evaluating Six dimensions of the Communication Maturity Index (CMI).

communication maturity: immature, emerging, established, and mature. The criteria for evaluating communication maturity levels are included in Appendix 3. Researchers first applied these criteria individually, and then compared and discussed differences in evaluations.

Findings illustrated that three of the organizations were suggested to have emerging communication maturity, seven organizations were proposed to be on maturity level 3 with established communication maturity, and one organization, organization K, was considered to be on level 4, with mature communication (see Fig. 1).

Distinguishing characteristics for the three organizations on level 2 with emerging communication maturity is that they either recently implemented major organizational changes or established a strategically oriented communication department. Two out of three do not have the communication executive as part of the senior management team.

The majority, seven out of the eleven organizations, were considered to be on level 3 with established communication maturity. One possible reason for this result is that the organizations who are willing to participate in a study like this are likely to be ambitious and therefore potentially relatively mature, but with the insight of development possibilities. However, a closer look at the characteristics of these organizations shows quite considerable differences between the organizations. This result suggests that the scope of level three might be too wide. This was also discussed and confirmed in the workshop with representatives from the organizations. The only organization on level 4 with mature communication has worked systematically with communication for a long time and made major organizational changes to professionalize the communication department to support and facilitate communication in the entire organization.

Communication understanding was the dimension where stakeholders valued communication most. In almost every organization, stakeholders seemed to have a mature understanding of communication and stated that communication is very important to the organization. Interview data revealed that stakeholders did not limit communication to transmission of messages, but had a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of communication.

The theoretical area of communication function was the dimension that showed the lowest levels of communication maturity in the organizations. The reason for this interpretation of the findings was that in several of the organizations, stakeholders perceived that responsibility for communication was not clear, and interpreted the mission of the communication department differently, or there was a discrepancy between how top management and representatives from core operations perceived the mission.

4. Conclusions

This exploratory study introduces the concept of communication maturity and targets the development of a communication maturity index for organizations to advance research and practice on the value ascribed to communication in organizations. The communication maturity index proposed here, is a first step towards a CMI indicating degree of progress made by an organization in communication maturity.

Our first research question asked what theoretical areas or concepts are relevant to analyzing and evaluating organizational communication maturity. The literature review identified six areas with implications for both research and practice that can be used for constructing a communication maturity index: communication understanding, communication function, communication organization, communication prerequisites, communication competence, and communication practices and assessment methods. These areas were tested by a comparative case study in eleven organizations through interviews with key stakeholders and document analyses and in a workshop where representatives of the participating organizations discussed the findings related to the theoretical areas and maturity levels. We conclude that the six areas were relevant to all types of organizations included in our sample. No new areas or concepts emerged during the interviews. For some of the respondents, questions on budgets, competence, and assessment methods for communication were more difficult to relate to, and the dimension of resources was broadened to include

communication prerequisites after the workshop. We conclude that some aspects of communication remained invisible for these stakeholders, and argue that the ability to answer or relate to these issues also provides insight into the maturity levels of the organization.

Our second research question asked: how key stakeholders perceive the value of communication in their organizations. This study showed that key stakeholders had a less developed understanding of how communication creates value for the whole organization than top management, and their perceptions of their own responsibility for communication was not clear.

We conclude that the key stakeholders in the organizations represented in this study need more communicative competence and knowledge about what their own communication responsibility entails or about what the organization expects when it comes to communicative responsibility. Also, key stakeholders did not always know how to use communication for organizational development and change processes, but when they did so, they saw that the communication contributed good value.

Moreover, participating organizations did not appear to have the ability to formulate a clear mission for the communication professionals and the communication department: different stakeholders of the organization expressed different expectations regarding the communication department. As a result, we conclude that the ways in which an organization prioritizes communication is consequently dependent on the incumbent CEO and his or her personal view of communication value, which in turn affects the legitimacy of the communication professionals.

Another conclusion that can be made based on these findings is that in organizations, stakeholders may have a mature understanding of communication, but they may not have the competence or knowledge that enables them to translate that understanding into a clear mission for the communication department. Key stakeholders perceived the role of the communication professionals more to contribute a support and service function whereas top management perceived the value of communication as a more strategic function. Findings demonstrated that the closer you are (physically) to a communication professional, the more satisfied you are with communication in general, and the communication department in particular. Personal relationships between key stakeholders and communication professionals seem to be essential for the perception of communication value as well. These findings are line with previous research, which concluded that centralization of the communication department led to perceived losses of proximity, relationships, and trust in communication practitioners (Grandien & Johansson, 2016).

Our third and final research question asked what levels of communication maturity were exposed through key stakeholders' perceptions. Based on our analyses of interviews and documents in the eleven organizations we proposed maturity levels for each organization according to criteria in the six dimensions of the CMI. We found that the organizations that participated in this study display variations in communication maturity, but the variations are not across the whole scale of the proposed maturity index. Possibly, organizations that are willing to participate in this type of study can be expected to already hold insights about the value of communication. Another type of selection of organizations could display a larger variation in maturity. For organizations that display lower levels of maturity, one reflection is that major disruptive events in organizations may affect key stakeholders' understanding and expectations of communication. This conclusion is supported by previous research that found practices of strategic communication were adjusted to organizational discourses and organizational settings (Grandien & Johansson, 2016). However, our findings add to this perspective since disruptive organizational events were seen to largely affect organizational perceptions and evaluations of the communication department and consequently the possibilities to build communicative value. In cases of large turnovers among key stakeholders, the understanding of the value of communication in relation to organizational performance can deteriorate, and the organizational history and "memory" can get lost. The institutionalization of communication is a dynamic process, and thus the communication maturity levels of the organizations that participated in this study are subject to change. The organizations that displayed the highest levels of maturity are organizations that over a longer period of time have worked with programs for communicative leadership.

5. Implications for theory and practice

Embracing a CCO-perspective and studying the constitutive role of communication moves the focus from studying how communication is organized and managed to analyze how communication by organizational members shapes organizational processes that create value (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011; Gregory & Halff, 2017; Van Ruler, 2018). By grounding the study in a CCO perspective, this study extends research on the perceived value of communication (Brønn, 2014; Johansson & Ottestig, 2011; Reber & Berger, 2006; Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015) beyond CEOs, top managers, and communication practitioners to include key communication stakeholders whose understandings and expectations of the value creation of communication are significant to organizational development.

The communication maturity index proposed in this article addresses a degree of progress made by an organization with respect to understandings and expectations of communication and the implementation of communicative practices. We believe communication maturity to be a dynamic concept; that is, the level of maturity is subject to change, which makes the index valuable both for research, practice, and organizational development in communication. From a research point of view, a communication maturity index can be applied in order to find factors that explain differences in understandings and expectations of communication in organizations. Longitudinal studies can trace the development and changes in communication maturity. From both a practice and research perspective, the index can be used to map developments in organizations over time. Further, it can be used to theoretically compare the communication maturity between organizations, and it can be used as a practice-based benchmark tool. For organizations, the index can also be used to develop internal processes and to justify investments in communication. This will further enable communication professionals to explore and develop their role in facilitating communication processes (Gregory & Halff, 2017; Heide & Simonsson, 2011). An organization can measure its communication maturity throughout the organization or in a certain unit or

department of the organization. The CMI will show what dimensions need to be developed in order to enhance communication in the organization.

6. Limitations and future research

The CMI that we propose here is a first version and a roadmap towards developing a communication maturity index. This is an exploratory study that points out a direction for future studies where this perspective can be developed. The study relied on a literature review, interview data, and document analysis in eleven organizations, and the results are obviously limited to the participating stakeholders and organizations. So far, the study encompasses the first four phases of maturity index development (De Bruin et al., 2005), and thus the next steps of development are to further expand the tests to ensure validity, reliability and generalizability, to *deploy* the CMI by making it available for use and establishing the generalizability as well as to *maintain* the use of the CMI to assess the relevance of the index.

In the next step of this project, a quantitative study of managers, co-workers and communication professionals will be conducted in order to further test if these theoretical areas are relevant to all members of an organization and to possibly generalize to other organizations.

We acknowledge that future developments of a CMI may find other theoretical areas relevant to include based on a constitutive communication perspective, such as for example organizational culture, including how new employees are socialized into the organization, or identification processes and the challenges of sustaining univocal identities in complex and multifaceted environments calling for flexibility and differentiated messages (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011).

Another limitation of this study is the qualitative evaluations of the organizations' communication maturity levels based on key stakeholders' perceptions. Future studies investigating communication maturity by including a representative sample of organizational members of an organization can possibly draw more accurate conclusions about the organization's maturity level.

In the future, when the CMI is further developed and tested on a larger scale in more organizations and based on a representative sample of all organizational members, the constitutive role of communication can be further investigated by comparing communication maturity with different key performance indicators (KPIs) of organizations, such as, for example quality or revenue, or to indexes in other fields such as sustainable development, innovation and change, customer satisfaction and employee engagement.

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Appendix 1 Six theoretical dimensions of the Communication Maturity Index (CMI)

Theoretical dimension	Definition of the dimension	Literature
Communication understanding	The understanding among key stakeholders of the communication function and the value of communication to the organization.	(Bowen, 2009) (Brønn, 2014) (Dolphin & Fan, 2000) (Goodman, 1998) (Johansson & Ottestig, 2011) (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) (Reber & Berger, 2006) (Ruck & Welch, 2012) (Welch, 2012) (Zerfass, Linke et al., 2014) (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015)
Communication function	The comprehensive approach to work with internal and external communication, how the communication department's mission is defined and how the organization work with communications strategically, tactically and practically.	(Grandien, 2016) (Grandien & Johansson, 2016) (Grunig, 2006) (Hallahan et al., 2007) (Tench et al., 2009) (Verhoeven et al., 2011) (Zerfass, 2009)
Communication organization	How communication work is organized and how the organization work integrated and specialized with communication issues.	(Grandien & Johansson, 2016) (Verhoeven, 2014) (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2011)
Communication prerequisites	Organizational prerequisites such as budget and the number of people working in communications as well as time devoted to communication activities for managers and employees.	(Dozier et al., 2013) (Grunig et al., 2002) (Desmidt & George, 2016) (Hargie & Tourish, 2009) (Johansson et al., 2014)

Communication competence	General communication skills within the organization, the education of key personnel in the communications area and the need for training.	(Barrett, 2006) (Heide & Simonsson, 2011) (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999) (Johansson & Stohl, 2012) (Stoltzfus et al., 2011) (Welch, 2013) (Yeo & Sriramesh, 2009) (Zerfass, Linke et al., 2014)
Communication practices and assessment methods	How the organization uses methods for analyzing, planning, implementing, measuring and evaluating communication activities and communication value in relation to business or organizational goals and key figures.	<i>Communication during organizational change</i> (Barrett, 2002) Johansson & Heide, 2008) (Johnson et al., 1996)) (Lewis, 2011) (Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017) (Sheep et al., 2017) <i>Communicative leadership</i> (Bäckström, 2009) (Bäckström et al., 2016) (Johansson, 2015) (Katsuhiko, 2017) <i>Crisis communication</i> (Chewning et al., 2013)) (Marra, 1998)) <i>Internal communication</i> (Ruck & Welch, 2012) (Welch, 2012) (Welch, 2013)) <i>Evaluation of communication</i> (Hargie & Tourish, 2009) (Watson, 2011) (Watson, 2012) (Zerfass et al., 2017) (Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2007) (Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2014) (Zwijze-Koning et al., 2015)

Appendix 2 Sample of organizations

Organization	Size (no of employees)*	Turnover (SEK) *	Area of operation	Location
A	227	1 billion	Business organization	Regional
B	3 992	3,6 billion	County	Regional
C	857	927 million	Higher education	Regional
D	7 294	6,4 billion	Municipality	Local
E	262	286 million	Government organization	National
F	46 000	91 billion	Business organization	International
G	1 100	5,3 billion	Business organization	International
H	431	2,9 billion	Government organization	National
I	79	138 million	Government organization	National
J	158	414 million	Government organization	National
K	99 501	(grants excluded) 313 billion	Business organization	International

*The figures are obtained from the annual reports from each individual organization. All figures except organization C are from 2015. The figures from organization C are from 2016.

Appendix 3 Maturity levels in the six theoretical areas

Communication understanding

Stakeholders' understanding of communication value to the organization, the role of communication in organizing, and the confidence in communication professionals			
Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
Stakeholders ignore communication value	Some stakeholders recognize communication value	Stakeholders in general recognize communication value	All stakeholders recognize communication value
Understanding of communication as transmission of messages	Understanding of communication as sensemaking	Understanding of communication as transformational	Understanding of communication as constitutive of organizing
No confidence in communication professionals	Emerging confidence in communication professionals	Established confidence in communication professionals	High confidence in communication professionals

Communication function

Ways of working with communication, and missions of communication professionals and communication departments

Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
Communication is not perceived as a general responsibility	Stakeholders have divergent opinions on communication responsibility	Stakeholders have common opinions on communication responsibility	Communication is perceived as a general responsibility
Communication aspects are neglected in all operational decisions and projects	In some units or situations communication aspects are integrated in important decisions or projects	In most units or situations communication aspects are integrated in important decisions or projects	Communication aspects are integrated in all operational decisions and projects
Communication department/ professionals enact a support and service function	Communication department/ professionals support some strategic decisions	Communication department/ professionals support most strategic decisions	Communication department/professionals enact a strategic management function and delivers support and services.

Communication organization

The organization of communication practices, communication professionals and communication departments

Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
The organization of communication is not supporting operational / management needs	The organization of communication is supporting operational needs	The organization of communication is supporting management needs	The organization of communication is adapted to both operational and management needs in a good balance
No communication professional participates in any management team	Communication professionals are invited ad hoc to management team meetings	Communication professionals participate in some management teams or decisions	Communication professionals participate in management teams and decisions throughout the organization at various levels

Communication prerequisites

Communication prerequisites are situational conditions for communication in different organizations and resources, in terms of budgets, staff for communication

Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
Lack of time for communication, no work with communicative leadership	Restricted time for communication	Acknowledges the need for communication and devotes time for it	Devote sufficient time to communication, managers have teams of sizes that enable systematic work with communicative leadership
No communication budgets	Local communication budgets	Central communication budgets	Both central and local communication budgets
No external communication resources	Ad hoc external communication resources	External communication resources in most units or situations needed	External communication resources when needed
Shortage of staff of communication department or function	Staff of communication department cover some needs of the organization	Communication department is staffed to cover most needs of the organization	Communication department is staffed sufficiently to cover the entire organization's communication needs

Communication competence

Communication competence of leaders, managers and employees, as well as communication professionals.

Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
Lack of communication competence	Varying communication competence	Communication competence in most areas needed	Communication competence in all areas needed
No communication professionals with formal training in communication	Some communication professionals with formal training in communication	Most communication professionals have formal training in communication	All communications professionals have formal training in communication.

Communication practices and assessments

Communication practices and assessments involve all members and situations in the organization.

Immature	Emerging	Established	Mature
Communication aspects are neglected in organizational development and change	Communication is sometimes integrated in organizational development and change	Communication is mostly integrated in organizational development and change	Communication is integrated systematically in organizational development and change
The organization responds reactively to communications issues	Responses to communications issues vary between reactive and proactive responses across the organization	Responses to communications issues are mostly balanced between reactive and proactive responses	The organization can handle proactive and reactive communications issues in good balance
Communication activities are not linked to outcomes in the organization	Communication activities are in some units or situations linked to outcomes in the organization	Communication activities are mostly linked to outcomes in the organization	Communication activities and efforts are linked to outcomes such as the organization's results and key performance indicators
Communication is not assessed.	Communication is assessed in some areas or situations	Communication is assessed in most areas or situations needed	Communication is assessed with advanced output and impact measurements, and both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to assess the effects of internal and external communication. Internal communication is evaluated frequently.

Appendix 4 Interview guide

Communication understanding

- How would you describe the importance of communication in your organization?
- On what occasions is communication most important (creates most value)?

Communication function

- How would you describe the communication department's mission in your organization?
- What are the main tasks of the communications department in your organization based on your perspective?
- How do you think the organization perceives the communication department's main job?
- Have the communication professionals sufficient understanding of the goals and challenges?

Communication organization

- How is the communication department organized in your organization?
- Do you think that this way of organizing works based on your needs?

Communication resources

- Do you think the communications department has a reasonable budget?
- Do you think there are enough people who work with communication?

Communication competence

- Is there a lack of communication skills in general in your organization? What is missing? What do you do too much of/ too little of?
- Do you think the communications department / communicators have the right skills?
- Are there any areas that you think that you need to develop in terms of communication?
- Communication Executives only: How do you keep up to date on new developments in the communications field?

Communication methods

- How do you measure and evaluate your communication work? Internally and externally.
- Tell us about a new organization or operations development project that your organization has gone through linked to communication. Describe how the process worked and when communications came into the picture and when an agent came into the process? What went well, what went less well, what would you have done differently?

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