

**IIMB WORKING PAPER NO.2009-10-295**

**Corporate communications: A Practice Oriented Approach**

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**Abstract**

The function of corporate communication is increasing in importance day by day. The evolutionary nature of the profession necessitates an investigation into the way it is practiced. The study aims at identifying the important themes, issues and challenges facing the field. The present study is a qualitative research done using in-depth interviews with heads of Corporate Communications of thirteen organizations from diverse sectors. It identified the roles and activities, structural organization, strategic contribution, cultural factors and training issues in the corporate communication function. It also identified the hindrances to the growth of the profession, its evolution and the likely future. In the end the paper identifies the strategic issues, challenges and interventions required to catapult the profession into the big league as marketing or finance.

## **Corporate Communications: A Practice Oriented Approach**

The traditional approach to coping with environmental uncertainty was to establish buffer departments so as to absorb uncertainty from the environment. Buffer departments surround the technical core and exchange money, materials, and resources between the environment and the organization. The Corporate Communication function, which is largely looked at as a buffer department is to a large extent engaged in a boundary spanning role. Boundary-spanning is primarily concerned with the exchange of information to (1) detect and bring into the organization, information about changes in the environment and (2) send information into the environment that presents the organization in a favorable light. In spite of the critical role of boundary-spanning played by the Corporate Communication function, it has often been sidelined by Finance, Marketing, HR and Production functions. While these functions were treated as an asset to the organization, communication has often been relegated to the status of a liability at best. Most of the communication if it happened at all was adhoc and tactical. The failure to conceptualize communications as strategy has proved to be costly for companies. Companies are now learning lessons from their past mistakes as is evident from instances such as Cadbury chocolates infestation with worms crisis, ICICI bank rumor of going bankrupt, which were handled deftly with a series of proactive measures taken to restore consumer confidence. The field of corporate communications is evolving and hence it is imperative that the practice is examined closely to understand the issues and challenges being faced. Moreover, the recognition of corporate communications (CC) as a managerial function necessitates more grounded theory and conceptualization emanating from practice.

A stream of research identifies CC as a strategic function responsible for managing relationships with key stakeholders and thereby building corporate image and reputation (Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2000). But these theories pay little attention to the managerial activities, professional issues and organizational contexts that characterize CC as a managerial function. There has been some research in this regards in 1990s (Fleisher & Burton, 1995; Scholes and Chutterbauck, 1998; Van Riel, 1992, 1995, 1997), and some more in recent times (Argenti, 2005, Cornellisen & Thorpe, 2001; Cornellisen, 2004; Van der Jagt, 2005) but in comparison with other disciplines like strategy (Whittington, 2003) and accounting (Hopwood and Miller, 1994) it is still far away from fully conceptualizing CC. While accounting has come to be regarded as social and institutional practice, that can be researched as a historical intersection of social institutions, economic and administrative techniques (Hopwood & Miller, 1994), the same conceptualization has not emerged in CC. Thus there is a gap between theoretical deliberations about the strategic importance of CC and descriptions of the function as it is practiced today. Grunig et al (2002) have acknowledged the need for more in-depth qualitative research to help understand more deeply the issues facing corporate communications. This practice based research will hopefully help in furthering the conceptualization of this emerging managerial function and identify the important themes, best practices and interventions required in the profession. The research will follow the approach taken by management scholars such as Moss (2002) and Stewart (1996) in that it will focus on examining the roles, responsibilities, organizational structure, and strategic contribution of CC while also examining broader political and cultural issues. This approach reflects the call by organizational scholars such as Eisenhardt for more emphasis to be placed on developing new

theories from empirical data, rather than relying on essentially quantitative, deductive, theory-testing research paradigms.

## **The Present Study**

Exploratory research design using semi structured, open ended questionnaires was employed to conduct interviews with Heads of Corporate Communication (CC) function of thirteen organizations. These organizations were carefully chosen such that the function was fairly important and big, and represented diverse sectors like manufacturing, finance, information technology, pharmaceutical, entertainment, automobile, FMCG and energy.

These interviews lasted for a minimum of an hour each and were in the form of free flowing discussion and led to important dimensions, themes, issues, challenges and best practices for strategic communication. Included in the sample were companies from information technology (Infosys, Rolta and Wipro), big conglomerates of Indian origin having global footprint (Reliance, Aditya Birla Group, Mahindra & Mahindra), multinationals (Cadbury, Bosch), pharmaceutical giants (Novartis), finance and capital market majors (SBI capital markets; Bombay Stock Exchange) and energy players (BPCL). In the following section the dimensions and themes identified from the study are discussed and subsequently the framework for strategic corporate communications is developed based on the findings of the study and review of literature.

## **Roles and Activities of Practitioners**

### ***Purpose of Corporate Communication***

If there is one sentence that sums up the broad purpose of corporate communication, it is to build value for the corporate brand. In Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) it is to create positive perception among internal and external stakeholders, in Disney it is the mouthpiece of the

organization that communicates the vision of the brand to consumers, creating aspirational value, and in Rolta it is to manage the reputation of the company. “Communication must build the corporate brand, which is closely linked to building image and reputation,” says D.G.M of Brand & PR in Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL). This thought is endorsed by head of Corporate Affairs & Corporate Communications at Novartis who believes that CC is effective for creating and portraying a unified umbrella brand rather than sub-brands. According to the Manager of CC with Wipro technologies, “CC is a brand building function which reaches out to customers, employees, government and investors.” “The main objective of CC is corporate branding and marketing communication is only a subset of it,” says Head of Brand & Communication at Infosys Technologies. DGM of CC at Bosch and Group Executive of CC at Aditya Birla Group are of the view that Corporate Communications is a long term strategic, pro-active tool for building the goodwill of the company through broad based activities like CSR, media, internal communications, sponsorships etc. They believe that CC is a service driven, bottom line oriented, long term and value adding function whose purpose is to enhance the profile and image of the corporate.

### ***Dominant roles***

The roles though universal and broad based are tailored to specific needs of the company. In Disney, every communication revolves around providing the brand experience to the stakeholders. “This experience should be consistent across the world. A kid in Russia, a parent in U.S. or a grandparent in India, should visualize the brand in the same manner,” says head of public relations at Walt Disney India. The roles performed could be situation specific, for instance when BSE became a corporate in 2005, CC did a corporate identity program where new visual identity was developed and unveiled. Similarly when it was hit with stock exchange scam

in 2000, the emphasis shifted on managing crisis and restoring consumer confidence. It will not be appropriate to say that one role is more important than the other. In Cadbury and Aditya Birla group, CSR is a prominent activity. In Disney in some countries, CSR is very important and hence handled by separate community relations department whereas in other countries it is handled by CC department. “Which activity is more important depends on the thrust area at that point of time” says V.P. and Head of CC at Mahindra. According to DGM of CC at Bosch, “Communication is a disciplined approach and integration across all elements of mix particularly with the parent company is critical. An important responsibility of CC is to increase the share of the voice of the company in the media.” In Novartis, the entire corporate communication across all the entities is handled centrally to ensure coherence in three main responsibilities of CC- media relations, internal communications and CSR.

### *Clarity of roles*

To a large extent clarity of roles was found that has increased over time. While each member of the team is accountable for a specific role, there is flexibility in the structure to accommodate exigencies. In both Mahindra and Disney, the multi faceted roles were seen as positive for professional growth. Corporate Communication is one of the rare functions which is vibrantly connected with the rest of the world unlike other functions which are somewhat isolated. “Instead of rigid hierarchical structures amoeba like structure is more relevant as today the medium is the message and all employees are communicators” says Head of Brand & Communications at Infosys. In some organizations like Cadbury’s where CC is managed by only one person, lot of roles are outsourced to PR agency. But all communication to the external world is controlled and routed through official spokesperson.

## **Organizing the function**

From our research two issues in organizing the function emerged- centralization versus decentralization and specialist versus generalist. It was found that in case of an MNC, the function is decentralized at national level but centralized and coordinated at regional and global level. Within country operations though delegated to other members of the team but are coordinated and centralized with Head of CC to ensure harmony in communication. In BSE all members of the team are involved in major projects and group emails keep all members in the loop. In Cadbury the function is centralized at the headquarters and is viewed as a specialist function. According to V.P. & Head of CC at Mahindra, “it is both a specialist as well as generalist function. General management skills are needed to understand the business in totality and specialist skills are needed to communicate effectively. It is a centralized function to ensure that there is control on communications.” Head of Brand & Communications at Infosys feels that the organization of CC is very complex as it is vertical as well as horizontal and is spread out in various domains. In Bosch, the CC division is the apex of the corporate communication for Bosch in India - overseeing the communication process in all its four subsidiaries which are panned out geographically and are across diverse business lines. There are three primary verticals- Corporate brand management & corporate events; PR and media relations and the web. Each of these three verticals are managed by three professionals and serviced by three service teams. For Novartis the business operations in India for some of its divisions is very small and hence CC function is set up centrally to look after all the group companies. The Reliance group which has a turnover close to around 30 billion dollars has a federal structure in CC with some flexibility. There are well defined hierarchies in the form of a president, vice-president and a general manager. Strategy is decided along with management at the president level and the



execution is done at a level below and vice-president acts as a bridge between the two. Given the scale of Reliance there is an inevitable specialization in every aspect of CC.

### ***Reporting relationships***

It seems to be a function of size of the organization, type of industry, profile of CC head and legacy. In big business houses, CC has wide scope and importance and hence reporting to CEO is not uncommon. If direct reporting to CEO was not feasible then the next preferred alternative was to report to HR. Internal communications is a common theme between HR and CC. Reporting of CC to Marketing was not preferred by corporations that have product brands as product related communication is a functional responsibility and hence is narrower in scope. In conglomerates like Mahindra reporting to marketing was found unsuitable. HR was found to be more integrated with CC from employee engagement perspective and hence was preferred for reporting. In IT companies like Infosys and Wipro, reporting was to Marketing Director whereas in Bosch it was to MD. In Aditya Birla Group, Group Executive of CC directly reports to the CEO. In Wipro, the manager of CC reports to marketing head. Head of Corporate affairs & Corporate Communications with Novartis India reports to MD but informs that CC still does not have seat in top management. In financial services sector, SBI Capital was found to be reporting to the MD. Hence in IT sector reporting is to marketing head, in conglomerates & MNCs reporting to HR is preferred over marketing.

In MNCs like Disney and Cadbury it was found that reporting happens at two levels-one to the CEO and the other to the regional head of CC. This dual reporting ensures that there is consistency at local, regional and global level. A similar reporting structure is observed in Bosch, where D.G.M CC has a reporting relationship with the M.D. of the company, and a dotted line reporting with his counterpart in Germany.

### *Nomenclatures*

The function is known by several names like PR, Public Affairs, Corporate Affairs, and Corporate Communications, which only adds to the confusion and varies from company to company. The industry is generally distancing itself from “PR” which has negative connotations at least in India and moving towards Corporate Communications or Corporate Affairs (CA) which is more encompassing. According to Head of CC at Cadbury, “nomenclatures are very company centric and Corporate Affairs includes PR, Public Affairs and CC. At Cadbury we have moved from CC to Corporate Affairs.” In several organizations like Cadbury and BSE there has been a transition from CC to CA as several functions like CSR and liaison with industry bodies were added and it was felt that CC is narrow in scope and hence name was changed to CA. Head of CC at Mahindra feels that differences in nomenclatures is a problem. “It should be Corporate Communications as Public affairs is more of government liaison, Corporate relations is more to do with customers and is part of business development, Community relations are purely CSR and PR is media centric,” she adds. The CC heads of SBI, Novartis, Bosch and Aditya Birla group were also comfortable with the title of Corporate communications.

### *Role of PR Agency*

While some organizations work with PR agency on a regular basis many do not have PR agency at all. Some CC heads who have earlier worked with PR agency, have media contacts and do not feel the need for agency. Similarly renowned companies anyways attract media attention and hence do not need PR agency. Organizations may be sensitive to head count in CC department and in that case whatever needs to be guarded closely is done internally and whatever can be

outsourced is given to PR agency. Many times agencies are hired for only particular projects, like going to the stock market to raise funds etc.

In Disney, PR agency works like an extended team built on relationship, confidentiality and exclusivity. “CC team is mainly responsible for protecting brand heritage whereas PR agency contributes in getting media mileage,” says Head of PR at Disney. “Some companies do not use PR agency for they believe that they understand what not to say besides what to say, which agency may not be able to appreciate as for them the number of media clips generated are very important,” comments Head CC of BSE. In Cadbury, the PR agency is vital in the execution of plans. CC provides strategic direction and planning and takes the help of PR for execution.

### Summary of Corporate Communications in Practice

Dimensions	Themes
Roles and Activities	Broad Purpose of CC  Dominant roles  Clarity of roles
Organizing the function	Departmental organization  Reporting relationship  Centralized vs decentralized  Specialist vs generalist  Interface with PR agency

	Nomenclatures & their meanings
Strategic Contribution	Input into corporate strategy  Top management view of CC  Seat in top management team  Is contribution measurable
Cultural issues	Own perception about profession  Interface with other areas  Status of CC practitioners and their work
Training and Development	Qualifications of CC practitioners  Professional development
Past and Future	Evolution of CC  Hindrances to CC  Future of CC

### **Strategic Contribution**

“The function of CC is very person centric. The experience, stature and profile of CC head influences the extent to which CC plays a strategic role in the organization. CC contributes to long term brand building and is hence strategic in nature,” says Head of PR of Disney. It is still

in a nascent stage in India. According to Head of CA at Cadbury, “input into corporate strategy and decision making is there but this has to increase.” In Mahindra the development of strategy plan is initiated by the CEO himself for all the strategic functions which includes CC. In Aditya Birla group too, CC gets a very strategic voice in the company.

### ***View of top management about Corporate Communication***

From the interviews it was found that when reporting is directly to CEO, then CC as a function is appreciated more. In both Disney & BSE, top management considers the function important. “Earlier top management had limited understanding of the function but it has increased over time,” comments Head of Corporate affairs at BSE. According to Head of CC at Cadbury, “the understanding is mixed. They know it is important but have yet to take the leap of faith.” By entrusting the CC function in the care of a higher ranking official, Mahindra has demonstrated how much it values CC. The same is the case with Infosys where Head Brand & Communication at Infosys, reports to the board on a quarterly basis. Wipro too has now recognized the importance of the function. In Reliance, Birla and in Mahindra, CC is a very important function. It reports to the Board or the CEO. Some organizations felt that the top management views this function as just an add-on. It is more an appendage than a necessity. However, companies do not realize that when there is a crisis, CC is the most needed function.

### ***Metrics for Measurement***

Industry seems to be moving towards objective measurement. Disney follows ‘performance management system’, wherein for each activity objectives are laid out in advance and results are compared with pre determined objectives. According to Head of Corporate affairs at BSE, “We prepare monthly reports on the events we participate in, calculate PR mileage in terms of equivalent advertising cost, and show the difference between rate card and negotiated rates in

media buying to quantitatively demonstrate our contribution to the organization.” “The contribution of CC is now measurable with metrics such as Cirrus (measures Corporate Image); increased ‘Sustainability reporting on CSR’ ; yearly employee surveys which are a good dipstick of progress in internal communications; and ranking of Most Respected Companies etc.,” comments Head of CC at Cadbury India. V.P. & Head of CC at Mahindra says, “Measurement is media centric and immediate in the form of either a favorable or an unfavorable story.” According to Manager, CC of Wipro, “Communication should lead to increased business generation.” “As one of the metrics, the company’s share of voice in media is compared with the competition,” says Head of CC at Bosch. Many companies hire external market research agencies to measure changes in corporate image. “There is a calendar of events that is to be followed along with external validation on image parameters. It throws up how the company has moved up the value chain,” says V.P. CA at Mahindra. “As far as metrics go, we don’t have anything on an ongoing basis, as it costs a lot of money,” says Head of CC at Novartis.

## **Cultural Issues**

### *Interface with other areas*

It has been observed that within organizations, Marketing, Finance and HR generally have a positive outlook towards CC as it shares the responsibility of communicating with their respective target audiences. “Marketing managers undertake activities for building product brands and seek help from CC to get mileage in terms of media relations,” says V.P. & Head of CC at Mahindra. “Interface between CC and other functional areas are increasing but most of it is still driven by media. Other functions perceive CC as a channel to reach out to media and as a department responsible for internal communications and CSR,” comments Head of CC at Cadbury. At BSE and SBI, initially there was a lot of inhibition in accepting Corporate

Communication, but slowly people started realizing that it is a useful function. Some organizations like Novartis and Reliance feel that there is lot of synergies between HR & CC and hence the two should work together. Both Aditya Birla group and Bosch felt that the interface with other functions is good.

## **Training & Development**

### *Educational qualifications*

Mass communication seems to be the preferred degree and more importance is given to experience than only degree. For internal communication, a qualification in literature may help but for media relations, experience in journalism may be desirable. “Since CC is a small team, we want experienced professionals who can deliver from day one. We do not have time to train them. Typically post graduate in Mass Communications or Journalism is preferred as one needs to be sensitive to the issues in communication,” says Head of PR at Disney. “At Bosch, people with humanities background are preferred to MBAs as MBAs may not understand the cultural and emotional sensitivities involved in communications. We like to take young people and train them,” says D.G.M CC at Bosch. According to Manager CC at Wipro, “a qualification in either communications or an MBA will be appropriate. Apart from this people must have strategic vision, common sense and a lot of initiative.” Group Executive of CC at Aditya Birla Group is of the opinion that people in CC need to be articulate and sensitive, have an understanding of media, have good listening and writing skills and be able to work in the business context.

### *Professional Development*

However, it appears there aren't enough in-depth and strategic training programs available in the domain for the practitioners. Disney has in-house online training programs which employees can

opt for and move to different verticals of business. BSE has an online 'BSE Training Institute' and offers courses from few days to few weeks on capital markets. According to Head of CC at Cadbury, "training and development is still in its infancy in India." "We follow the balance score card approach and training and development are the key elements for that," says V.P. & Head of CC at Mahindra. "India lacks in training opportunities in the field, there are at best some general programs on topics like brand management by business schools like IIM or ISB," feels Manager of CC at Wipro. At Novartis and Reliance too it was felt that with a dearth of professional training opportunities, people rely more on seminars, conferences etc. with the twin objective of learning and networking. Bosch aims at achieving continuous professional development for people through an annual conference.

## **Past & Future**

### *Evolution*

CC has come a long way from being the post box for press releases to becoming the custodian of corporate brand. The common perception is that CC as a function is evolving, though it will still take some time to mature. "Training and educational institutions have challenged the existing style of working and infused fresh thinking in the function," argues Head of PR at Disney. Most management graduates still prefer to opt for the traditional time tested specializations like Marketing, Finance etc. However, there is a growing interest now in CC as a specialized area. "From merely being a media department to now being responsible for the corporate brand, is a significant step forward," according to Head of CC at Cadbury. The Aditya Birla group has evolved from being an inwardly focused, closed entity with no internal coordination amongst different subsidiaries of the Group to a conglomerate with distinct corporate identity cohesively



uniting the different subsidiaries, primarily because of the positive role played by CC, says Group Executive of CC at Aditya Birla Group.

### *Hindrances*

Like every profession this too has some stumbling blocks, which need to be overcome. The dearth of good talent was perceived as the biggest obstacle almost unanimously. According to Head of CC at Cadbury “Absence of dedicated courses on CC in management schools is a hindrance to the growth of this profession.” The number of vacancies in CC are limited as many big corporations also staff a limited number of CC professionals. Moreover many CC professionals prefer to work with agencies as there one is exposed to different brands across categories and hence there is seldom boredom. “The onus for according stature to CC as a function rests with professionals as they have to drive the communications agenda of the organizations they serve. A lot depends on how the CC professionals perceive themselves and hence shape the perception of others,” says V.P. & Head of CC at Mahindra. The key is not to perceive it as a support function but rather as a function that will deliver in the long term. “A major hindrance is that the function is still media centric,” is the view from SBI.

### *Future*

From the interviews it can be concluded that the future is very bright and CC is going to have a very important role to play in the growth of a company thereby enabling it to earn its rightful place in the top management. “There is a need to communicate at every level.” avers Group Executive of CC at Aditya Birla Group. “Adhoc measurements will no longer be sufficient. It is time to stand up and contribute to top line and bottom line like HR has been able to do with recruitments, attrition rate, training programs etc.,” feels Head of PR at Disney.

Based on the above findings, I recommend the below given strategic interventions as a step forward for catapulting CC function into the mainstream business.

### **Strategic Corporate Communications**

<b>Strategic Issues</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Interventions</b>
Roles and Activities	To communicate with stakeholders, short term horizon.	To build corporate brand and reputation; long term horizon
Departmental organization	Integration of communication through structural design	Informal and process integration rather than structural integration
Reporting relationship	Reporting to an intermediate position between CC Head and CEO, very often to Head HR or Head Marketing	Report to CEO
Specialist vs Generalist	Treated more as specialist function	A specialist function at junior level but more general management skills and orientation at senior level
Strategic contribution	Peripheral to strategy making process.	Part of top management

		strategy team
Cultural Issues	Dilemma over potential of function and its practitioners	Practitioners initiative to take the big leap of faith

Corporate Communications can play an important role in providing horizontal information flow necessary to accomplish organization's overall goals. Whereas vertical linkages are designed primarily for control, horizontal linkages are designed for coordination and collaboration. Organizations can choose whether to orient towards a traditional organization designed for efficiency, which emphasizes vertical communication or towards a contemporary learning organization, which emphasizes horizontal communication. Competitive companies today are guided by the assumption that the organization needs ideas from everyone. Thus emphasis on knowledge management and information sharing often leads to a flattening of the organizational structure and greater empowerment and involvement of employees. CC can tie the different departments together by providing forums for sharing and disseminating information and fostering dialogue. Boundaries between departments and as well as those between organizations are becoming more flexible and diffuse as companies face the need to respond to changes in the external environment more rapidly. CC can bring in market orientation in organizations which entails the generation of marketing intelligence at the organization level, the dissemination of intelligence across departments, and an organization-wide responsiveness to it (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Interdepartmental connectedness is an important aspect of a market orientation, fundamental to the success of strategies (Fisher, Maltz, & Jaworski, 1997; Hutt & Speh, 1984; Maltz & Kohli, 2000; Ruekert & Walker, 1987). Interfunctional communication is linked to a variety of positive outcomes (Robert J. Fisher,

Elliot Maltz, & Bernard J. Jaworski, 1997); including increased understanding and harmony between functions (Souder 1988), interfunctional integration (Gupta, Raj, and Wilemon 1985), stronger market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski 1990), an increased ability to cope with complex dynamic environments (Huber 1982), and greater new product success (Cooper 1984; Dougherty 1987). Crossfunctional integration will be enhanced if the department has comparable status to that of other powerful functions within the company (Piercy, 1991; Shipley & Fonfara, 1993). Hence in the interest of the organization CC needs to evolve and come at par with other functions.

Changing corporate expectations of CC's role, from transaction processor to trusted advisor on managing environmental change and more require that companies assemble, train and appropriately reward top talent. World-class companies do this in several ways: They ensure that Corporate Communication executives have a strong understanding of the business. They provide training that develops leadership skills. They also hire fewer but more highly skilled specialists, and pay them more.

The answer to the structural challenge debate of centralization/decentralization depends on a company's size, the geographic dispersion of its offices and the diversity of its products and services. Research suggests that centralization is inversely related to interdepartmental coordination (Matsuno, Mentzer, & Ozsomer, 2002; Menon, Jaworski, & Kohli, 1997) and thus inconsistent with a market orientation. A strong, centralized, functional area can be supplemented by a network of decentralized operatives who adopt the function to the special needs of the independent business units (Argenti, 2007). Even in an environment that extols the

virtues of decentralization to meet customers' needs quickly, the value of a central management structure for communication makes sense for many organizations, particularly ones with global operations. A central communication group develops, projects, and maintains the corporation's image and culture. It also sets policies to achieve the strategic goal of developing and perpetuating a corporate image and culture, to project consistent messages, and to communicate with its various publics on a routine basis, as well as in emergency and crisis situations.

Playing the communication game at the Fortune 500 level requires substantial resources in professional staff and financial commitment (Michael B. Goodman, 2001). In practice, corporate communication is a strategic tool for the corporation to gain a competitive advantage. If the company has a sound strategy, and if the intangible assets are aligned with that strategy, then the assets will create value for the organization (*Kalpan, R.S & Norton, DP (2004)*).

If CC and PR is to contribute meaningfully then organizations must change their concept of the function. Instead of accepting an avalanche of releases and publicity as “results” of public relations programs, executives must build scientific research and evaluation into the process (*Broom and Dozier, 1983*).

CC professionals should have the ability to enter strategic conversations with the senior team (Liedtka, 1998). In the past, mastery of the written word was more than enough. Writing is still the core skill on which all others are built. But additionally CC professionals must have the ability to absorb and comprehend vast amounts of complex information quickly, create and build relationships internally and externally and build trust in audiences (Goodman, 2001).

Not only has the nature of corporate communication changed over the last few decades, the type of people who create the company messages has changed as well. Generally, practitioners are loyal company people with a long record in the organization, reflecting the importance of the strategic nature of the organization's communications. The emphasis on recruiting good talent translates into improving quality. Just raising the bar each year can be a good start (Herbert, 2008). Building a talented crop of motivated specialists is a strategic imperative (Sinnott, 2003). As an academic discipline, corporate communication is more art than science. Its intellectual foundations began with the Greeks and Romans with rhetoric. Corporations that do not value communication highly are doomed to wither.

### **Conclusion**

To catapult itself into the same league as marketing, finance, HR, and operations, CC will have to be the custodian of corporate reputation and brand. Simply being an interface between an organization and its stakeholders is not sufficient but taking a long term view of business goals and strategies and proactively contributing to its attainment is more important today than ever. Corporate communication today cuts across all organizational departments and the message is the medium and all employees are communicators. In such a scenario organizations must look beyond structural integration to have a more informal and process driven integration. Reporting to anyone less than a CEO only reflects that the function has not yet acquired a central role in the organization and the practitioners not earned the status of thought leaders in top management. The beginning has been made with a select few practitioners rising to the level of Presidents and Vice Presidents and occupying seat in top management. It has been hard work for them but it should pave the way for others in the profession to get into the big league. The onus for this

primarily lies on practitioners as they have to move beyond tactical communications and think strategy to enable top management take the big leap of faith.

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