

Information/Knowledge Management for enhanced Corporate Communication Practices

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ABSTRACT

The corporate communicator needs to know how to manage information effectively both individually and within the task/group/organizational setting. In practice corporate communication practitioners are needed who are able to exploit the riches of the worldwide web and other electronic resources with confidence and intelligence, but at the same time realize that traditional information and library skills also have their place in their practical repertoire. Such skills can reinforce strengths in business and organizational information seeking, but today and increasingly in the future this will not be enough. Full professional competence requires a mastery of a totality of capacities and qualities in information. This paper reveals how the strategic response to this need is being realized through the development of knowledge management: as a key norm within corporate communication theory and practice.

Key Words: Corporate communication, knowledge management, information management

INTRODUCTION

Corporate communicators are ethically obligated to provide truthful and verifiable information. This means that gathering accurate data and information about clients, events, and issues is crucial. Doing so allows for a better understanding of clients' needs and helps in crafting appropriate responses and messages. Ensuring that corporate communication is based on high-quality information is essential for effective communication. Consequently, managing information and knowledge becomes essential and mutually reinforcing in corporate communication practice.

The trend in policy and practice is moving towards comprehensive management of information and knowledge resources, making it a standard part of corporate communication. This paper aims to explore how to achieve this strategic goal. It involves examining a wide range of concepts and practices related to information, intelligence, and knowledge, and reflecting on the key components of corporate communication. Definitions and models are needed to bring intellectual cohesion to these ideas. From this perspective, several key points arise:

- Corporate communication professionals need strong personal information and knowledge management skills.
- Professional education for corporate communicators should provide a wide range of transferable information and communication skills to complement their general communication and professional skills.
- Corporate communication professionals must apply their understanding and skills in information management to serve clients, upholding ethical and legal responsibilities, and contributing to client satisfaction through quality management.
- Effective management of information and knowledge resources within organizations should be ensured by establishing information strategy and policy, planning actions, and managing work efficiently to maximize the value of these resources and minimize risks to both the communicators and their clients.

By managing information effectively, corporate communicators can better leverage their specialized skills in a complex world. This involves understanding and addressing stakeholder interests and claims, adhering to ethical and legal standards, and being sensitive to human and social conditions. Transparency in information and communication should be a goal for all professionals in this field.

Key terms

Corporate Communication

Communication involves the process of transferring information, which includes both the initiation and reception of content. Information, in this context, encompasses various forms such as data, intelligence, and knowledge. Both information and communication can take on numerous forms, reflecting their diverse nature.

Information Management

Information management deals with the selection, evaluation, description, storage, retrieval, manipulation, and presentation of information (Askew, 2000). It can be defined as the formal organization of handling information (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). These two definitions complement each other: Askew emphasizes the process and outlines a sequence of functions that align with the information-communication cycle, while Roberts underscores the broader concept of organization. Without formal organization, there is potential for disorder, chaos, and inefficiency. Nonetheless, information management can be effective even in informal settings, such as grapevine communication that spreads positive information. These seemingly informal environments often have an underlying formal structure.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is a more comprehensive and inclusive concept. It must be defined not only by content but also by time, space, experience, learning, and organizational and social activity. Information management is a crucial component that contributes to the development of knowledge management as a competence within broader knowledge frameworks. These frameworks include interpersonal networks and learning organizations, such as enterprises that have adopted knowledge management strategies to aid their development or groups of practitioners in 'communities of practice' who collaborate to share and create new knowledge. The integration of knowledge management into the core practice of information professionals reflects current trends and future goals. While information management (IM) and knowledge management (KM) can be distinct, they are most effective when closely related. Knowledge management thrives in specific organizational contexts characterized by unique social behaviors (e.g., Leonard-Barton, 1995; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The Information-Knowledge Binary

Knowledge-based work and management differ from other fields, such as data management handled by statisticians, data processors, data warehouseers, and those who work with information like library and information service personnel, documentalists, publishers, and web page providers (Nicholls, A., 2010). These professionals operate across the spectrum from data to knowledge. In the corporate environment, knowledge work and workers are increasingly recognized as a distinct group. This group is often supported by data processors, librarians, and information managers, among others. Additionally, consultants, experts, academics, pundits, journalists, and analysts are also considered knowledge-based workers engaged in knowledge work. Corporate communicators definitely belong to this category as well.

The main goal of practical knowledge management is to identify, extract, share, and leverage hidden knowledge. While the world of information deals primarily with explicit and revealed knowledge, managing this information can be labor-intensive and costly (Howaldt, J., & Schwarz, M., 2010). Information management also involves making implicit knowledge visible and tangible. Knowledge management becomes crucial when much of what is known is implicit and only partially usable, yet necessary for the collective. Intelligence serves as a bridge between information and knowledge; it involves applying knowledge to information (and data) to extract meaning and value.

Information as foundation for Knowledge Management

The concept of information is a helpful starting point for this discussion. While it is challenging to define it scientifically and professionally, the term has widespread colloquial and literary recognition. People generally understand information to mean facts, data, things that inform, useful items, and known entities. It is often said that "information is power" or that information empowers, emphasizing its potential to bring about change, transformation, and benefits (Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., & Ryan, R. M., 1991). Information specialists find it useful to distinguish between formal information and informal information. They further differentiate types of formal publications and informal communication activities.

Information management focuses on the supply and mediation of information demand. This activity can be individual, collective, or institutional, and often occurs simultaneously in all three contexts. Information management is dynamic, active, and proactive, relying on techniques for data and information storage, handling, retrieval, analysis, and exploitation. Modern technology allows these techniques to be applied both at the desktop and in the field using mobile communications. In varied and unstable conditions, experienced corporate communicators with expertise in information and knowledge management have a distinct advantage (Brown, T. (2009).

Knowledge management has emerged alongside advances in information and communication technologies, forming an infrastructure for many organizational and societal activities. It has also evolved due to changes in markets, business environments, global conditions, and new technologies. Knowledge management builds on the concept of information (explicit knowledge) and intelligence (a mix of explicit and tacit knowledge), incorporating tacit and shared knowledge as key paradigms. It extends ideas of comparative and competitive advantage in corporations through the strategic use of IT and transaction cost concepts, and it focuses on knowledge resources (intellectual capital and assets) thriving in holistic, synergistic environments known as knowledge organizations and learning organizations (Patel, P. C., & Spindler, S. J., 2019).

Information and knowledge management have become vital corporate and business activities, originating from market research, competitive intelligence, business information, consulting, decision support, and corporate policy. These fields significantly impact library and information professionals, who play a crucial role in the knowledge supply chain. The relevance of information and knowledge management to corporate communication lies in the importance of information as a resource within organizations and the communication process. While successful corporate communication depends on various forces and requirements, effective information and knowledge management techniques form a fundamental infrastructure.

Knowledge Management as driver of Corporate Communication

Studying corporate communication requires understanding the business and client environments, management principles and practices, and the nuances of information. Information and knowledge management have evolved alongside changes in the business landscape, influenced by advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs), strategic business and IT integration, the global marketplace, virtual corporations, e-business, and e-commerce (Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E., 2006). The significant role of the internet in marketing and corporate communication is now widely recognized.

While the corporate environment has driven the development of knowledge management, its future impact will extend broadly to society and individual citizens, not just those working within global corporations or local enterprises. Trends in information and knowledge management are already shaping corporate communication through digital media and electronic business. Employees, consumers, and other stakeholders are finding new empowerment avenues through ICTs. Practitioners must understand and incorporate this empowerment into new communication methods and strategies.

Corporate communicators have always been information workers, but they are now increasingly seen as knowledge workers. It is essential for corporate communicators to explicitly integrate knowledge-related concepts into their professional practice. Knowledge-based organizations and clients will benefit most from communicators who are attuned to knowledge management. Theories and practices from information management, organizational management, and behavioral science provide the tools and techniques for a hybrid and integrated approach to knowledge management (Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C., 2001). This approach leverages information as a resource, aids in organizational and individual decision-making, and drives change in behavior as organizations and individuals strive to achieve their goals.

The Information-Communication relationship in a Corporate Communication ecosystem

The principles discussed here aim to strengthen the skills and competencies of corporate communicators by providing a disciplined understanding and insight into information and communication. Familiarity with the professional world of information and knowledge management will enable corporate communicators to articulate their information needs to specialists effectively (Berger, Arthur Asa, 2004). This understanding will help them achieve a degree of autonomy in handling information, both with their corporate communication colleagues and clients. This autonomy and competence will enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of corporate communicators, underpinning their techniques and solutions with sound information and communication strategies.

Corporate communicators must consider several critical questions:

- How much information exists about a given issue?
- Who possesses this information?
- What is the quality of the information?
- What are the preferred communication activities and methods?
- How can information be processed and managed at different points in the cycle to meet various needs and conditions?
- What are the optimal methods for gathering, storing, analyzing, and retrieving information?
- How can relevant information be effectively targeted to stakeholders and their concerns?

Corporate communicators operate within an information society, while their clients work in knowledge-based environments. Their stakeholders are increasingly part of a global information society. Corporate communicators need access to a wide range of data, information, and intelligence resources that reflect their clients' and stakeholders' interests (Lister M. et al., 2003). These resources form the foundation for developing corporate communication strategies, policies, messages, and responses to build image, identity, and reputation.

Leveraging technology for tapping Information resources

Despite the importance of knowledge, its management is best founded on solid information management practices. In a corporate communication context, the task is to maximize the value of information, which can be seen as

resourcefulness in problem-solving and decision-making. Corporate communicators, acting as information managers, must identify and select the most resourceful information or ensure its availability for the task at hand. Information management increasingly relies on computers and telecommunications (ICTs), with the internet and the worldwide web representing contemporary ICTs through digitized input, hypertext, multimedia, high-speed data transmission, and broad bandwidth (Poster M., 1995).

From this environment, the virtual organization has emerged, exemplified by dot-com enterprises and e-businesses engaged in e-commerce. The impact of these new organizational forms on corporate communication is still debated. Are these new technologies merely grafted onto older organizational structures, or do they represent a radically different model?

Several factors have thus crystallized:

- Organizations and stakeholders are more connected through common technological platforms.
- Information circulation, communication, and messaging have become faster, spreading both good and bad news quickly to more people.
- Technological diffusion has increased the number of players, potentially creating a more 'democratic' environment for corporate communication.
- The boundaries between corporate and personal/individual/private spheres are being readjusted.
- Corporate society is becoming increasingly globalized through the use of new technologies.

CONCLUSIONS

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are significantly shaping the theory and practice of corporate communication. However, traditional methods of information and communication remain crucial. Despite the broader range of media options, choosing and effectively utilizing the right mediums still demands skill and experience. Both students and practitioners of corporate communication must understand information and communication practices comprehensively, developing personal skills and appreciating their corporate significance. The integration of information management and knowledge management into corporate communication education is a crucial step toward building a robust professional foundation, leveraging established disciplines in these areas.

The evolution of ICTs is transforming corporate communication, necessitating a blend of traditional skills and modern technological proficiency. By embracing comprehensive information and knowledge management programs, corporate communicators can enhance their professional capabilities, ensuring they remain effective and strategic in an increasingly complex information landscape.

As ICTs and information management serve as catalysts for communication activities, managing corporate communication in an increasingly information and communication-rich environment becomes complex. A strategic perspective is essential, pointing toward practical solutions for corporate communication. Developing effective information management strategies and policies is a necessary response to navigate the challenges of an informatized and globalized world. Following are the seminal points that emerge from this inquiry:

1. **Understanding Media Options:** Corporate communicators must be adept at selecting the appropriate media for different communication needs, balancing traditional and modern options.
2. **Personal Skill Development:** Practitioners need to develop personal competencies in handling information and communication technologies, ensuring they can navigate and leverage these tools effectively.
3. **Strategic Information Management:** Creating and implementing information management strategies and policies is vital for maintaining effective communication practices within the corporate environment.
4. **Global and Local Integration:** Communicators must understand the global context while addressing local nuances, ensuring their strategies are relevant and impactful across diverse settings.
5. **Continuous Learning:** Staying updated with advancements in ICTs and evolving information management practices is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in corporate communication.

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