Executive Perspectives on Communication Leadership Competencies and Credentials

MCM 740 Capstone Project

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INTRODUCTION

The functions of senior public relations and communications management representatives have evolved over the past three decades and are "achieving increased stature within the corporation" (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, p. 7). Reflective of the evolution of public relations and communications management as a strategic management function, the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) established a National Council on Education (Education Council) in 2007 to provide advice to post-secondary educators about current public relations practice for use in curriculum. As a professional association, CPRS has a responsibility to play an active role in the development and maintenance of post-secondary education programs which reflect current theory, practice, professional values and relevancy to the workplace.

CPRS first began to look at the issue of standards related to public relations and communication management curriculum in the 1980's. In recent years, educational institutions have asked CRPS to step up even more by providing processes and support for consistency in curriculum and program planning that would lead to a formal recognition and endorsement by CPRS of educational programs as well as look at options for students to enrich their learning experience with direct links to the profession.

In response, the CPRS Education Council developed guidelines and a clear overview that – from a professional association's perspective – reflected what was required for educational programs to reflect current practice. This project began by simply looking at requirements for curriculum standards. However, it quickly became apparent that public relations education in Canada is offered in diverse ways within many autonomous educational institutions. Attempting to develop one set of learning criteria for public relations programs that could reflect a national

standard proved impossible. It would also negate the unique nature of the current slate of programs along with the independent decision making incorporated by the respective educational institutions which offer them. Yet through consultation with many of the educational institutions, the CPRS Education Council heard there was a strong interest in CPRS being involved in providing guidelines for curriculum development and formal recognition of programs was valued by educational institutions.

As a means to address this while respecting the independent nature of programs, the CPRS Education Council developed the *Pathways to the Profession,* an integrated program planning model that includes an emphasis on program outcomes along with recommendations for a course framework. The *Pathways to the Profession* defines the skills and competencies required of public relations professionals at the technical, career, management, leader and scholarship levels.

BACKGROUND & THEORY

The evolution of public relations and communications management functions has profound implications for professional development programs. According to Goodman (2006), "Recent studies confirm corporate communication as a strategic management function centered on these challenges:

- the need to build trust with all internal and external audiences;
- the expectation by the corporation to accomplish more with less;
- the demand to build a responsible and accountable global corporate culture in response to a hostile environment for multinational corporations;
- the perception of the corporate communication executive as "counsel to the CEO" and "manager of the company's" reputation;
- the understanding of the global impact of the local act, and the local impact of the global act;
- the demand for greater transparency and disclosure have made media relations more complex and strategic;

- the expectation that the company be a good citizen and make money;
- the reality of global terrorism makes crisis communication planning a critical success factor for corporate communication professionals;
- the understanding of transparency as a best practice strategy for reputation management; and
- the knowledge that writing remains the core skill for corporate communications (p. 196).

Corporate communication professional development programs continue to be a growth area in higher education not only in Canada, but worldwide. Based on the outcomes of an academic symposium in May 2006 sponsored by the Arthur W. Page Society, participants identified that "in an interdisciplinary and applied field such as corporate communication, current practices and trends can inform the academic community on what to offer in professional degree programs" (Goodman, 2006, p. 197). Participants went on to identify the following strategic challenges that executives face which a program in corporate communications should focus on:

- building trust;
- efficiency;
- building a culture of accountability;
- counseling the corporation and the CEO;
- managing the company reputation;
- managing the impact of globalization;
- transparency in media relations and reputation management;
- managing corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility;
- managing issues and crises; and
- writing is a core skill for corporate communication (Goodman, 2006, p. 197).

In the United States, the Commission on Public Relations Education, managed by The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), has been a leader in working with American institutes in endorsing and accrediting education programs and in establishing educational standards that are to be met for this recognition to occur. The *Port of Entry* (1999) and *The*

Professional Bond (2006) were developed by The Commission to highlight what is expected of education and offered an overview of curricula based predominantly on recommended courses. These reports offer a clear philosophical approach to public relations education while recognizing the autonomy of educational programmers and faculty in their development.

Leeds Metropolitan University 2008 report, *Towards a Global Curriculum,* to the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management provided an analysis of secondary literature to determine the potential for creating a global curriculum for public relations. The recommendations coming out of the report included building a global curriculum that respected potential cultural differences, the tensions between uniformity and diversity of program elements, and the need for partnering with industry and other relevant bodies to create appropriate educational competencies (Leeds University, 2008, pp. 18-24).

A First Look: An in-depth analysis of global public relations education (2010), which built on earlier studies, analyzed 218 educational institutions in 39 countries on five continents, and engaged in in-depth interviews with public relations educators in 20 of these countries, found the following:

- public relations is generally defined as a strategic function for building and maintaining relationships;
- undergraduate programs are basically designed to prepare future practitioners;
- curriculum frequently reflects the five-course standard suggested in the Commission on Public Relations Education's 2006 report, *The Professional Bond;*
- important cultural distinctions are often embedded within programs;
- barriers to development of the 'ideal public relations program' include resources, government, country culture, program structure, and inadequate or ineffective relationships with practicing professionals;
- graduate programs emphasize advanced theory and strategic thinking; and
- researchers also found 'moderate' influence by U.S. and European educational standards in other parts of the world (Toth & Aldoory, 2010, pp. 2-3).

Understanding the value and importance executives (e.g. general business, human resources, and public relations/communications management) place on a set of public relations and communication management competencies and credentials for communication managers and leaders (e.g. director, vice president, and chief information officer) is important to the ongoing advancement of the public relations and communications management profession.

Scant research exists that looks at the competencies and credentials Canadian executives require of their senior public relations professionals. The goal of this research project was to more clearly understand to what degree the skills and competencies identified in the manager and leader *Pathways* levels of the CPRS *Pathways to the Profession* align with Canadian executive perspectives of the competencies required of their communication managers and leaders (e.g. managers, directors, and vice presidents).

The CPRS *Pathways to the Profession* is an outcome-based approach to excellence in Canadian public relations and communications management education developed by the National Council on Public Relations Education. The *Pathways* outlines what, in the eyes of CPRS National Society, should be included in public relations education programming in Canada.

Using this information, the researcher conducted a gap analysis of the communication manager and leadership skills and competencies defined in the *Pathways to the Profession* and the value executives place on those skills and competencies and their senior communicators demonstration of those skills and competencies.

A secondary goal of this research was to test the value placed on credentials – academic credentials achieved through academic institutions, e.g. certificates, diplomas or degrees, and

professional credentials achieved through professional associations, e.g. certifications or accreditations.

The questions posed in this research included:

RQ1: How and to what extent do the skills and competencies of the communication manager and leadership levels of the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) *Pathways to the Profession* match what executives are looking for in their communication managers, directors, and vice presidents?

RQ2: To what degree do executives require educational and/or professional credentials for their communications managers, directors, and vice presidents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

When considering the competencies and credentials Canadian executives require of the communication managers and leaders, it's important to consider the value executives place on communications. It is equally important to consider the key functions, processes and attributes required of communication managers and leaders and how the literature defines them.

Communications and Public Relations

The terms "public relations," "communications," and "organizational communications" are used interchangeably. Much has been written about the definition of public relations. In fact, there are more than 450 definitions of public relations and communications management. The definitions that formed the foundation of this research include the following.

Cutlip, Center & Broom (2000) defines "public relations as the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (p. 6). Coombs (2001) defines public relations as "the use of communication to manage the relationship between an organization and its stakeholders" (p. 106). According to the CPRS endorsed definition developed by Flynn, Gregory

& Valin (2008), public relations is "the strategic management of relationships between an organization and its diverse publics, through the use of communication, to achieve mutual understanding, realize organizational goals, and serve the public interest" (www.cprs.ca).

CEO Commitment to Communications

CEO commitment to communications often sets the organization's culture for communications and its openness to including strategic communication principles as part of the business strategy. According to a 2000 Angus Reid study of Canadian CEOs, CEOs devote nearly half of their time (49 per cent) to communications, both with external stakeholders such as investors, government, the media, customers, and internal audiences such as employees and management (Canadian Management Association, 2000, p. 8).

Ninety three per cent of the CEOs who participated in the study agreed, "public relations is a strategic management function that contributes to the success of their organization." A similar percentage agreed that in today's environment, public relations is a key component in the development of their organization's strategic business plan and other important initiatives (Canadian Management Association, 2000, p. 8).

CEOs have noted the most important communication challenges facing their companies today are the "converging forces of technology, global integration, multiplying stakeholders, and the resulting need for transparency" (Arthur W. Page Society, 2007, p. 14). In a CEO interview conducted by the Public Relations Society of America, one CEO noted that her "most powerful leadership strategy is to communicate" (Public Relations Society of America, 2004, p. 21).

Today's senior communicators are under pressure to provide CEOs with strategic counsel and guidance on how best to bring the company values to life, articulate the corporate vision and strategies, and effectively deliver both good and bad news. According to Feldman (2004),

"…one inferior CEO performance with one key stakeholder group can have measurable impact on corporate reputation" (p. 24). Senior communicators are also challenged by their CEOs to "to demonstrate the outcomes and relationships that public relations facilitates for organizations to enhance their reputation" (Flynn, 2006, p. 197).

In a 2009 Conference Board of Canada study on CEO Top Challenges, more than 70 per cent of the top 10 challenges identified by CEOs were communications related.

Table 1: Top 10 Challenges of Greatest Concern to CEOs

Top 10 Challenges of Greatest Concern to CEOs				
Global Top 10	Asia	Europe	U.S.	Canada
1. Excellence in execution	1	1	1	2
2. Consistent execution of strategy by top management	4	2	3	1
3. Sustained and steady top-line growth	3	3	2	3
4. Customer loyalty/retention	2	5	4	4
5. Speed, flexibility, adaptability to change	9*	4	9	5
6. Corporate reputation for: quality products/services	6	7*	8	7
7. Stimulating innovation/creativity/ enabling entrepreneurship	9*	9	10	8
8. Profit growth			5	10*
9. Improving productivity	9*			10*
10. Government regulation		6	7	

* Results were tied (Conference Board of Canada, 2010, pg. 1).

Communications as Part of the Dominant Coalition

Much has been written on the importance of the senior communicator being "at the table" as part of the dominant coalition. According to Larissa Grunig, as cited in van Ruler & de Lang

(2003), "inclusion of communication management in the dominant coalition seems vital" (p.

146). The literature has also suggested that both public and private organizations need:

> …a specific function, on a policy-making level, aimed at initiating, directing, and coaching communications within the contexts of the organization itself, its policy framework, and its functioning within the commercial, political, technical, and social environments. It concerns all activities that are intentionally implemented to direct communication and information processes to help achieve an organization's goals. It also argues for hiring specialists at a managerial level, e.g., communication managers rather than communication technicians (van Ruler, et. al, 2003, p. 146).

James E. Grunig (2006) supported the value public relations brings to an organization by

providing an organization's key stakeholders with input into management decisions that affect

them. "If public relations provides publics a voice in strategic decision-making, management is

more likely to make socially responsible decisions" (p. 2).

Roles and Responsibilities of a Senior Communicator

Much has also been written about the ongoing evolution of the key roles, responsibilities,

and functions carried out by senior communication managers and leaders. According to Goman

(2004), the role of organizational communications has expanded to helping people interact and

connect with one another. "The traditional role of the communication staff has changed from

information gatekeepers to developers of environments conducive to information sharing" (p.

17).

Ensuring excellence in public relations and communications management is one of the

key responsibilities of the senior communicator within an organization. Grunig (2001) states that

excellent public relations "builds long-term relationships of trust and understanding with

strategic publics of the organization—those that affect or are affected by the organization as it

identifies and pursues its mission" (p. 21). Grunig (1992) goes on to state, "Excellent public

relations is an integral part of an excellent organization... Excellent public relations can help the

rest of the organization be excellent" (p. 248).

To develop a global theory of public relations, Vercic, Grunig, Grunig & Wakefield

consolidated the "Excellence" variables and principles into three dimensions: "strategic

management, symmetrical communication, and characteristics of the public relations

department" (Grunig et. al, 1999, p. 221). The principles related to strategic management state:

> That a public relations unit should be headed by a manager who plans programmes
> strategically, public relations should be empowered in the dominant coalition, it should
> be involved in the strategic management of the overall organisation, public relations
> activities should be integrated into one function, and public relations should be a function
> separated from other functions, e.g., marketing" (p. 221).

> The principles related to symmetrical communication state:

> Organisations should communicate with their external public symmetrically and similarly
> use the two-way symmetrical model in their internal communication. In addition,
> excellent public relations departments share characteristics such as having the knowledge
> to practice symmetrical communication and to manage the public relations function
> strategically, recruiting diverse communication employees in both management and
> technical roles, and taking social responsibility" (pp. 221-222).

> The studies suggest, "Excellence in public relationships has direct effects on relationship

quality between organizations and publics. Relationships with publics provides the best indicator

for the effects of excellence in public relations rather than reputation or image" (Yun, 2006, p.

309).

Grunig, et al. (2002) also recognized that "excellent public relations managers help bring

the values and goals of different functional managers together by working with them to build

relationships with relevant publics and bring perspectives of those publics into strategic

management" (p. 307).

One way senior communicators can ensure excellence in public relations is to ensure

communications are strategic and support the overall business strategy. Garnett (1992) points out

that while there is no general consensus on the definition of "strategy" or "strategic," there are a number of concepts that consistently emerge. "A strategic approach involves systematically integrating information across fields, departments, and organizations; considering more than the technical aspects of managing; thinking situationally—taking relevant political, economic, administrative, social, legal, and personal factors into account; and devising strategy appropriate to organizational strengths, weaknesses, and competition" (p. 38).

According to Steyn (2007), "the unique contribution of public relations to an organization's strategic decision-making process is to provide a societal view—showing concerns for broader societal issues, approaching any problem with a concern for the implications of organizational behavior toward and in the public sphere" (p. 139). By "viewing an organization from an 'outside' perspective," public relations can help an organization adapt to its stakeholder environment and society as a whole through environmental scanning and providing input on stakeholder concerns and expectations, and societal issues and publics that emerge around an issue as part of the decision-making process" (Steyn, 2007, p. 139).

Strategic public relations management serves the interests of both the organization and the public by influencing organizational leaders "to address the reputation risks and other strategic issues identified in this process by aligning organizational goals and strategies to societal/stakeholder values and norms" (Steyn, 2007, pg 139).

The 2009 CCI Corporate Communication Practices and Trends Study found that "corporate communication executives continue to see their primary role in the company as 'counsel to the CEO' and 'manager of the company's' reputation. Reputation management requires a strategic partnership and counsel with the CEO" (Goodman, Genest, Cayo and Ng, 2009, pg. 1). This study also found that social media has dramatically changed the media

landscape for corporate communications and the "challenge for communication officers is to focus on the strategic, rather than the tactical, use of the new technology" (Goodman, et. al, 2009, pg. 1).

One of the best examples of where strategic public relations management serves the interests of both the organization and the public is issues management.

The term issues management was coined by Howard Chase in 1997 in an attempt to "define the strategies that companies needed to use to counter the efforts of activist groups which were putting pressure on legislators for stricter controls of business activity" (Regester & Larkin, 2008, p. 40). Chase and Jones, as cited by Meath (2009) in a presentation to the PRSA Public Affairs Conference, defined an issue as an "unsettled matter which is ready for decision." According the Issues Management Council, as cited by Meath (2009), an issue is the "gap between your actions and stakeholder positions." Meath (2009) summed up the definition of an issue as "any matter that can impact our interests."

Others have defined the term issues management as "a condition or event, either internal or external to the organization which, if it continues, will have a significant effect on the functioning or performance of the organization or on its future interests" (Jaques, 2007, 147). Health (2001) defines issues management as "the management of organizational and community resources through the public policy process to advance organizational interests and rights by striking a mutual balance with those stakeholders and stakekeepers" (p. 36).

How an organization manages its issues can mean the difference between an out of control crisis or a proactive solution, or between profit and loss. Organizational communications scholars have identified "multiple stages in the life cycle of an issue: nonexistent, potential, dormant, imminent, current, and critical" (Cutlip, Centre & Broom, 2006, p. 326). They go on to

define crises as "issues confronting the organization that have reached the critical stage" (p. 326). Meath (2009), in a presentation to the PRSA Public Affairs Conference, defined a crisis as a "major occurrence with potentially negative outcome that affects an organization's publics, services, products, or reputation."

Fearn-banks (2001) defines a "crisis as a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization as well as its publics, services, products, and/or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can, at its worst, threaten the existence of the organization" (p. 480).

How an organization manages its relationships with its key publics as part of its issues and crisis management responses can have a reputational impact on the organization. According to Coombs (2008), "An organization's reputation is an aggregate evaluation stakeholders make about how well an organization is meeting stakeholder expectations based on its past behaviors. Put another way, a reputation is an evaluation of an organization based on stakeholder perceptions" (p. 244).

Drawing from Spicer (2008), "Combs defined primary stakeholders as those who can harm or benefit the organization, and secondary stakeholders (or influencers) as 'those who can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization, but not to the critical degree that primary stakeholders can" (pp. 29-30).

Berger (2005), as cited in Spicer (2008), noted that the role of the public relations practitioner is a "social role," meaning the public relations practitioner has set of responsibilities to the organization and to its stakeholders and others. Included in this set of responsibilities is the management of the relationships between an organization and its diverse publics.

In defining the term reputation, it is important to recognize that it can be defined by both tangible and intangible attributes. Corporate reputation is based on more than the quality of a company's products or services, social responsibility or ethics. It is all of those things plus "financial performance, the CEO's reputation, the company's vision and the leadership of the company" (Elsasser, 2004, p. 38). More specifically, reputation is "how a company is perceived by its stakeholders, including customers, partners, employees, and regulators" (Vallens, 2008, p. 37).

Fombrum and Van Riel (2004) break down reputation into five key attributes organizations must develop to build a strong reputation. These five reputation pillars – visibility, authenticity, consistency, distinctiveness and transparency – can be applied equally to the corporate, not-for-profit and public sectors:

- *Visibility:* "The more familiar you are to the public, the better the public rates you" (p. 104).
- *Authenticity:* "To earn the benefit of the doubt, organizations have to convey absolute honesty in all their interactions with stakeholders – otherwise, any discredit by one stakeholder will instantly be communicated to all of them, reducing the degree of support they feel for the organization" (p. 163).
- *Consistency:* "An organization's reputation platform has to be consistently enacted across all stakeholder groups and through all of the organization's communications and initiatives" (p. 218).
- *Distinctiveness:* "Distinctiveness builds strength of association and comes from a success at building a reputation platform (its customized slogans, unique trademarks and logos, and personalized corporate stories) that is strategically aligned and emotionally appealing" (p. 157).
- *Transparency:* "Research has shown that the more transparent an organization is, the more likely stakeholders are to rely on their disclosures and to have faith in the organization's prospects" (p. 186).

In a 2005 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, 84 per cent of the survey respondents noted that CEOs have the ultimate responsibility for managing the reputation

risk which was also identified as "the greatest risk facing global companies" (Vallens, 2008, pp. 37-38).

The role and responsibility of the senior public relations practitioner in advocating an organization's position is an important one. According to Grunig (2000), many people believe public relations is a "mysterious hidden persuader working for the rich and powerful to deceive and take advantage of the less powerful," both the academy and profession "believe that public relations plays an essential role in a democratic society" (Grunig, 2000, pp.23-24).

Edward Bernays "stressed the advocacy nature of public relations, thereby sharply differentiating it from the journalistic function" (Curtin & Boynton, 2001, p. 414). According to James Grunig, as cited in Cancel, Cameron & Mitrook, 1997, "Many, if not most practitioners, consider themselves to be advocates for or defenders of their organizations" (p. 36).

"Proponents of advocacy theory note that democratic society based on free expression, a persuasion ethic is both acceptable and necessary for the emergence of truth" (Curtin et al., 2001, p. 414).

In publicly traded companies, advocating on behalf of the organization with its shareholders is the responsibility of a public relations specialty known as investor relations, or also referred to as "IR," "shareholder relations," and "financial relations." Practitioners who assume this role work to "enhance the value of a company's stock" and "keep shareholders informed and loyal to a company in order to maintain a fair valuation of a company's stock" (Cutlip et. al, 2006, p. 20).

Advocating on behalf of an organization with government and policy-makers is another key responsibility of the senior communicator within an organization and is often known as government relations or public affairs.

Public affairs relates to "public relations efforts related to public policy and corporate citizenship" (Cutlip, et. al, 2006, p. 16). As cited in Cutlip, et. al (2006), public affairs specialists described the relationship between public affairs and public relations in the following manner:

1. Public affairs is the public relations practice that addresses public policy and the publics who influence such policy (p. 16).
2. PR tactics applied to GR (government relations) strategies to produce "excellent public policy" (p. 16).

Lesly (1991) notes "public affairs is confusedly used to describe what happens in government and policy-making more often than when dealing with organizations' relations with government and public groups" (p. 6).

While the senior communicator within an organization wears many hats and is responsible for managing the relationships with an organization's many stakeholders to ensure access to markets, access to resources and access to capital, being able to quantify the results of the public relations and communications strategies is more important than ever through the use of evaluation and measurement.

Similar to the definition of public relations, there is confusion over what constitutes evaluation and measurement. There is also a lack of agreement of whether or not the outcomes of public relations programs can be measured. Because evaluation is often defined from the perspective of the function analyzing the activity, many companies approach public relations activities from the view point of "justifying expenditure" (Watson, 2001, p. 259).

The Dictionary for Public Relations Measurement and Research defines "public relations effectiveness" as "the degree to which the outcome of a public relations program is consonant with the overall objectives of the program as judged by some measure of causation" (Stacks, 2008, p. 17**).**

Cutlip, Center & Broom (1994) define evaluation as using research to systematically "measure[s of] program effectiveness" (p. 406). Rossi & Freeman (1993) use the term "evaluation research" and "evaluation" interchangeably to represent "the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of… programs" (p. 5).

According to Cutlip et al. (2006), "evaluation research is used to learn what happened and why, not to prove or do something… true evaluation research is done to gather information objectively" (pp. 364-365). Cutlip et al. (2006) have identified three levels of program evaluation "preparation, implementation, and impact" (p. 367). They go on to discuss how each stage helps to increase understanding and provides for additional information required to assess the program's effectiveness.

Preparation criteria assess the quality and adequacy of information gathering and strategic planning. Implementation evaluation documents the adequacy of the tactics and efforts. Impact evaluation provides feedback on the consequences of the program. No evaluation is complete without addressing criteria at each level (Cutlip, et. al, 2006, p. 368).

One emerging evaluation and measurement theory, "evidence-based public relations," combines measurement and experience and "moves measurement from the back end of a program and making it the proverbial prequel… [it] is the act of shaping strategies around hard facts and research that's gathered before the planning stages begin" (Weiner & Heymeyer, 2008, p. 1).

According to Garnett (1992), evaluating and measuring communication performance to show return on investment is a challenge for both public and private sector communicators.

In a nationwide survey conducted in the United States in 1998, Lindemann (1990) found that

57.4% of the respondents believed that outcomes of public relations programs can be measured

(41.8% disagreed). The study also found that while research is widely accepted by most

practitioners as part of the planning process, 94.3% agreed that research is talked about more

than it is done.

Business Acumen

With the ongoing call for transparency and corporate ethics and the need to serve as a

trusted advisor to senior management, senior communicators need to have a solid understanding

of how businesses operate and make money, as well as a working knowledge of the

organizations they represent.

"Business acumen is critical to understanding strategy and the communication

implications around it, and to winning the respect and trust of the organization. If communicators

have a good understanding of how the company works, they will be able to counsel top

management to provide value in the decision-making process" (Matha & Boehm, 2008, p. 160).

The Corporate Communication International (CII) Corporate Communications Practices

and Trends Study 2009 identified that "corporate communication officers require business

acumen – 'a deep understanding of business and business strategy,' as well as the ability to

'articulate ideas and persuade others'" (Goodman, Genest, Cayo and Ng, 2009, pg 2). Goodman,

et. al (2009) also recognize the ability to "adapt to the transforming business environment

requires strategic thinking, problem solving, integrity, and crisis management expertise to

function as an active partner in the strategic process to achieve business goals" (pg. 2).

According to an Executive Development Associates study conducted in 2007, 81 per cent

or more of the participants believed business acumen "is extremely or very important compared

to other competency areas" (EDA Networks, 2007, pg. 2). However, the survey also noted that business acumen "is not a development priority for many organizations, though some elements of business acumen may be" (EDA Networks, 2007, pg. 2).

Attributes and Aptitudes

The three key attributes and aptitudes the literature has defined as being paramount to the success of a senior communicator within an organization are leadership, ethics, and trust.

When considering the importance of leadership, Eriksen (2009) cites a number of leading management gurus in defining leadership, including Peter Drucker (1999) who "asserts that to manage others one must first manage one's self, a principle that applies equally to leadership" (p. 751). According to Taylor (1992), as cited in Eriksen (2009), "to effectively lead one's self, one must possess self-knowledge and consciously and deliberately choose who one wants to be. It is only in this way that one can achieve one's potential" (p. 751). Eriksen (2009) also draws on the work of Warren Bennis (2003), who "equates authenticity with leadership. In other words, leadership is an expression of one's authenticity" (pp. 751-2).

Ulrich, D. & Ulrich, W. (2010) synthesized and integrated current research on what makes effective leaders. Out of their taxonomic work, they identified five outcomes that leaders deliver as well as the roles that they play:

- Strategist. Effective leaders develop a point of view about the future;
- Executor. Effective leaders build the discipline of getting things done;
- Talent manager. Effective leaders engage others in planning and executing their agenda;
- Human capital developer. Effective leaders prepare the next generation of employees; and
- Personal proficiency. Effective leaders have personal skills and abilities that enable them to lead and others to follow. (pp. 1-2).

According to Ulrich, et. al (2010), these five roles help any leader to be more effective. However, they also recognized that "leading in today's uncertain, changing, and risky world is not just about the actions or motions of leadership; it's also about the e-motions" (p. 2). They go on to define emotion as "focusing on behaviors and actions; emotion focuses on passion and meaning. Motion is what we do; emotion is why we do it. Motion gets things done while the leader is present; emotion sustains behavior in the leader's absence" (p. 2).

When considering ethics, Grunig (2000) recognized that "the term *ethics* is often used interchangeably with *morals* and *values* because ethical questions generally ask what is morally right or what should be valued" (p. 28). The challenge public relations practitioners' face is how to reconcile "the divided loyalties that practitioners experience when they try to balance their personal values with those of organizations, publics, and professionals" (p. 29).

While many practitioners often state that their obligations to the public outweigh their obligations to their employers, they find "that ethical demands of the employing organization, the society, and the self might contradict, misunderstanding and mistrust among the public" (Curtin, et. al, 2001, pp. 414-415).

Ethical communications has its foundation in truthful communications. "Truth in communicating involves accuracy in communicating, avoiding falsehood or misrepresentation whether by including false information, deliberately excluding vital information, or deliberately allowing people to misinterpret a message" (Garnett, 1992, p. 229). Garnett (1992) argues that "to have the most value, however, truth in communicating needs to include usefulness, openness, and fairness as well as accuracy" (p. 229).

Professional organizations, such as the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), are advancing the profession by codifying "ethics to define daily decision-making standards and

reflect the practitioners' responsibility to the public" (Curtin, et. al, 2001, p. 415) Professional

codes of ethics outline the principles for ethical practice that must be upheld by members,

including "deal[ing] fairly and honestly with the communications media and the pubic... [and]

practice[ing] the highest standard of honesty, accuracy, integrity, and truth" (Code of Ethics,

2009).

> According to a leading Canadian public relations scholar, Patricia Parsons (2008):
> Codes of ethics… as well as generally held conventions about deception and truth in
> public communication direct us to always do our best to be truthful in our messaging –
> both in content and delivery… For example, if the way a message is delivered is truthful
> in its content but misleading in its delivery, then it can be considered to be deceptive…
> Some instances of ghostwriting are [deceptive]; others are not likely to be considered as
> lies. (p. 124).

Building trust both internally and externally is key differentiator of successful senior

communicators. According to Goodman (2005) "formal trust includes the rule of law,

transparency, and publicly event rules. Informal trust is culturally defined by values and norms

that allow people to communicate and deal with others who share those values" (p. 23).

A PR Coalition White Paper entitled *Restoring Trust in Business: Models for Action*

(2003) laid out a three-part plan of action focused on ethical behavior, transparency and

disclosure, and establishing trust as a board-level governance issue. The White Paper

recommended that corporations "articulate a set of ethical principles that are closely connected

to their core business processes and supported with deep management commitment and

enterprise-wide discipline" (PR Coalition, 2003, p. 2).

Professional communicators have the opportunity to play a leadership role in managing

the issues and reputations of their CEOs and organizations, and in helping rebuild public trust in

business by advocating for transparency and authenticity in their communications and

stakeholder relationships. According to the Arthur Page Society (2009), "leaders need to become

as expert in the trust environment as they are in the technological, economic, political, and competitive environments."

"Research has found that measurement of trust can demonstrate success that equates to the bottom line. Conversely, lack of trust can limit your power to do the things you want to do" (Goodman, 2005, p. 35).

Credentials

In Canada, the number of academic institutions offering certificate, diploma, bachelors or masters' level public relations or communications management programs continues to increase on an annual basis. As of the fall of 2011, Canada will have four, four-year public relations degree programs at the following institutions – Mount St. Vincent University, Humber College, Conestoga College and Mount Royal University. Masters level public relations and communications management programs are offered at Mount St. Vincent University and McMaster University. Other academic institutions are offering masters level communications theory programs.

Canada also has a number of public relations and communications related professional associations offering a process to attain professional credentials.

In a recent study conducted by Leger Marketing for the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Canada, 18% of the communicators surveyed indicated they held the association's professional accreditation – Accredited Business Communicator (ABC). The survey also found that accredited professionals tend to have an average salary of 21% higher than those who weren't accredited. There are currently 306 ABCs in Canada, who represent 40% of ABCs around the world (Web Newswire, 2010).

In a similar study conducted for the Canadian Public Relations Society in 2008 (Flynn, Scholz, Killingsworth, 2008), 30% had attained a professional designation. Twenty-eight per cent were Accredited Public Relations (APRs), and 2% were ABCs.

The majority of respondents (98%) indicated that they were members of CPRS, while a number also reported holding memberships in other professional organizations, including:

- International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) – 19%
- Healthcare Public Relations Association – 3%
- Canadian Investor Relations Institute (CIRI) – 2%

More than half (56%) reported the highest level of education completed was university/Bachelor's degree, while ten percent reported holding a Master's degree. Twenty-four per cent of the respondent reported having a college diploma, and nearly six per cent (5.6%) had some college.

While the vast majority of the participants had attained at least an undergraduate degree, only 22% reported having degrees/diplomas in public relations. An overwhelming percentage of the respondents (49%) had continuing education courses in public relations but not certificate or diploma, while 19% garnered their public relations education from attending public relations conferences. Nearly six per cent (5.5%) of the respondents indicated that had no public relations education.

In a recent ComPRehension blog post, Kathy Mulvill, manager of accreditation for the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), posted the following:

> Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credential holds tremendous value for the profession. Accreditation unifies and advances the public relations profession by identifying those who have demonstrated broad knowledge, experience and professional judgment. Accredited professionals agree to be bound by ethical guidelines and maintain Accreditation through continued professional development and education. Accreditation confirms an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities levels in public relations theory and practice (http://comprehension.prsa.org).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This project utilized mixed research methods (one qualitative and one quantitative) to identify executive perspectives about communication leader competencies and credentials. "There is more insight to be gained from the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research then either form by itself. Their combined use provides an expanded understanding of research problems (Cresswell, 2009, p. 203). The research methods included:

1. Four focus groups in four regions (Nova Scotia (Halifax); Ontario (Toronto), Alberta (Calgary/Edmonton), and British Columbia (Victoria).
2. An online survey of general business executives (C-suite), human resources executives and communication executives.

Online survey and focus groups were chosen as the research methods for this study because they provide the opportunity for the researcher to gather feedback from a representative sample from across Canada.

This triangulation approach has provided subjective and objective data that has been compared to the communication leader competencies and credentials described in the literature. Subsequent analysis provides a perspective that may help to inform the communications and public relations industry about the value executives place on communication and business competencies, skills, attributes, and credentials.

Sampling and Data Collection

The McMaster University Research Ethics Board has approved this research project. *(See Appendix 1 – REB certificate.)*

1. *Focus groups*

The researcher randomly selected general business executives, human resources executives and communication executives and recruited six to eight participants to participate in four focus groups. However, due to last minute cancellations, two of the groups dropped below six participants. The total number of participants in the four groups was 25 – N=5, N=7, N=4 and N=9.

The groups lasted approximately 90 minutes each and were facilitated by the researcher. The focus groups took place between October 15 and November 19, 2010. The Ontario (Toronto) group took place in the offices of Leger Marketing. The Nova Scotia (Halifax) group took place in a meeting room at the Halifax Club. The British Columbia (Victoria) group took place in the offices of Delta Media and Pace Communications. The Alberta (Calgary/Edmonton) group took place in the Calgary and Edmonton offices of the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA). Participants in each office were connected via video conferencing. Participants were paid an honourarium of $50 each at the end of the session. They signed consent forms and the sessions were recorded for the researcher's reference. *(See Appendix 2 – Focus Group Consent Form.)*

The researcher recruited focus group participants for this study by sending e-mails to randomly selected contacts from her extensive network. The researcher also asked contacts from her network to recommend human resources or general business executives who might be willing and interested in participating. The researcher was successful in recruiting participants who represented different demographic groups based on variables including: age, gender, professional background and experience working with or hiring communication leaders. (*See Appendix 3 – Focus Group Invitation.)* Five participants live in the Greater Toronto Area, seven

participants live in the Halifax area, four participants live in the Victoria area, seven participants live in Calgary, and two participants live in Edmonton. Eleven were men and 14 were women. Nineteen were senior communicators, three were senior human resources practitioners, and three were general business executives. They ranged in age from 35 to 65.

The researcher developed the discussion guide that was used for the focus groups. *(See Appendix 4 – Focus Group Discussion Guide.)*

2. *Online survey*

The researcher designed a 15-minute online survey using Fluid Surveys, a Likert Scale and open-ended questions. *(See Appendix 5 – Online Survey.)*

Both colleagues of the researcher and a representative of the McMaster Ethics Board pre-tested the online survey between October 12 and October 30, 2010. The online survey was launched on October 31, 2010 and closed December 20, 2010. The online survey was distributed to 3,475 general business, human resources and communications executives and had a 12.5% response rate (n=436). The response and completion rates were weighted almost equally across all three target audiences (see Table 2). Of those who responded, 74% (n=321) completed the survey.

Table 2: Response and completion rates

Targeted Executives	Total Response (n=403)*		Total Completes (n=301)*	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count
General business/operations/finance	(34%)	136	(35%)	105
Human resources	(37%)	150	(35%)	106
Communications/public relations/ marketing communication	(38%)	154	(39%)	118

*Note: Some participants selected multiple responses when identifying their current role.

In analyzing the results of this survey, the researcher analyzed the total number of responses given that the response and completion rates were weighted almost equally across all three groups.

The participant lists were drawn from across Canada and represented a broad range of demographics. The gender split of respondents was nearly 50 / 50 (see Table 3), and the age split represents that of a person with enough experience to be an executive member (see Table 4).

Table 3: Gender breakdown

Gender Breakdown	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=230)
Male		49%	113
Female		50%	114
Prefer Not to Answer		1%	3

Table 4: Age breakdown

Age Breakdown	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=227)
Under 18		0%	0
18-24		0%	0
25-34		1%	3
35-44		19%	44
45-54		48%	108
55-64		28%	63
65 or Above		2%	4
Prefer Not to Answer		2%	5

When looking at the respondents' work experience, nearly half reported having 20 or more years of experience (see Table 5). When asked to identify their job function or title, 29% (n=230) reported holding the title of "Director," 20% (n=230) indicated they were "Vice Presidents", and 23% (n=230) said they were the "President/CEO/Executive Director" (see Table 6). As well, one third (n=229) reported having a masters degree, and 38% (n=229) reported having a bachelor's degree (see Table 7).

Table 5: Work experience

Work Experience	1 year or less	2-5 years	6-9 years	10-19 years	20 or more years
Human resources	18 (18%)	6 (6%)	6 (6%)	27 (26%)	45 (44%)
General business/ operations/ finance	11 (11%)	7 (7%)	5 (5%)	23 (22%)	58 (56%)
Communications/ public relations/ marketing communications	15 (10%)	3 (2%)	8 (6%)	44 (31%)	74 (51%)

Table 6: Job function or title
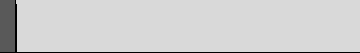
Job Function or Title	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=230)
Staff		0%	1
Manager		11%	26
Director		29%	67
Vice President		20%	45
Senior / Executive Vice President		11%	25
President / CEO / Executive Director		23%	54
Consultant		3%	6
Partner / Principal		1%	2
Educator / Professor		0%	1
Other		1%	3

Table 7: Education level

Education Level	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=229)
Some college		2%	5
Some university		7%	15
Certificate		3%	6
Diploma		5%	12
Bachelor's degree		38%	88
Graduate certificate		8%	19
Master's degree		30%	68
Doctorate		6%	14
Prefer not to answer		1%	2

The majority of respondents were from Ontario (51%, n=225), followed by Alberta (26%, n=225) and British Columbia (11%, n=225). Table 8 captures the provincial breakdown of respondents.

Table 8: Provincial breakdown of respondents

Province or Territory	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=225)
Alberta		26%	59
British Columbia		11%	24
Manitoba		2%	5
New Brunswick		2%	4
Newfoundland and Labrador		0%	0
Northwest Territories		0%	0
Nova Scotia		3%	6
Nunavut		0%	0
Ontario		51%	115
Prince Edward Island		0%	0
Quebec		4%	8
Saskatchewan		2%	4
Yukon		0%	0

Respondents reported belonging to the following professional associations (see Table 9).

Table 9: Professional association membership

Professional Association	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=212)
The Canadian Public Relations Society		28%	59
The International Association of Business Communicators		18%	39
The Canadian Council of Chief Executives		0%	0
The Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations		13%	27
Other, please specify:		33%	71
Not a member of a professional association		25%	53

As well, more than half (53%, n=225) reported holding a professional credential. Table

10 provides an illustration of the professional credentials respondents (n=119) reported holding.

Table 10: Professional credentials

Professional Credentials	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=119)
APR (Accredited Public Relations)		35%	42
ABC (Accredited Business Communicator)		6%	7
CHRP (Certified Human Resources Professional)		30%	36
CMA (Certified Management Accountant)		1%	1
CA (Chartered Accountant)		6%	7
CGA (Certified General Accountant)		2%	2
Other		28%	33

The initial recruitment approach was to target three Canadian professional associations in recruiting participants for the online survey – the Canadian Council of Chief Executives *(see Appendix 6 – CCCE Letter Requesting Access to Membership and Response)*, the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations *(see Appendix 7 – CCHRA Letter Requesting Access to Membership and Response)* and the Canadian Public Relations Society *(see Appendix 8 – CPRS Letter Requesting Access to Membership)*.

The CCCE declined participation and the CCHRA requested the researcher complete and submit a partnership proposal *(see Appendix 9 – CCHRA Partnership Proposal).* The researcher did not receive a response from the CCHRA regarding her partnership proposal.

CPRS presented the request to the National Council on Public Relations Education requesting their endorsement to access the CPRS membership *(see Appendix 10 – CPRS Education Council Request.* Based on the Education Council's endorsement, CPRS sent the invitation to participate in the online survey to 109 French speaking members and 353 English speaking members who have been members with CPRS for more than 10 years, excluding retired and life members *(see Appendix 11 – CPRS Online Survey Invitation).*

To gain access to a larger sample, invitations to participate in the survey were sent to six lists of CEOs and HR representatives secured for this research, as well as to 92 of the researcher's personal contacts. The researcher also sent a request to members of her network to circulate the invitation to appropriate general business and human resources executives *(see Appendix 12 – Online Survey Invitation.*

The researcher purchased a list of 332 senior communicators and 764 CEOs from across Canada. These lists had a 34% failure rate. CPRS also provided the researcher with a list of 500 CEOs and 1,000 human resources representatives. These lists had a 25% failure rate, but were

100% guaranteed so one-for-one replacement contacts were provided to the researcher. In addition, the researcher purchased a list of 75 CEOs and a list of 250 HR representatives. These lists had a 26% failure rate, but were also 100% guaranteed so one-for-one replacement contacts were provided to the researcher.

Funding

Funding for the research project was provided through a grant from the Communications and Public Relations Foundation *(see Appendix 13 – Grant Request and Response)* and by the researcher.

RESULTS

Focus Groups

From the lively and wide-ranging discussions in the focus groups, a number of strong themes emerged around the three key concepts explored – role of the senior communicator, defining the ideal senior communicator, and the value of academic and professional credentials. *(See Appendix 14 – Focus Group Transcripts)*

Role of the Senior Communicator

Advocate

Being an advocate not only for the businesses they represent, but also for stakeholders impacted by their companies' operations and for communications was a sentiment express in all four focus groups. In order to be an advocate for business, stakeholders and the role of communications in the decision-making process, participants agreed that the senior

communicator needs to be at the management table to best support the core business strategies with effective communications strategies. Their role is to provide senior level counsel to the C-suite not only on the best way to express their vision for the company, but also the best timing from a public perspective.

The unique value the senior communicator can bring to the C-suite is the "outside-in perspective." While there are enough people around the table that look at issues through an internal and business lens, "I think in communications, we're one of the few areas that actually spends more time looking externally, at stakeholder issues and trends, and other issues that need to be brought to the table," said one participant.

Titles are deceiving

Respondents in all four groups believed titles can be deceiving and can vary greatly depending on the size and structure of the organization or government agency. One participant summed it up by acknowledging that while titles are important, "what is more important is your role within the organization." The overall sentiment was that being at the table as a trusted advisor, building strategic relationships both internally and externally, and influencing the bottom-line through effective communication strategies are more relevant than the title assigned to senior communicators.

While the overall sentiment was that the senior communicator should be at the table, one participant noted, "You don't need to necessarily physically be at the table, or have the position where you are reporting to the CEO. It doesn't matter what the title is, as long as you're able to provide that strategic counsel and advice to the right set of people, then you are valued and your role is effective." Another participant countered that while the senior communicator can provide counsel, it's important for that person to report to the CEO or president. "My experience within

organization is that some of your colleagues listen differently to you when they know your advice and counsel are being listened to by the top person," another participant said.

Strategic, but...

The overall sentiment from the four focus groups was that the role of the senior communicator should be and most often is strategic. One participant, who indicated that the role of the senior communicator was strategic, also noted the senior communicator is not involved in every issue. "It is more an issue of who the CEO needs on the particular issue and what competence he needs at the table. Not every vice president is at every strategic meeting. [It's about] who can add value," one participant said. Another participant noted that the "strategic thought behind communications has increased, and the sophistication" based on the availability of more communications challenges.

However, given many circumstances such as size of the organization, the communicators' skill set and experience, and where they are positioned within the organization can often result in communications being more tactical than strategic. Another reason for this, as pointed out by one participant who believes that half or 60% of senior communicators are strategic, is that while "everyone talks strategic, but not everyone knows what that means," said one participant. Another participant noted, "Not to disparage tactical stuff, it is easier to manage tactic[s]. Tactical implementation is highly valued. It's just you don't want to have tactics that are uninformed by strategy," said another participant.

Importance and complexity of the communications function has increased

The majority of participants agreed that the importance of communications within their organizations has changed over the past five years. A number credited the advent of social media for this change. The impact of social media "means a different relationship with your

organization," said one participant. "How we drive our messages out and the expectations are all changing because of social media," said another participant. Another participant acknowledged that social media has made it "harder to get your messages out to the right targets." Participants also noted the lack of control brought about by the evolution of social media and the importance of being "part of the conversation." "Relationships have always been very important to our business. With social media, you can't control those relationships anymore," another participant said.

The need for employee engagement has also contributed to the increasing importance of internal communications within an organization. "I've seen a shift of importance in internal communications. Company CEOs are really seeing the need to get their messages out [so] the strategy of the firms or companies is understood by their own employees," one participant said. "Internal communications has been driven largely out of the corporate communications office and into the line departments. It's become a management responsibility," said another participant. There was also recognition that there is a "real emphasis on face-to-face communications" and more communications and leadership training at the frontline supervisor and manager level to develop the competency and capacity for communications. This has resulted in more "people around the [management] table thinking from a communication [perspective] and brining up communication issues," said another participant. From the human resources perspective, internal communications has grown "in the form of change management or organizational development disciplines rather than [as part of] corporate communications," said another participant.

Issues management has also increased in importance. "Six year ago, most of our day would have been taken up with media relations and internal communications activities. We now

have one person doing nothing but issues management full-time as their primary function," one participant said. The need for "community engagement to gain the social license to [operate]" is driving the need for organizations to better manage their issues and relationships with their stakeholders. "The BSE (Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, commonly known as mad-cow disease) crisis totally revamped the role of communications and public affairs in an industry. It was revolutionary," said another participant.

Corporate reputation management is one of the "main drivers" to positioning communications at the forefront. Communications has "become part of the public discourse about business, which has complicated our role, I believe," said another participant. "We make communication part of the management agenda. Everybody is an expert, which has caused another problem," said another participant. "Communications has become a bit of another item on the checklist," another participant said.

Communications is now part of the "risk management toolbox" noted another participant. "Of the top five risks facing the company, three of them involve serious communications support," said another participant.

While the importance of communications has increased in organizations, one participant noted that there "has not been much change in the way CEOs see the role of communicators. I don't see any diminishing of the role of communicators in any of their communications roles." Another participant cautioned, "I worry that it is getting so broad that there is a dilutive impact of what you can actually do, and what you can do well."

Future trends

One participant noted a trend in both the corporate world and public service sector is governance. Organizations are beginning to look for competency-based directors to sit on their

boards. Communications is "becoming the topic de jour across organization effectiveness discussions and study. This is our opportunity to ensure that communication is considered at the policy level. [Being] at the management table is no longer as important as being at the governance level," the same participant said.

Another participant highlighted the potential "labour shortage, or availability of people in the market. I think there are going to be some wonderful opportunities, but there are going to be some challenges as well." According to the Canadian Public Relations Society (2011), this trend is reflective of shifting demographics as baby boomers leave the workforce. CPRS' membership data for 2008 indicates that between 29% and 34% of its members are eligible to retire within the next four to 10 years (p. 9).

"Succession planning and building capacity by finding people that have the experience, maturity and skills to continue at the level that has been expected in many organizations is an important consideration," said one participant.

Defining the Ideal Senior Communicator

Some participants noted that the ideal communicator would be half male and half female. Another participant said the ideal communicator should be three-quarters female. The most common attributes and competencies cited by participants that the ideal communicator should possess are as follows.

Business acumen

The need for business acumen and a good understanding of how businesses operate and make money was a theme that resonated throughout the four focus groups. "It's just as important that we understand how a business runs, not just about communicating. Our job is to help companies be more successful," said one participant. Participants agreed that senior

communicators need to "understand financial reporting," "disclosure policies," and "managing

budgets and understanding how the budget of the communications office relates to the budgets of

business units, and how it all feeds up to the financial health of the company," one participant

said. Another participant indicated, "I almost see business management and communication

management as one." "If you offer advice, based on your understanding of business, you are

much more quickly accepted. Learn the business you are advising on [because] content is

important," said another participant. "Communications is regarded as a partner to the business,

and not just for its communication products," another participant said.

Another participant noted the importance of evaluation research to business management

because "executives are expecting more accountability for the programs." There was

acknowledgement that many people are weak in this area because they "can't make those

structural linkages" because they have "misaligned their objectives, so they can't measure them

against the final outcomes," said another participant.

One participant said it was also important for the senior communicator to "understand

senior management commitments and their expectations of each other." Understanding and

"learning to work in different types of structures" is also important given the potential for

mergers, joint ventures, collaboration and other types of partnerships noted one participant.

Other competencies

Other competencies participants believed the ideal communicator should have included:

- Good listening skills
- Good communication skills, written, verbal, and visual
- Ability to synthesize and present communication concepts succinctly so senior management can make a decision
- Strategic thinker, communicator, striving to understand the bigger picture, "ability to see things from a 30,000 foot level and from 360 degrees"
- Able to build and leverage strategic partnerships to the advantage of the team
- Leadership and management skills

- Coaching skills, a natural mentor
- Enough experience to have "muscle memory"
- Evaluation research
- Political acumen
- Good understanding of two-way symmetrical communications, including social media
- Provide good service delivery
- Collaboration skills
- Sensitive to cultural diversity, understand how to communicate across cultures

Personal attributes

Attributes participants believed the ideal communicator should posses include:

- Adaptable
- Diplomatic
- Passionate, has a vision
- Good work ethic, commitment
- Professional appearance
- Principles of influence, "you don't have to be at the table, you have to BE the table"
- Highly credible, able to build trust
- Able to get along with people and build relationships, strong face-to-face communication style
- Self confidence, "have the courage of their convictions and are willing to step outside of their comfort zone"
- Thirst for knowledge, commitment to life-long learning and professional development
- Integrity, conduct themselves in an ethical manner, being an honest broker
- Commitment to volunteerism and involvement in the community

One participant summed it up as "a third of it for me is skills, a third is their character, and a third is [being] strateg[ic]."

Value of Academic and Professional Credentials

Confusion over academic credentials

A number of participants expressed confusion over the variety of public relations and communications academic credentials offered in Canada. As one participant noted, "Not all education is created equal. Programs are quite different." For example, one institution offers a masters degree without a bachelors, and the masters' program is shorter than a diploma program

explained the same participant. "There isn't any one size fits all, for all circumstances. It depends on the organization, what's asked of the person and the scope of practice," said another participant.

"I am still confused about the credentials behind a baccalaureate, depending on the program and the curriculum, and more importantly the instructors," said another participant. The discussion turned to the need to "create some standards in education." Standards would allow the individual to "demonstrate with that credential that you have some critical thinking skills, that you've met some standards somewhere, and more importantly, that you've finished it," said the same participant.

Another participant questioned whether or not there was a role for professional associations such as CPRS and IABC (International Association of Business Communicators), "to provide some kind of accreditation of communications programs, so you would be able to at least have some point of comparison. If someone came to me with a diploma or degree, I really wouldn't know how to judge that."

Successful senior communicators have…

From one participant's perspective, "the most successful [communicators] have had a university degree in mass communications and a diploma in public relations." Another participant noted that while other academic credentials are valuable, communicators are "incomplete until they've had some sort of program in communications or public relations." Another participant noted looking for a bachelor's degree at a minimum. "A bachelor's degree demonstrates that you can complete something, and you assume there is a certain level of critical thinking," said another participant. "For me, it is the experience piece that counts for a whole lot

more, then encourage them to continue their education while they are working through the ranks," another participant added.

Another participant indicated looking for a bachelor's degree in combination with 10-years experience in the industry, and another noted that MBA's with a "focus on human resources, sales and marketing, or leadership rather than finances" have had some success. Graduate study in public relations and communications management "gave me a far better perspective and understanding of the 'why'," another participant noted.

Having a working knowledge of both official languages, French and English, is also a prerequisite for advancing to a senior level within the federal government. "It's a fundamental communication skill," said one participant.

An issue that was flagged by one participant was her organization's perspective that there is very little senior-level professional development in Canada. "You have to go to the States, or just train them yourself," said the same participant.

Professional credentials demonstrate commitment and discipline

A professional credential "shows commitment" and that the individual has "discipline." "It would give them a standing, primarily because they've gone outside their box and comfort level… [to] broaden their understanding and hopefully skill set as well," said one participant. "Professional accreditation says that you have these skill-sets and you've attained this level [of experience]," another participant said.

Another added that the "APR" designation is "more generalist approach and documents a skill set that's more generalist in nature as opposed to AMA and ABC," said another participant.

While having a professional credential is "icing on the cake. [However], it is going to come down to who the best candidate is," said one participant.

A downfall to the professional credentials representing the communication industry is "people don't understand the APR or ABC outside of our profession," noted many participants.

Online Survey

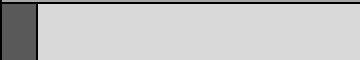The qualitative results generated by the four focus groups were contrasted with the quantitative results from the online survey that was undertaken simultaneously. This triangulation enriched the value of all the data collected and provides a compelling view of the attitudes and opinions about communication leader competencies and credentials in Canada. *(See Appendix 15 – Online Survey Responses)*

The Respondents' Context

One quarter (25%) of the respondents (n=232) reported working for organizations with between 1,001 and 5,000 employees. Tied for second were organizations with 101 to 500 employees (19%), and organizations with more than 5,000 employees (19%) (see Table 11).

Table 11: Number of employees

Number of Employees	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=232)
5 or fewer		8%	18
6-10		3%	7
11-25		5%	12
26-50		6%	13
51-100		7%	16
101-500		19%	44
501-1,000		8%	18
1,001-5,000		25%	59
More than 5,000		19%	45

The primary industries represented by respondents (n=232) are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12: Primary industries represented by respondents

Primary Industry	Chart	Percentage	Response n=232
Agriculture		1%	2
Mining		2%	4
Construction		3%	6
Finance or Insurance		6%	13
Real Estate		1%	2
Government/Military		9%	21
Health Care		14%	33
Energy		12%	28
Manufacturing		11%	26
Retail, Wholesale		6%	14
Professional Services		3%	8
Transportation		2%	4
Communications, Utilities		5%	11
Internet		1%	3
Education Institution		6%	14
Not-for-profit/Association		11%	26
Other		18%	42

Other industries identified by respondents (n=41) are illustrated in Table 13.
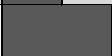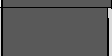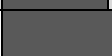
Table 13: Other industries represented by respondents

Other Industry, Please Specify		
	Percentage	**Response (n=41)**
Agency, Communications Services, PR Consulting, Public Affairs Firm	20%	8
Environmental Services	7%	3
Arts, Culture, Tourism Travel	7%	3
Beverage, Food Processing	5%	2
Crown Corporation	5%	2
Regulator	5%	2
Technology, IT Services	5%	2
Broadcasting, Television	5%	2
Metal Service Centre, Rare Metals Supplier	5%	2
Resources Recovery, Recycling	2%	1
Industrial and Environmental Waste Management	2%	1
Management Consulting	2%	1
Policing	2%	1
Contact Manufacturing	2%	1
Hospitality	2%	1
Forest Products	2%	1
Service	2%	1
Project Management	2%	1
Biotechnology-Research and Services	2%	1
Meetings and Events	2%	1
Publishing	2%	1
Sports	2%	1
Engineering Services	2%	1
Tire and Mechanical Sales and Services	2%	1

The Role of the Senior Communicator

More than three-quarters (79%, n=380) of the respondents indicated having a senior

communicator or public relations professional on staff. As noted in the focus groups, the titles of

the senior communicator or public relations professional vary (see Table 14).

Table 14: Title of senior communicator / public relations professional on staff

Title of Senior Communicator / Public Relations Professional	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=306)
Manager		14%	43
Director		29%	89
Vice President		27%	82
Other, please specify:		30%	92

As indicated in the focus groups, the titles within each level of responsibility vary greatly.

Of those who identified the specific manager-level title (n=29), the most common titles reported

were Communications Manager (31%), followed by Marketing Communications Manager

(10%,) and Corporate Communications Manager (10%) (see Table 15).

Table 15: Manager-level titles

Manager-level Titles	Percentage	Response (n=29)
Communications	31%	9
Corporate Communications	10%	3
Marketing Communications	10%	3
Public Relations	7%	2
Public Affairs	7%	2
Communications and Public Relations	3%	1
Communications Media Relations	3%	1
Brand	3%	1
Operations	3%	1
Marketing	3%	1
Investor Relations, Corporate Communications	3%	1
Human Resources	3%	1

In addition to the titles above, two respondents noted that their senior communicator holds

a specialist title, e.g. Public Affairs Specialist and Communications Specialist. Another reported

the senior communicator holds the title of Senior Manager, Marketing Communication.

When looking at director-level titles, again the most common titles reported (n=55) were

Director of Communications (29%), followed by Director of Marketing Communications (9%)

and Director of Corporate Communications (7%). Table 16 illustrates the various director-level

titles reported by respondents.

Table 16: Director-level titles

Director-level Titles	Percentage	Response (n=55)
Communications	29%	16
Marketing Communications	9%	5
Corporate Communications	7%	4
Human Resources	5%	3
Marketing	4%	2
Corporate Communications, Community Relations	2%	1
Education Services and Communications	2%	1
Communications and Public Relations	2%	1
PR Partnerships	2%	1
Communications Corporate Affairs	2%	1
Public Relations Communications	2%	1
Community Relations	2%	1
Regional Communications and Issues Management	2%	1
Communications and Strategy	2%	1
HR and Communications	2%	1
Communications and Education Development	2%	1
Public Relations	2%	1
College Community Relations	2%	1
Customer Care and Public Relations	2%	1
Investor Relations	2%	1
Communications, Stakeholder Relations	2%	1
CIO	2%	1
Communications and Planning	2%	1
Corporate Communications , Public Relations	2%	1
Government and Public Affairs	2%	1

Additional titles that were reported in this section included Executive Director (1),

Director (1), Managing Director (1), and Senior Manager, Corporate Communications (1).

The most common vice president-level title for the senior communicator reported by

respondents (n=49) is Vice President Human Resources (14%), followed by Vice President

Corporate Communications (12%), and Vice President Marketing Communications (8%) (see

Table 17).

Table 17: Vice President-level titles

Vice President-level Titles	Percentage	Response (n=49)
Human Resources	14%	7
Corporate Communications	12%	6
Marketing Communications	8%	4
Communications	4%	2
Communications Stakeholder Relations	4%	2
HR and Communications	4%	2
Marketing	4%	2
Communications and Corporate Responsibility	2%	1
Communications and Public Relations	2%	1
Communications and Stakeholder Relations	2%	1
Communications Branding	2%	1
Communications External Affairs	2%	1
Corporate Affairs	2%	1
Corporate Communications and Government Relations	2%	1
Corporate Relations	2%	1
External Relations	2%	1
HR, Marketing, IT, Finance, Ops	2%	1
Investor Relations	2%	1
Legal HR	2%	1
Marketing Media Relations	2%	1
Public Affairs	2%	1
Public Affairs and Corporate Communications	2%	1
Public Affairs and Marketing	2%	1
Public Affairs Communications	2%	1
Public and Government Affairs	2%	1
Public Relations	2%	1
Regulatory Affairs, Corporate Communications	2%	1

Other titles reported in this section included Managing Partner (1), and CFO (1).

The other titles for the senior communicator reported by respondents (n=88) included

President (22%), followed by CEO (11%) and Consultant, Executive Vice President, and

Principal (each with 5%) (see Table 18).

Table 18: Other titles

Other Titles	Percentage	Response (n=88)
President	22%	19
CEO	11%	10
Consultant	5%	4
Executive Vice President	5%	4
Principal	5%	4
Coordinator	3%	3
Communications Specialist	2%	2
Executive Director	2%	2
Managing Director	2%	2
Senior Consultant	2%	2
A Department with Multiple Titles	1%	1
Assistant Vice President	1%	1
Associate Vice President	1%	1
AVP Government Relations	1%	1
CAO	1%	1
CEO, President of the Board	1%	1
Chairman and CEO	1%	1
Chief Communications Officer	1%	1
Chief HR Officer	1%	1
Chief Public Affairs Officer	1%	1
Communications Agent	1%	1
Communications Supervisor	1%	1
Director Assistant	1%	1
EVP CFO	1%	1
Executive Director, Communications	1%	1
General Manager	1%	1
General Manager Investor Relations	1%	1
General Manager, Communications Public Affairs	1%	1
General Manager, Public Affairs Information Systems	1%	1
Global Director, Marketing and Communications	1%	1

Other Titles		
	Percentage	**Response (n=88)**
Group Publisher	1%	1
Leader	1%	1
Owner of PR Firm	1%	1
Partner	1%	1
PR Wizard	1%	1
President CEO	1%	1
President for Public Relations, VP for Customer Communications	1%	1
Public Education Specialist	1%	1
Senior Communications Officer	1%	1
Senior Human Resources Consultant	1%	1
Senior Regional Communications Advisor	1%	1
Senior Specialist	1%	1
Senior Staff Officer	1%	1
SVP, Public, Corporate Government Affairs	1%	1
Team Leader	1%	1

The senior communicator / public relations practitioner in the respondents' companies were reported to have the following responsibilities (see Table 19).
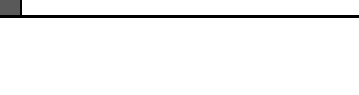
Table 19: Responsibilities of senior communicator / public relations practitioner

Responsibilities	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Responses
Strategic communication planning	181 (70%)	66 (25%)	9 (3%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	(n=259)
Issues management	149 (58%)	88 (34%)	19 (7%)	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	(n=259)
Crisis communication	176 (68%)	69 (27%)	11 (4%)	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	(n=259)
Reputation management	175 (68%)	74 (29%)	7 (3%)	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	(n=258)

Responsibilities	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	Responses
Stakeholder relations / management	128 (49%)	106 (41%)	19 (7%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	(n=259)
Advocacy	79 (30%)	113 (43%)	57 (22%)	6 (2%)	5 (2%)	(n=260)
Managing the PR function	149 (57%)	89 (34%)	19 (7%)	2 (1%)	1 (0%)	(n=260)
Investor relations	40 (16%)	67 (26%)	91 (35%)	40 (16%)	20 (8%)	(n=258)
Government relations	80 (31%)	92 (35%)	66 (25%)	20 (8%)	2 (1%)	(n=260)
Public affairs	113 (44%)	106 (41%)	25 (10%)	12 (5%)	3 (1%)	(n=259)
Consulting and collaboration with internal client/stakeholders	140 (54%)	105 (41%)	10 (4%)	3 (1%)	1 (0%)	(n=259)
Evaluation and measurement	100 (38%)	110 (42%)	42 (16%)	3 (1%)	5 (2%)	(n=260)

Two-thirds of the respondents (n=327) reported that the senior communicator was

involved in *strategic decision making* as part of the management team (see Table 20).

Table 20: Strategic vs. tactical

Response	Chart	Percentage	Response (n=327)
Strategic decision maker at the management table		66%	216
Role is strategic, but not at the management table		17%	56
Role is largely tactical		13%	42
Don't know		4%	13

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

When considering the *knowledge, skills, and abilities*, respondents were asked to rank those that **are** important for public relations and communications practitioners to have. Table 21 highlights those that were reported to be the most important having received a score of 90% or greater on the importance scale, and those that received a score 75% or greater as very important.

Table 21: Most important competencies

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities	Very Important	Important	Total Importance	Responses
Practices public relations and communications in a legal and ethical manner	232 (85%)	37 (14%)	99%	(n=272)
Functions in a responsible, professional, trustworthy manner	207 (76%)	64 (23%)	99%	(n=274)
Business ethics	213 (77%)	58 (21%)	98%	(n=277)
Displays mindful awareness of events, trends and cultural shifts that impact the organization	187 (69%)	79 (29%)	98%	(n=272)
Listening skills	216 (78%)	56 (20%)	98%	(n=276)
Ability to counsel and advise C-suite executives	214 (77%)	55 (20%)	97%	(n=277)
Business knowledge of industry where employed	178 (64%)	88 (32%)	96%	(n=277)
Displays mindfulness of the role of the organizational leader	161 (58%)	105 (38%)	96%	(n=276)
Presentation skills	166 (61%)	96 (35%)	96%	(n=274)
Decision-making abilities	181 (65%)	83 (30%)	95%	(n=277)
Problem-solving skills	142 (52%)	112 (41%)	93%	(n=275)
Consensus-building skills	115 (42%)	141 (51%)	93%	(n=275)
Understanding social media	106 (38%)	125 (45%)	93%	(n=276)
Leadership skills	133 (49%)	113 (42%)	91%	(n=272)

The next set of competencies considered to be important, but not as important as those

above, received a score of between 70 % and 90% (see Table 22).

Table 22: Important competencies

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities	Very Important	Important	Total Importance	Responses
Practices principles of influence	112 (41%)	131 (48%)	89%	(n=274)
Consulting skills	121 (44%)	121 (44%)	88%	(n=277)
Organization skills	102 (37%)	138 (50%)	87%	(n=274)
Managing team processes	105 (38%)	132 (48%)	86%	(n=274)
Strategic planning	127 (47%)	102 (37%)	84%	(n=273)
Client management	110 (40%)	119 (43%)	83%	(n=275)
Corporate social responsibility	101 (36%)	129 (47%)	83%	(n=277)
Proofreading and editing	111 (41%)	109 (40%)	81%	(n=274)
Commitment to lifelong learning	81 (29%)	140 (51%)	80%	(n=276)
Negotiating skills	84 (31%)	135 (49%)	80%	(n=274)
Project management	78 (29%)	138 (51%)	80%	(n=273)
Use of information technology	81 (29%)	140 (51%)	80%	(n=276)
Conducts research and evaluation to support communication strategies	112 (40%)	107 (39%)	79%	(n=277)
Visual literacy (using visual media to tell a story)	93 (34%)	124 (45%)	79%	(n=273)
Organizational/operational planning	78 (28%)	134 (49%)	77%	(n=274)
Risk management	87 (32%)	121 (44%)	76%	(n=273)
Budgeting	61 (22%)	140 (51%)	73%	(n=275)

Table 23 illustrated those competencies that respondents believed were somewhat or not

at all important.

Table 23: Somewhat or not important

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities	Very Important	Important	Total Importance	Responses
Diversity considerations	64 (23%)	128 (46%)	69%	(n=276)
Organization policy development	48 (17%)	115 (42%)	59%	(n=275)
Knowledge of legal issues	32 (12%)	124 (45%)	57%	(n=274)
Public opinion polling and analysis	42 (15%)	106 (39%)	54%	(n=274)
Knowledge of finance	24 (9%)	109 (40%)	49%	(n=275)
Foreign language proficiency	9 (3%)	31 (11%)	14%	(n=275)

When looking at diversity considerations, this competency rated highest on the importance scale with human resources executives who responded (85%, n=87), followed by communications executives (68%, n=126), and general business executives (66%, n=85).

More communications executives reported (64%, n=125) that organization policy development was important or very important than general business executives (60%, n=85), or human resources executives (54%, n=87).

Having knowledge of legal issues rated the highest on the importance scale with human resources executives (69%, n=87), followed by communications executives (60%, n=125), and general business executives (47%, n=84).

As a competency, having knowledge of public opinion polling rated the highest on the importance scale with communications executives who responded (62%, n=124), followed by a close tie with human resources executives (49%, n=87), and general business executives (48%, n=85).

Having knowledge of finance rated higher on the importance scale with the communications executives who responded (58%, n=126), followed by general business executives (44%, n=85), and human resources executives (43%, n=86).

Foreign language proficiency rated the highest on the importance scale with communications executives who responded (18%, n=126), than with human resources executives (10%, n=86), or general business executives (9%, n=85).

Academic Credentials

When recruiting for a senior communicator / public relations practitioner, more than three-quarters (77%, n=232) of respondents required candidates to hold an academic credential. The academic credential respondents are looking for the senior communications / public relations practitioner to hold is a Bachelors Degree (67%, n=190) (see Table 24).

Table 24: Type of academic credential required of senior communicator

Response	Chart	Percentage	Responses (n=190)
Diploma in public relations or communications		7%	13
Bachelor degree in public relations or communications		35%	66
Bachelor degree (any discipline)		32%	61
Advanced certificate in public relations		3%	5
Master's degree in communications management or communications		13%	25
MBA		3%	5
Other		8%	15

When reviewing the other comments provided by respondents, the following themes arose:

- Experience/performance
- Bachelor Degree, plus relevant experience
- Bachelor Degree, plus graduate diploma in public relations
- Bachelor Degree in public relations, or combination of degree in any discipline with relevant communications experience
- Professional credential, e.g. APR or ABC
- MBA or Masters

Professional Credential and Association Membership

When asked if preference was given to candidates who hold professional credentials, e.g. APR (Accredited Public Relations), or ABC (Accredited Business Communicator), the majority of respondents indicated they did (59%, n=231). For those who don't give preference to professional credentials, the following are some reasons they offered as to why not:

- "There are many components to hiring a senior professional. While credentials do add to the overall impression made, we don't require them."
- "Rather than simply collecting membership dues, organizations need to validate expertise and competencies of members through some form of accreditation… If these organizations want to be recognized, they need to establish standards and hold members to them."
- "I look far more for solid education, related experience, accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and so on than I do for an APR or ABC. Some of the most strategic senior communication people I have ever known don't have those designations. I don't think they have relevance to anyone, really, beyond the associations that give them."
- "It's actually a yes and no – it's an asset, so if two candidates are otherwise equal, the credential helps, but usually the credential is an aspect of the kind of person we are seeking."
- "Not a requirement for all PR professionals to practice, so limits the talent pool."
- "Better understanding of the value of the credential."
- "Knowledge, experience, track record. If hiring at a junior to mid-level professional, academic credentials [are] much more important."

The majority of respondents (84%, n=233) also reported that their organizations pay for membership in professional associations. Of those whose organizations don't pay for membership, the following is a sampling of the reasons why not:

- "The associations lack a cross section of members and tend to be junior practitioners networking."
- "Considered a prerequisite for the role."
- "Professional registration is not mandatory for working in the field. (It's not as if we are hiring a Professional Engineer, or A Medical Doctor)."
- "No budget."

DISCUSSION

The findings from the focus groups conducted in Halifax, Toronto, Calgary, and Victoria and the triangulation of the results with the online survey and other qualitative research methods provides an insightful view of the competencies, attributes and aptitudes, and credentials Canadian executives require of their senior communication professionals, and the varied roles and responsibilities, and titles senior communicators hold within organizations.

The triangulated results confirm that titles can be deceiving and can vary greatly depending on the size and structure of the organization or government agency, and the level of responsibility within the organization, e.g. 12 different manager-level titles, 25 different director-level titles, and 27 different vice-president level titles, and 45 other titles were reported being used to define the senior communications function within the organizations that responded.

This broad divergence in titles and varied roles and responsibilities of the senior communicator supports the notion that the complexity of the communications function within organizations continues to increase. So too does the level of strategic versus tactical communication directed by the senior communicator as part of the dominant coalition, as demonstrated by the majority of respondents. The triangulated results also support the notion that the role of the senior communicator can be strategic even though he or she is not part of the management table.

When looking at the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of an ideal senior communicator, respondents reported that while preference was given to a certain set of competencies and aptitudes, in some cases the senior communicator in their organization exceeded expectations while in others there was a demonstrated deficiency in the ideal competency and attribute.

Table 25 compares the importance level respondents placed on having their senior communicator able to demonstrate a working knowledge of the following business competencies with the importance level respondents placed on the knowledge, skills, and competencies required of a senior communicator (see Table 25). Included in the table are arrows which reference whether the actual working knowledge is less than or more than the importance level respondents places on the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a senior communicator.

Table 26 compares a number of skills and attributes statements based on the respondents opinion of whether or not the communications / public relations practitioner at their company possesses these skills and attributes with the level of importance weighting on the knowledge, skills, and competencies required of a senior communicator.

Table 25: Demonstrates a working knowledge of business competencies comparison to importance placed on knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Total Importance*	Working Knowledge of Business Competencies	Very Important	Important	Total Importance
98% (n=271)	Business ethics	144 (60%)	86 (36%)	96%↓ (n=242)
84% (n=273)	Strategic planning	116 (48%)	96 (40%)	88%↑ (n=242)
89% (n=274)	Using influence to persuade *(Practices principles of influence)*	128 (53%)	83 (34%)	87%↓ (n=241)

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Total Importance*	Working Knowledge of Business Competencies	Very Important	Important	Total Importance
n/a	Strategic management	118 (49%)	90 (38%)	87% (n=240)
88% (n=277)	Internal consulting skills *(Consulting skills)*	98 (40%)	111 (46%)	86%↓ (n=242)
n/a	Conflict management	91 (38%)	108 (45%)	83% (n=242)
88% (n=277)	External consulting skills *(Consulting skills)***	86 (36%)	113 (47%)	83%↓ (n=242)
83% (n=277)	Corporate social responsibility	94 (39%)	100 (41%)	80%↓ (n=242)
76% (n=273)	Risk management	77 (32%)	110 (46%)	78%↑ (n=241)
77% (n=274)	Organizational/operational planning	70 (29%)	114 (48%)	77% (n=240)
86% (n=274)	Managing team processes	72 (30%)	113 (47%)	77%↓ (n=241)
80% (n=274)	Negotiation	77 (32%)	104 (43%)	75%↓ (n=240)
54% (n=274)	Public opinion polling and analysis	52 (21%)	101 (42%)	65%↑ (n=242)
49% (n=275) 73% (n=275)	Financial reporting and accounting *(Knowledge of finance, and Budgeting)***	36 (15%)	107 (44%)	59%↑↓ (n=242)
59% (n=275)	Organizational policy development	40 (17%)	100 (41%)	58%↓ (n=241)
57% (n=274)	Corporate and communication law *(Knowledge of legal issues)*	43 (18%)	92 (38%)	56%↓ (n=241)
n/a	Human resources management	25 (10%)	110 (46%)	56% (n=240)

*Sum of responses reported as very important and important.
** How the question was stated in the knowledge, skills, and abilities section.

Table 26: Skills and attributes possessed by the communications / public relations professional at my company comparison to knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Total Importance*	Skills and Attributes	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total Agreement
99% (n=272)	Practices public relations and communications in an ethical manner *(Practices public relations and communications in a legal and ethical manner)**	181 (77%)	54 (23%)	100%↑ (n=236)
99% (n=274)	Functions in a responsible, professional, trustworthy and accountable manner	182 (77%)	51 (22%)	99% (n=237)
99% (n=272)	Practices public relations and communications in a legal manner *(Practices public relations and communications in a legal and ethical manner)**	166 (70%)	65 (27%)	97%↓ (n=237)
96% (n=276)	Displays mindfulness of the role of the organizational leader	154 (66%)	72 (31%)	97%↑ (n=235)
n/a	Functions as an effective member of a team	158 (66%)	71 (30%)	96% (n=238)
91% (n=272)	Provides leadership in implementation of communication objectives *(Leadership skills)**	166 (70%)	63 (26%)	96%↑ (n=238)
98% (n=272)	Displays mindful awareness of events, trends and cultural shifts that impact the organization	141 (60%)	85 (36%)	96%↓ (n=235)
91% (n=272)	Provides leadership to the organization on reputation, relationships, and positioning *(Leadership skills)**	148 (62%)	74 (31%)	93%↑ (n=237)
80% (n=276)	Commitment to lifelong learning	90 (39%)	125 (54%)	93%↑ (n=233
79% (n=277)	Uses research to expand on a body of knowledge *(Conducts research and evaluation to support*	82 (35%)	117 (49%)	84%↑ (n=237)

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Total Importance*	Skills and Attributes	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total Agreement
	*communications strategies)**			
79% (n=277)	Conducts formative research to develop communication strategies *(Conducts research and evaluation to support communications strategies)**	59 (25%)	125 (53%)	78%↓ (n=238)
79% (n=277)	Conducts evaluative research to develop communication strategies *(Conducts research and evaluation to support communications strategies)**	61 (26%)	123 (52%)	78%↓ (n=238)

*Sum of responses reported as very important and important.
** How the question was stated in the knowledge, skills, and abilities section.

The minimum credentials executives require their senior communicators and public relations practitioners to posses are a bachelor's degree plus relevant experience in public relations. It was noted that there is some confusion over the various types of public relations or communications academic credentials in Canada, and that executives often have difficulty evaluating one credential over another.

Executives view professional credentials offered by organizations such as the Canadian Public Relations Society's APR (Accredited Public Relations) designation, or the International Association of Business Communicators' ABC (Accredited Business Communications) credential as a means for senior communicators to demonstrate their commitment and ability to accomplish something; however, most are unaware of what the designations mean and don't often give preference to job candidates holding the designations. Professional associations such as CPRS and IABC need to ensure there is a "broad recognition that it [APR, ABC] represents a

minimum standard of competency in the field, e.g. financial advisors (CFP, CLU, etc.), urban

planners (MCP)."

For the most part, executives are looking for demonstrated experience in implementing

communication strategies that achieved the stated objectives and personal aptitudes when

seeking when to hire a senior communicator. "The experience, background and personality is

most important; obviously such a designation is a factor that is positive, but generally not a

deciding factor."

DELIVERABLE

Pathways Gap Analysis

There is a direct correlation between the competencies, attributes and aptitudes valued by

executives and demonstrated by senior communicators in their organizations, and those

programmed for in the *Management and Leader Pathways*. Table 27 shows the correlation

between the courses programmed as part of the *Management Pathway* and responsibilities

executives reported the senior communicator at their organization having, as well as to what

degree the knowledge, skills, and abilities are important, and to what degree the senior

communicator demonstrated a working knowledge of the competency, attribute or aptitude.

Table 28 illustrates the same for the *Leader Pathway.* The gaps of more than 2% in working

knowledge compared to the degree of importance are highlighted in both charts in orange and

represent areas for public relations and communications education and professional development

programming for senior communicators and public relations professionals holding manager,

director, and vice president level positions within an organization.

Table 27: Gap analysis for the course framework for the management pathway.

Management Pathway					
Courses	**Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator**	**Agree***	**Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude**	**Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities****	**Working Knowledge Demonstrated**
PR Theory and Practice					
Strategic communication planning	Strategic communication planning	95% (n=259)	Strategic planning	84% (n=273)	88%↑ (n=242)
			Strategic management	n/a	87% (n=240)
Issues management	Issues management	92% (n=259)			
Crisis management	Crisis management	95% (n=259)			
Reputation management	Reputation management	97% (n=258)	Provides leadership to the organization on reputation, relationships, and positioning	n/a	93% (n=237)
Principles of persuasion	****		Using influence to persuade *(Practices principles of influence)****	89% (n=274)	87%↓ (n=241)
Stakeholder relations	Stakeholder relations / management	90% (n=259)			
Advocacy	Advocacy	73% (n=260)			

Management Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Management Theory and Practice					
Financial management for PR	****		Financial reporting and accounting (*Knowledge of finance*)*** (*Budgeting*)***	49% (n=275) 73% (n=275)	59%↑↓ (n=242)
Corporate social responsibility	****		Corporate social responsibility	83% (n=277)	80%↓ (n=242)
Managing team processes	****		Managing team processes Functions in a responsible, professional, trustworthy, and accountable manner	86% (n=274) 99% (n=274)	77%↓ (n=241) 99% (n=237)
Environmental analysis and trends	****		Displays mindful awareness of events, trends, and cultural shifts that impact the organization	98% (n=272)	96%↓ (n=235)
Business ethics	****		Business ethics	98% (n=271)	96%↓ (n=242)

Management Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Public opinion	****		Public opinion polling and analysis	54% (n=274)	65%↑ (n=242)
Internal and external consulting skills	Consulting and collaboration with internal clients/stakeholders	95% (n=259)	Internal consulting skills	88% (n=277)	86%↓ (n=242)
			External consulting skills	88% (n=277)	83%↓ (n=242)
Introduction to corporate and communications law	****		Corporate and communication law *(Knowledge of legal issues)***	57% (n=274)	56%↓ (n=241)
Introduction to HR management	****		Human resources management	n/a	56% (n=240)
Personal and Group Competencies					
Managing and leading teams	****		Managing team processes	86% (n=274)	77%↓ (n=241)
			Leadership skills	91% (n=272)	
Current events and media literacy	****		Displays mindful awareness of events, trends, and cultural shifts that impact the organization	98% (n=272)	96%↓ (n=235)

*Sum of strongly agree and agree.

**Sum of very important and important.

***How competency / attribute / aptitude was stated in the knowledge, skills, and abilities section.

****Roles and responsibilities in addition to those tested. See Table 19.

Table 28: Gap analysis for the course framework for the leader pathway.

Leader Pathway					
Courses	**Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator**	**Agree***	**Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude**	**Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities****	**Working Knowledge Demonstrated**
PR Theory and Practice					
Managing the PR function	Managing the PR function	91% (n=260)	Practices public relations and communications in an ethical manner *(Practices public relations and communications in a legal and ethical manner)***	99% (n=272)	100%↑ (n=236)
			Practices public relations and communications in a legal manner *(Practices public relations and communications in a legal and ethical manner)***	99% (n=272)	97%↓ (n=237)

Leader Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Stakeholder management	Stakeholder relations / management	90% (n=259)			
Reputation management	Reputation management	97% (n=258)			
Areas of specialization including investor relations, government relations, and public affairs	Investor relations	42% (n=258)			
	Government relations	66% (n=260)			
	Public affairs	85% (n=259)			
Consultation and collaboration	Consulting and collaboration with internal clients/stakeholders	95% (n=259)			
History and evolution of PR and CM	****				
Management Theory and Practice					
Organizational policy	****		Organizational policy development	59% (n=275)	58%↓ (n=241)

Leader Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Financial reporting and accounting	****		Financial reporting and accounting (*Knowledge of finance*)*** (*Budgeting*)***	49% (n=275) 73% (n=275)	59%↑↓ (n=242)
Risk management	****		Risk management	76% (n=273)	78%↑ (n=241)
PERT analysis	Evaluation and measurement	80% (n=260)	Uses research to expand on a body of knowledge (*Conducts research and evaluation to support communication strategies*)*** Conducts formative research to develop communication strategies (*Conducts research and evaluation to support communication strategies*)***	79% (n=277) 79% (n=277)	84%↑ (n=237) 78%↓ (n=238)

Leader Pathway					
Courses	**Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator**	**Agree***	**Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude**	**Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities****	**Working Knowledge Demonstrated**
			Conducts evaluative research to develop communication strategies *(Conducts research and evaluation to support communication strategies)***	79% (n=277)	78%↓ (n=238)
Strategic planning	Strategic communication planning	95% (n=259)	Strategic planning	84% (n=273)	88%↑ (n=242)
Operational planning	****		Organizational / operational planning	77% (n=274)	77% (n=240)
			Organizational policy development	59% (n=275)	58%↓ (n=241)

Leader Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Organizational leadership	****		Provides leadership in implementation of communication objectives *(Leadership skills)***	91% (n=272)	96%↑ (n=238)
			Provides leadership to the organization on reputation, relationships, and positioning *(Leadership skills)***	91% (n=272)	93%↑ (n=237)
			Displays mindfulness of the role of the organizational leader	96% (n=276)	97%↑ (n=235)
Principles of influence	****		Using influence to persuade *(Practices principles of influence)***	89% (n=274)	87%↓ (n=241)
Strategic management	****		Strategic management	n/a	87% (n=240)
Corporate social responsibility	****		Corporate social responsibility	83% (n=277)	80%↓ (n=242)

Leader Pathway

Courses	Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator	Agree*	Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude	Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**	Working Knowledge Demonstrated
Personal and Group Competencies					
Internal consulting	Consulting and collaboration with internal clients/stakeholders	95% (n=259)	Internal consulting skills	88% (n=277)	86%↓ (n=242)
			External consulting skills	88% (n=277)	83%↓ (n=242)
Managing change	****		n/a		
Personal leadership	****		Provides leadership in implementation of communication objectives *(Leadership skills)***	91% (n=272)	96%↑ (n=238)
			Provides leadership to the organization on reputation, relationships, and positioning *(Leadership skills)***	91% (n=272)	93%↑ (n=237)
Personal learning planning	****		Commitment to lifelong learning	80% (n=276)	93%↑ (n=233)

Leader Pathway					
Courses	**Reported Responsibility of Senior Communicator**	**Agree***	**Tested Competency / Attribute / Aptitude**	**Importance of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities****	**Working Knowledge Demonstrated**
Motivation	****		n/a		
Negotiation and conflict management	****		Negotiation	80% (n=274)	75%↓ (n=240)
			Conflict management	n/a	83% (n=242)

*Sum of strongly agree and agree.
**Sum of very important and important.
***How the competency / attribute / aptitude was stated in the knowledge, skills, and abilities section.
****Roles and responsibilities in addition to those tested. See Table 19.

Recommendations for Promoting Professional Credentials

To enhance the awareness and perceived value of public relations and communications credentials offered by communications and public relations professional associations, associations need to be willing to invest in long-term reputation management and brand strategies targeted to general business, human resources, and communications executives. It is not enough to run an ad once a year to profile the newly accredited members. Professional associations also need to create a value for accreditation with their memberships through testimonials, and transparency in accreditation processes, including the maintenance of accreditation process. There is a perception that accreditation is targeted to junior to mid-level practitioners and does not provide value to senior level practitioners.

Key messages to be communicated through the reputation management and brand strategies should focus on the minimum standard of competency required to achieve the designation, the commitment to practicing public relations and communications management in an ethical manner, and the rigor applied to the examination and maintenance processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of this Research

Given time constraints, the focus groups were convenient groups recruited from the researcher's network. As well, the researcher is a long standing national leader in CPRS, including serving as the current national presiding officer of the Education Council, and many of the focus group participants were aware of that. This may have caused them hesitate to voice

criticisms of CPRS and the professional credential offered by the association. The researcher also holds a bias towards public relations and communications management academic and professional credentials.

Two questions in the online survey were redundant and may have caused some confusion with respondents. As well, clarification around the business acumen competencies, including knowledge of finance, may have helped respondents.

Opportunities for Further Research

The reproducibility of this methodology could be tested by other researchers. There is also an opportunity to further test the *Pathways* framework to determine to what degree the *Technical and Career Pathways* competencies align with the skills and competencies organizations are looking for in their entry- to mid-level public relations and communications practitioners.

This research also serves as a benchmark for the CPRS Education Council to test against as it implements the *Pathways* program nationally with education institutions.

Contributions of this Research

This research has validated the competencies and credentials for communications and public relations managers and leaders as highlighted in the *Pathways* framework. It has also provided CPRS with an understanding of the value executives place on professional association membership and professional and academic credentials. This is an important contribution as CPRS takes a leadership position in providing educational institutions with a set of standards for public relations and communications education in Canada. The results of this research will help the public relations and communications profession provide guidance to educational institutions

programming for public relations and communications management education based on quantifiable data on the value executives place on a particular set of skills and competencies.

The value of understanding the competencies and credentials executives are looking for in communications managers and leaders, and the roles and responsibilities carried out by the senior communicator in and organization have been demonstrated in this study. The fundamental attributes and aptitudes defined in the literature as being paramount to the success of a senior communicator within an organization – leadership, ethics, and trust – are supported by this research.

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