

Testing a Model of Drivers and Outcomes for Corporate Communications Team Performance

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Abstract

In a previous study involving depth interviews and a survey of Chief Communication Officers (CCOs), the authors identified the key drivers and inhibitors of high performance on corporate communications teams. In this follow-up study, the authors tested a resulting model of four performance drivers and four outcomes of high-performing teams. In addition, the study analyzed the different perspectives of CCOs, their direct reports and their team members. Results indicated that each variable in the model had several dimensions that were rated distinctly. Also, there were significant differences in how CCOs evaluated their organization across many variables compared to those who report directly to them and the other members of their teams. Also, there were significant differences in how respondents rated their team on performance variables depending on if they perceived their role as providing communication services, driving stakeholder advocacy, or enabling the company's outcomes. Finally, respondents provided open feedback on their opinions about what to do to improve performance in their team. These responses are summarized in relationship to the proposed model and suggestions for future research. Academics and professionals alike can apply the results to: a) understand what constitutes "high performance" in corporate communications, b) consider how to develop high performance in specific organizations, c) be conscious of the outcomes, and therefore the incentives, of achieving high communication performance, and d) be aware of differing assessment of performance between CCOs and other members of the communication team.

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Introduction

It could be taken as a given that the leadership of any organization would strive for high performance. However, defining that abstract concept in a meaningful way has been an elusive goal. It is possible that each organization would have its own definition of high performance, given organizational culture, specific industry or competitive environment, and other factors. Specific functions within an organization, such as public relations and communications, may also have unique perspectives on what constitutes high performance.

However, previous research has determined, if not a definition, at least the commonly agreed upon characteristics of high performance from the perspective of corporate communications. In addition, the primary causes and inhibitors of high performance of corporate communication teams have been determined. From this research, models of high performance have been proposed. It is the purpose of this paper to put forth and test an updated model of the drivers and outcomes of high performance in corporate communications teams.

The results of this paper can be useful to academics who may do additional research to refine the model and advance it to new theory proposals. It also serves professionals who seek practical application in building and maintaining corporate communications teams that perform at a level that contributes to organizational success.

Literature Review

Performance

The concept of performance regarding corporate communications has many dimensions accounted for in previous literature. The roles played by public relations and communications professionals is a key aspect of performance. Two key roles—manager or technician—were determined in numerous studies (J. E. Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier, 1992; Dozier & Broom, 1995). The enacted role may not necessarily be consistent with the practitioner’s perceived role, given other organizational factors (Moss & Green, 2001; Toth et. al., 1998; Heath, 1994). A survey of senior communication professionals in the U.K. (Moss D. , 2005) determined five categories of roles: monitor and evaluate; issues management; policy and strategy advisor; problem solver; communication technician (tactical production). More recently, a study by the Arthur Page Society found new job roles for the CCO and her/his team, including content and engagement designer, influencer engagement leader, digital strategist, behavioral scientist and culture czar (Arthur Page Society, 2016). A 2017 survey by PR firm Weber Shandwick of 153 CCOs worldwide revealed that CCOs collaborate regularly with other corporate departments, including marketing, legal, human resources, government relations and public affairs (Weber Shandwick, 2016). Similarly, the University of Southern California’s Communication and Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices (GAP VIII) study noted that public relations and communications as a function is increasingly seen as a contributor to organizational success (Strategic Communication and Public Relations Center, 2014).

Conceptions of performance in public relations in particular have been associated with the term “excellence” from the studies (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995) that determined companies practiced ‘excellent’ communication if among other things: senior management was committed to communications excellence, CCOs reported directly to the CEO, PR and communication was more preventive than reactive, and the company was committed to research

as well as ongoing training and development. The Society for Human Resource Management (2015) has defined a high-performance work team as “a group of goal-focused individuals with specialized expertise who collaborate to relentlessly pursue performance excellence through shared goals, shared leadership, collaboration, open communication, clear role expectations, accountability and trust among its members.” There are a variety of characteristics of high-performance teams. Thiel (2009) noted six characteristics of high-performance teams: common purpose, clear roles, accepted leadership, effective processes, solid relationships, excellent communication. Wolski (2016) describes high-performance teams as those that function at a high level for an extended time, are efficient and effective and have qualities of diversity, clear goals, effective communication, trust, and ownership. Communicating well and aligning the team’s talent in the context of business relationships are also seen as elements of high-performance teams (Cancialosi, 2015).

Several other studies describe variables that affect the performance of teams. These include cohesiveness, or the degree to which teams stay together in pursuit of a common goal (Molnau, 2016), a shared understanding of terminology (Brewer, 2016), and willingness and eagerness to share knowledge (DeVries, van den Hoof, & deRidder, 2006). It is also notable that leaders and their followers have different perspectives of the job performance of leaders, with leaders evaluating themselves higher than those who report to them (Plank Center, 2016).

Since public relations is called a management function, it is important to consider the degree to which corporate communication teams in particular contribute to organizational performance overall (Schultz & Grindem, 2002). Liang, et. al. (2010) found that more communication in general between top management teams improves overall organizational performance, whereas decentralized communication has a negative impact on performance. Within teams, meanwhile, task orientation, feedback and upward communication have positive effects on perceived organizational performance in mission-oriented organizations but potentially negative effects on performance in rules-oriented cultures (Garnett, Marlowe, & Pandey, 2008). A South African study found that corporate communications professionals see variables affecting organizational performance at the individual, organizational, professional, industry and country levels (Le Roux, 2014).

Traditionally, performance in organizations has been measured by key performance indicators, or KPIs. The performance of teams has been operationalized by a solution quality average, a measure of the quality and quantity of task performance (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). In this case, for products, quality was measured in terms of innovation level, viability in the market, and competitiveness in the market rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale from “not at all” to “a lot.” More recently, in the Arthur Page Society (2016) study, 93 percent of CCOs responding said KPIs specific to communication today are different than 3-5 years ago and include employee engagement, customer loyalty, propensity to recommend to others, social influence and likelihood to act based on past behavior.

Models and Theories of Performance

There are several models and theories about communication performance. Michaelson, Wright and Stacks (2012) proposed a model focused on campaigns (as opposed to total organizational performance) and include three levels in what they call the “Excellence Pyramid”: a basic level that includes setting objectives, research and planning, outputs, outtakes and outcomes, and results; an intermediate level that includes deep connections to target publics, leadership support and engagement, and creativity and innovation that provides a unique

approach; and an advanced level in which a campaign sets the agenda for the target audience on key messages.

The strategic contingencies theory of organizational power (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971) suggests that the corporate communications unit would both maintain power and demonstrate value through high-performance measures of its distinctive functional contributions to the organization, because organizations are systems of inter-dependent subunits. The model in this study draws from the concept to the extent that it considers both drivers and outcomes of performance.

Zerfass and Viertman (2017) proposed a model called a “communication value circle” that includes four value dimensions of communication in organizations: enabling operations, building intangibles, adjusting strategy, and ensuring flexibility. Another qualitative and exploratory study looked into communication value as a measure of maturity (Johansson, Grandien, & Strandh, 2019). The study investigated 11 organizations and 85 stakeholders on variables of communication pre-requisites, competence, practices and assessments. The authors proposed a “Communication Maturity Index” that includes four levels: immature, emerging, established, and mature.

Lencioni (Lencioni, 2002) proposed that the five dysfunctions of a team are absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. The corresponding model of Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team include a consideration of appropriate focus on results, accountability, commitment, conflict, and trust.

Based on the above and in additional research, the authors of the current study found in their own previous research (Penning & Bain, 2018) a set of drivers, inhibitors and outcomes of high-performance in communications teams. Depth interviews and a subsequent survey with CCOs found five common characteristics of high-performing corporate communications teams: adaptable, specific and appropriate levels of expertise, analytical and strategic, demonstrate leadership across the organization, and are collaborative internally and with other functions. In addition, eight key factors in achieving high team performance emerged, in the following order, the team: is aligned with business goals, collaborates with other functions, adapts rapidly to change, has respect and a culture that encourages an individual’s best work, members understand the company’s business, has a clear role, CEO support, and demonstrates interpersonal skills. These factors and the comments about them by CCOs, combined with consideration of Lencioni’s model, led to the specific set of drivers and outcomes/enablers of communication team performance tested in this study.

A Model to Be Tested

Taking into consideration other models and previous research about team performance in general (Lencioni, 2002) and that which is specific to corporate communications teams (Penning & Bain, 2018), the authors devised a model to be tested in this paper. This model is also applicable specifically to communications teams because the subjects for research were CCOs and the members of their corporate communication teams, and communication is a function, unlike finance and engineering, where processes are freer to vary and variables of performance more vital. The model includes four primary drivers of high performance in corporate communications teams, as well as four outcomes and enablers of performance. These categories include attributes consistent with aspects of previous research.

The primary drivers of high performance, each with three attributes, include:

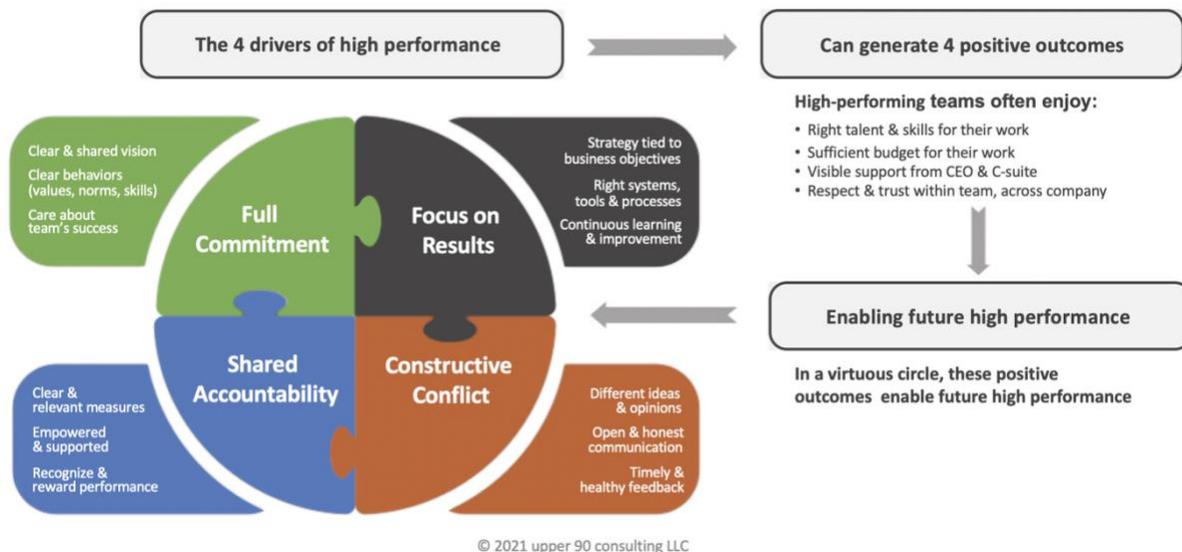
- *Full commitment*— These teams articulate and embrace a future vision for the team, members consistently demonstrate supportive behaviors based on agreed values and skills, and they care about the function’s collective success (not just their own).
- *Focus on results*— These teams have an explicit strategy that is tied to business objectives, they use appropriate systems, tools, and processes to enhance their work, and they take a disciplined approach to continuous learning and improvement.
- *Constructive conflict*—These teams encourage diverse thought and expression to foster better solutions and build harmony, they promote open and honest communications within and beyond the team, and they make timely and constructive feedback a standard operating practice.
- *Shared accountability*—These teams define and use clear, relevant measures that map to business and other outcomes, they empower and support team members at all levels to enhance success, and they recognize and reward performance consistent with team objectives and values.

The other aspect of the model includes characteristics of teams that are both enablers of high performance and the positive outcomes of achieving it. When teams optimize the four performance drivers, they can expect to see valuable outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, will enable continued high performance. The outcomes/enablers are:

- *Right talent*—High-performing teams tend to possess the necessary skills for their work, have a sufficient number of people for their work, and are effective in attracting, retaining, and developing talent.
- *Sufficient budget*—High-performing teams tend to have the budget they need to achieve their current objectives and to invest in their future.
- *Visible support*—High-performing teams tend to enjoy vocal and visible support from the CEO and other C-suite leaders, an important endorsement that reflects and reinforces the team’s value.
- *Respect and trust*—Members on high-performing teams tend to respect and trust each other and enjoy the respect and trust of others in the organization.

Figure 1

A Model of Corporate Communications Team Performance



Research Questions

Models are important in research and practice, but their real value is in the degree to which professionals agree with them and they provide meaning for specific contexts. For a model to have utility, there should be variance in responses—common responses would indicate that not much is being measured or tested. In the case of communications performance, there may be variance within teams and between organizations. Respondents may also have their own insights about what would improve performance, and whether the model is an appropriate test of that for their own organization. This led to a series of research questions for this study:

RQ1: To what extent do **CCOs** view their organizational performance in terms of the model’s primary drivers, enablers, and outcomes of high-performance in corporate communications teams?

RQ2: To what extent do those who are **direct reports** to the CCO, and other corporate communication **team members** view their organizational performance in terms of the model’s primary drivers, enablers, and outcomes of high-performance in corporate communications teams?

RQ3: Do CCOs and their direct reports and team members agree or disagree significantly on the aspects of the model?

Because each organization is different, the roles of the corporate communication teams may vary. The specific roles that public relations professionals play in organizations has been studied since the 1970s (Broom & Sha, 2013), when Broom and Smith (1979) proposed a four-part typology of roles: communication technician, expert prescriber, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication facilitator. Subsequent research and statistical analysis collapsed and simplified the roles into two: technician and manager (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Dozier & Broom, 1995). In addition to individual roles, previous models suggest organizations—or their corporate communications teams—conduct public relations or communications differently

depending on which perceived model or role they predominantly follow. The earliest set of such models characterized public relations in four ways: press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). There have been many other iterations of these models. This study considered how teams may see their role as providing communication (public information), achieving business outcomes (two-way asymmetrical), or driving stakeholder advocacy in the sense of balancing stakeholder interest with company objectives (two-way symmetrical). This leads to another research question:

RQ4: Does the team's perception of their **primary role** make a difference in their assessment of any of the aspects of the model?

Finally, respondents may view the model being tested as appropriate or they may identify additional factors that would affect communications team performance in their own context. This led to a final research question:

RQ5: What areas for improvement do respondents identify, and do they confirm the model or suggest revisions?

Method

A survey instrument was developed with several questions for each of the variables in the model, which address the four drivers and four outcomes of high-performance. Each of the four primary drivers in the model had three associated survey questions, and the four outcomes/enablers in the model had two associated questions each. Respondents were asked to consider their own communications team and respond to statements in the survey on a 7-point Likert scale (see Tables 1 and 2 in results for variables associated with each driver and outcome). CCOs from large organizations—domestic and global, corporate, and nonprofit—were recruited to take the survey. They were also asked to give the survey to their teams. Screening questions were included to determine if the respondent was a CCO, a direct report to the CCO, or a lower-level team member. This enabled subsequent comparison of responses by CCOs, direct reports and team members. The survey was administered via email with several reminders and responses gathered in Survey Monkey, with data imported to SPSS for analysis.

An email appeal was sent to 528 randomly selected members of large organizations of CCOs. The CCOs were asked to forward the survey to their communications team members. Three follow-up appeals were made over a period of two months.

After determining descriptive total statistics, one-way ANOVA regressions were run in SPSS to compare means on dimensions of model variables. Comparisons were done of CCOs, direct reports and team members, as well as a comparison based on perceived role of the team in the organization.

Results

There were 221 completed responses, representing 25 CCOs, 50 direct reports, and 146 team members. Since the appeal went to 528 CCOs, the 25 respondents represent a response rate of 4.7%. Among the CCOs there were seven males and 17 females; among direct reports 23 males and 35 females; and among team members 52 males and 117 females, with 26 choosing not to disclose. There was a range of years of experience, from less than five years to more than 20. CCOs mostly had more years of experience.

While all responding organizations were international in scope, there was variance between them in size by revenue and the size of their communications teams. All had more than \$1 billion in annual revenue but spread evenly from less than \$2 billion to more than \$40 billion. Communication team size ranged from less than 10 (7), to 11-49 (10), to 50-99 (5) team members. One team was larger than 100 members and one was larger than 200 members. Overall, 84 respondents considered their team role to be providing communications, 62 saw their role as driving stakeholder advocacy, and 74 indicated their team enabled business outcomes.

Responses to questions about the drivers and outcomes/enablers of team performance ranged across the seven-point Likert-type scale, with some questions having a range of 1-7. Means ranged from 3.92 to 6.2 across all variables, another indicator of variance. All responses are based on a 7-point Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = neither, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree.

RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 are all answered by looking at response to the questions associated with the dimensions of each model variable. Across all variables, CCOs tended to rate the performance of their team higher than direct reports, who in turn rated the team performance higher than team members, with a few exceptions. The difference was statistically significant for 12 variables, 10 associated with the primary drivers in the model and two on the “respect and trust” outcome in the model. This data, with significance levels for key variables indicated, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Differences in Team Performance Assessment for CCOs, Direct Reports, and Team Members

Model	Variable	CCO	Report	Member	F-Test	η^2
<i>Primary Drivers</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>		
Full Commitment	Team has clear vision	6.16	5.54	5.46	F(2,218) = 2.580, $p > .05$	.02
	*Consistent with values	6.36	6.10	5.63	F(2,218) = 5.713, $p < .05$	.05
	*Care about success	6.60	6.34	6.09	F(2,217) = 3.034, $p = .05$	.03
Focus on Results	*Strategy to outcomes	6.44	6.30	5.92	F(2,217) = 4.023, $p < .05$	.04
	*Right systems, tools	5.12	4.62	4.28	F(2,218) = 4.352, $p < .05$	.04
	**Continuous learning	6.16	5.86	5.35	F(2,216) = 8.066, $p < .01$	.07
Constructive Conflict	**Different ideas	6.60	6.02	5.45	F(2,217) = 9.191, $p < .01$	.08
	**Value open, honest	6.38	5.90	5.50	F(2,216) = 5.772, $p < .01$	.05
	*Healthy feedback	5.76	5.60	5.15	F(2,218) = 3.972, $p < .05$	.03
Share Accountability	Clear, relevant measure	5.36	5.48	5.11	F(2,218) = 1.718, $p > .05$	.02

	**Empowered	6.16	5.76	5.36	F(2,218) = 4.791, $p < .01$	.04
	**Reward to objective	5.96	5.52	5.08	F(2,216) = 5.250, $p < .01$	.05
<i>Outcomes/Enablers</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>		
Right Talent						
	People with Skills	5.80	5.92	5.78	F(2,218) = .280, $p > .05$	--
	Number of People	3.76	3.62	3.95	F(2,218) = .661, $p > .05$	--
Sufficient Budget						
	Budget for Objectives	4.72	4.30	4.34	F(2,218) = .601, $p > .05$	--
	Budget for Future	3.92	3.88	3.94	F(2,217) = .023, $p > .05$	--
Visible Support						
	from CEO	6.04	6.14	5.85	F(2,217) = 1.101, $p > .05$	--
	from C-Suite	6.08	5.86	5.58	F(2,218) = 2.906, $p > .05$	--
Respect and Trust						
	**Team respects	6.28	6.06	5.54	F(2,218) = 4.929, $p < .01$	.04
	**Other units respect	6.52	6.16	5.88	F(2,216) = 5.187, $p < .01$	.05

*Means are reported on a 7-point scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. η^2 is effect size reported only for significant equations.*

In addition to these tests, two questions outside the model variables were asked—whether the team was able to recruit and retain talent with the right skills and whether the team was able to develop current team members. Means for hiring the right skills for CCOs, direct reports and team members were 5.64, 5.34, and 4.79, respectively, which was a significant variance ($F(2,218) = 5.312, p < .01$). On the question of developing current members, the scores were 5.44, 5.16, and 4.73 which also varied significantly ($F(2,217) = 3.563, p < .05$). CCOs were more likely to agree that they have the right skills on the team and develop team members than are members of their team.

To answer RQ4, mean responses on each variable were compared according to whether respondents saw their team role as providing communications, driving stakeholder advocacy, or enabling outcomes. Here as well there was significant variance by these groups in 11 variables of the model. Generally, those who perceived their team role to be enabling outcomes rated their performance higher than those who saw their roles as driving stakeholder advocacy or providing communications. The variables that had significant differences are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Differences in Team Performance Assessment by Perceived Team Role

Model	Variable	Provide	Drive	Enable	F-Test	η^2
<i>Primary Drivers</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>		
Full Commitment	**Team has clear vision	5.25	5.47	5.96	F(2,217) = 5.119, <i>p</i> < .01	.04
	*Care about success	5.98	6.26	6.41	F(2,216) = 3.457, <i>p</i> < .05	.02
Focus on Results	*Strategy to outcomes	5.85	6.06	6.31	F(2,217) = 3.752, <i>p</i> < .05	.04
	*Right systems, tools	4.12	4.55	4.69	F(2,217) = 3.590, <i>p</i> < .05	.06
Constructive Conflict	**Different ideas	5.38	5.68	6.03	F(2,216) = 5.453, <i>p</i> < .01	.07
Share accountability	*Clear measures	4.94	5.34	5.41	F(2,217) = 3.047, <i>p</i> < .05	.02
	**Empowered	5.25	5.47	5.92	F(2,217) = 5.106, <i>p</i> < .01	.04
	**Reward to objective	4.92	5.37	5.60	F(2,216) = 5.179, <i>p</i> < .01	.03
<i>Outcomes/Enablers</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>		
Visible Support	**from CEO	5.55	6.27	6.10	F(2,216) = 7.266, <i>p</i> < .01	.04
	**from C-Suite	5.40	5.98	5.85	F(2,217) = 4.963, <i>p</i> < .01	.03
Respect and Trust	*Other units respect	5.81	6.08	6.19	F(2,215) = 3.110, <i>p</i> < .05	.06

*Notes: Only significant results are shown. Means are on a scale of 1-7, with 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01.*

RQ5 had to do with the suggestions the respondents had about how their communications team performance could improve. To answer that, the open-ended (qualitative) responses to a question in which they were asked to name three things that would lead to improved performance were examined and categorized.

Nearly all the respondents, 116, answered this question. Their responses add validity that the variables in this model are associated with performance. Most of the suggestions they had to improve their communications team performance align with variables already in the model. It is likely they suggested factors on which they ranked their own organization low in the survey. For example, some common key words or ideas that emerge frequently in the qualitative data

include: trust, teamwork, collaboration, hire more people, link strategy to business outcomes, increase budget, provide tools and technology needed, empower and trust employees, become metrics-driven or provide open feedback. Some comments that could serve to be additional factors affecting team performance include: increasing team meeting frequency, ensure multi-lingual ability on the team, and adapt the fundamental structure of the team within the organization.

Discussion

In addition to being informed by the descriptive data overall, there are several interesting findings from looking at patterns in the survey responses to the performance model.

One practical outcome is to see the overall highest- and lowest-scoring variables in the model. The highest variables, with mean scores over 6 on the scale, were “cares about team success” (M = 6.2), “have a strategy tied to business outcomes” (M = 6.07), and “the team has respect from others in the business” (M = 6.02). The lowest variables, those with overall mean scores below 5, included “having the right systems and tools” (M = 4.45), “having the right number of people on the team” (M = 3.85), “having enough budget to achieve objectives” (M = 4.38), and “having enough budget to invest in the future” (M = 3.92). The higher scoring variables are related to attitude toward role or function and could be driven by the CCO. The lowest scoring variables include factors influenced by organizational realities hard to change, such as the ability to hire, to purchase equipment and technology, or budget allocation.

Overall, respondents believe their teams do well on all four performance drivers. But they seem to rate full commitment and constructive conflict more highly than others. All respondents, and especially CCOs, rated their teams highest on two outcomes/enablers: respect and trust and visible support. When it comes to having the right talent, respondents indicated they have the right skills more than having the right number of people, a suggestion that these teams may have adapted to hiring freezes. Having sufficient budget was generally scored lower.

What is perhaps more interesting is the variance in perception of how well a team is performing when comparing CCOs, direct reports, and team members. It may be the CCO generally ranks variables higher because they feel responsible and it is a form of self-evaluation, whereas team members feel more freedom to be autonomous and critical. Another explanation is that certain variables, such as having a vision, providing good feedback and others, are more perceptual or implicit in nature. Other variables, such as having the right tools or aligning rewards with outcomes, are more tangible and already explicit.

CCOs would do well to not assume understanding by their team of the more tacitly understood aspects of performance. Intentional explanation, training and feedback tied to these variables could bring scores--and thus performance--more in line between CCOs and team members. Meanwhile, with the more tangible factors of performance, CCOs can use results of conducting the model test in their organization to demonstrate to CEOs and others what areas may be inhibiting performance in the view of communication team members.

Another interesting outcome of this study is the significant variance in perceived communications performance based on differently perceived communication roles in an organization. The fact that those who perceive their role to be enabling business outcomes perceived their performance higher than those who perceived their role as stakeholder advocacy or simply providing communications is worth considering.

Those who saw their role as enabling business outcomes may have evaluated their performance higher because they work in an organizational environment that has a more complete or enlightened view of what communications is, that it is two-way and strategic and more of a management function. Thus, it is more likely to have more resources and behaviors already aligned with the variables in the model. By comparison, those who self-identify their role as advocacy or communications services are more tactical in nature and therefore perceive their team to be more functionary without visible support and other aspects of the model that would drive or be an outcome of higher performance.

As noted in the results section, respondents suggested specific ways to improve performance. Their suggestions mostly aligned with variables already included in the model and the instrument to test it. As such, this aspect of the study helped to confirm model variables are practically relevant and demonstrate the utility of the model.

The study is somewhat limited by a smaller sample in terms of the number of organizations included in the responses. However, the effect sizes are all medium (Cohen, 1988) (Miles & Shvrin, 2001) and therefore do indicate a small but meaningful difference between CCOs and others on the team. Also, the total number of individuals responding is larger and shows that the variables in the model are considered relevant across individual roles.

Practical Implications

The study provides useful insights for both professionals and academics. Specifically, there are two insights for professionals, having to do with the team's role and the way the individuals rate their team based on their role on it. Teams that see their role as "enabling the company's outcomes" are more likely to rate their performance higher than those which see their role as "driving stakeholder advocacy for the company" or "providing communications materials and services to the company." In other words, a team's charter or vision, either chosen or assigned, can shape its performance.

Meanwhile CCOs tend to rate their team's performance higher than their direct reports and team members. In teams where this gap is wide, this could become a performance issue.

The study also contributes to the body of scholarly knowledge about public relations. For one, it contributes to the understanding of public relations as a management function by providing empirical data regarding the organization and team-based causes and benefits (drivers and outcomes) of performance. A second and related implication for academics from this study is to move from a focus on evaluation of specific and time-limited public relations tactics and campaigns to examining the concept of performance of ongoing corporate communication for broader organizational impact. Future research could extend the findings in this study to examine factors associated with communication team performance in other settings, such as nonprofits, or to further test the association of type of team role with the variables in the model.

Therefore, to elevate performance, communication teams should start by determining their current state on the four performance drivers. In particular, CCOs and communication managers could ask what additional steps they can take to ensure that team members are fully committed to the team's success. They should also consider what more can be done to foster constructive conflict, and to create a vibrant, open, and dynamic work culture that allows all team members to freely share their best thoughts, without fear of criticism. By maximizing the four performance drivers, teams can expect to see positive outcomes/enablers which, in a positive feedback loop, will help to sustain and elevate their performance excellence.

Two concrete actions can be taken to move a communications team toward higher performance. First, a self-assessment can establish a baseline and help lay a path for specific and intentional actions to improve. CCOs could start a team conversation about current performance, making explicit the four drivers and the four outcomes/enablers, and then determine which are strong and which need to improve. This can be acted on by creating a plan to improve team performance, support it with quantitative and qualitative measures, and then implement the plan, monitor progress and adapt as necessary.

A second action would be a peer group comparison. Seeing how a corporate communication team's performance measures against other teams can be a good barometer of success as well. The authors may be contacted by those who wish to take the formal model test and see their score compared to a group average of respondents or compare themselves to the results in this article.

CCOs may need to consider other intangible factors such as country or organizational culture or whether their team is more centralized or decentralized or across multiple locations when using the model to assess performance. Some CCOs may want to scale their own performance measure if some factors like team role, size, capabilities, or talent are not possible to change in the current organizational climate. If a team is able to improve on drivers and enablers over time, CCOs could also measure if their team role also matures to a higher level of responsibility (i.e. from providing communication to enabling outcomes).

In the end, the model as deployed in this study proved to be a good means of assessment of corporate communication team performance. The survey instrument identified areas of strengths and weaknesses, and where CCOs and teams may disagree specifically. Individual organizations could use the model to determine their own specific strengths, weaknesses, and differences in perceived performance. Making more explicit the perceptual aspects of performance, and seeking to provide the more tangible ones, could be a valuable action of CCOs in response to internal execution of the model.

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