

Strategic Communication and Decision-Making Processes

Toward the Communication Oriented Organisation

Prof. Emanuele Invernizzi

President of Euprera, European Public Relation and Research Association

Professor of Public Relations and Corporate Communication

IULM University, Milan, Italy

Dr. Stefania Romenti, PhD

Assistant Professor of Public Relations and Corporate Communication

IULM University, Milan, Italy

Abstract

Communication continues to be an increasingly strategic and pervasive component in the processes of governance and management at all levels of a company. This evolution has been made evident by the importance that the communication function has acquired, or is acquiring, inside the organisational structure of companies. Furthermore, this evolution has been made evident by the growth of the role that communication, especially that of communication professionals, plays within the strategic decisional processes of the executive committee and administrative management of a company. Lastly, this evolution has been made evident by the omnipresence of communication within specific company functions especially with its most advanced and innovative forms and instruments.

The aim of this article is to bring attention to the evolution of the role of communication at the levels of company administration and management, using the results of the most recent international and national empirical research as well as the considerations emerging from a lively on-going debate in international publications, most markedly within the disciplines of public relations, organisation and management.

Finally, using the main results of case studies of four Italian successful companies.

Key words: strategic communication, role of CCOs, dominant coalition, decisional and organizational processes.

1. The Strategic Role of Communication in the Organizational Structure of a Company

An important process of evolution in the role of company communication has been underway inside complex organisations since the 1990's. This process highlights the strategic contribution that communication makes to the management and to the

organisational development of a company. Data, obtained from a 2008 research project conducted in Italy (Invernizzi, Romenti, 2009) in line with trends which have emerged from similar studies in the United States (GAP Study, 2008) and Europe (Moreno et al., 2009), show that the role of the communication function within the organisational structure of large Italian companies is progressively growing in importance. The most significant indicators that can be cited in that regard are *the growth in the number of corporate communication departments, the inclusion of a communication manager in the dominant coalition, and an increase in specialized technical communication activities* carried out inside companies.

The Growth in the Number of corporate communication departments. The organisations' communication managers are more and more frequently CCO's. In the last 15 years the number of CCO's in large Italian companies has increased exponentially: from 22% in 1994, to 55% in 2004, to 78% in 2008. In all cases, these managers report directly to the CEO, just as happens with the more consolidated departments of Human Resources, Production and Marketing. The constitution of a communication department doubtlessly necessitates considerable qualitative and quantitative changes in a company: increased responsibility and more tasks to carry out, a growing number of persons to manage, and new demands on strategic, organisational and administrative coordination.

The Inclusion of a Communication Manager in the dominant coalition. A large majority (67%) of the communication managers in large Italian companies participate in the executive committee and 61% declare that their proposals are taken into serious consideration by the top management of the company. Even though lower than the 85% of cases in which a communication department exists, these percentages nevertheless show that the majority of communication managers are involved in strategic decision making, and that they contribute to formulating strategies (corporate, competitive and functional) and corporate policies in various administrative phases. The aforementioned percentages acquire greater relevance when compared with data on the level of innovation in large Italian companies. In the more innovative companies, the percentage of cases in which the proposals of the communication manager are taken into serious consideration rises to 82%. This is proof of the contribution communication can make to corporate development and organisational success.

The Increase in Specialised Technical Communication Activities. New specialisations have gradually arisen alongside the more traditional activities, such as media relations, event organisation, internal communication and public affairs. Some of these specialisations have been created within the communication departments, such as those for Corporate Social Responsibility and Crisis communication. Others have arisen in the departments with which they have affinity of content: typical is the case of the Investor Relation Function or Financial Communication, which are often

created within the Finance and Controls divisions. Among the specialised activities characterised by consistent growth is Internal Communication, the diffusion of which in Italian corporations has grown from 52% in 1994, to 91% in 2004, to 96.3% in 2008.

An analysis of the actual state of large Italian companies thus shows the growth of the importance of the communication function and of the role of its manager. Communication is more and more considered a managerial function that contributes to organisational efficacy, equal to the other managerial functions traditionally included in the dominant coalition. Consequently, the importance of the strategic component of the role of the communication professional has grown significantly, compared to the traditional technical-tactical components.

The increase in the importance of the function in the Italian corporate organisational structure, together with the growth of the strategic aspects of the role of its manager are the indispensable conditions which allow communication to contribute significantly to organisational efficacy (Grunig, Dozier, 2002). This contribution attains its fullest value when communication is systematically involved in strategic decision making rather than being limited to communicating the decisions taken by other company functions.

But how can communication contribute to the efficacy of strategic decision making within the corporation? And how can this contribute to corporation success? As we shall see in the following section, there is no single answer.

2. Contributions to the Concept of Strategic Communication in Decision Making

Publications on corporate communication and on public relations have given diverse meanings to the concept of strategic contribution of communication in decision making, praising its multiple potentiality, and delineating the implications in the process of creating corporate value (Hallahan et al., 2007). Three components, emphasized by scholars of communication, highlight the concept of strategic contribution of communication to corporate governance from different perspectives: the contribution of communication to the definition and *diffusion of corporate strategies and guiding values*, the *analysis and interpretation of the organisational context*, and, lastly, the *activation of symmetric relationships with company stakeholders*.

Corporate Strategies and Guiding Values. Some scholars (Argenti, 2008; Cornelissen, 2008; Van Riel, 1995) define as strategic those communication activities which make known the contents of company strategy and important corporate decisions to key stakeholders, both internal and external. The communication activity focuses on what to communicate in order to obtain the desired effect (Stroh, 2007). In the case of internal stakeholders, communicating the decisions regarding strategic company

choices serves to channel collective energy to a common goal, consistent with company mission and guiding values.

In the case of external stakeholders, strategic communication activities are essential to shaping a single, clear company position in the minds of its stakeholders as well as to developing a solid long-term reputation (Cornelissen, 2008). These studies stress the importance of concerting all communication activities so as to ensure the coherence of messages sent and the strategic intent of the organisation (Van Riel, 1995).

Such coherence is reinforced by appropriate coordination between the departments and professionals responsible for communication, with consideration given to the content, tone, and style of the messages (Argenti, 2008). This component of the strategic contribution of communication partly corresponds to the technical-managerial role (Van Ruler, Vercic, Balmer, 2002; Invernizzi, 2004) which in 2008 the communication professional occupied in 96% of large Italian companies. That is to say, the role focuses on the ability to plan and design communication activities and on having a full grasp of specialized language which facilitates understanding the messages on the part of key interlocutors.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Context. Communication plays its role at the increasingly more and more porous and fragile boundary between the organisation and its reference environment (White, Vercic, 2001). From this viewpoint, communication exercises a function of *boundary spanning*. The fact that it has a boundary function gives corporate communication a privileged position for observing and interpreting the context in which an organisation operates, and this is considered a central theme in strategic management studies to guarantee long-term corporate survival. The theme has become progressively more crucial as the corporate social profile has expanded, that is, with the increase of counterparts and with the increase in the urgency and pressure of their requests (Sciarelli, 2007).

The monitoring and interpretation of the on-going dynamics in *environmental scanning* are thus an important component of the strategic contribution of communication to the decisional processes and can be conducted on two levels: the *issue* and *public* level and the *company stakeholder* level. In fact, the analysis may be applied firstly to the variables which the organisation is powerless to influence (*issue*), but which may have a direct impact on organisational performance or which may indirectly act on the stakeholder groups which are strategic for the organisation itself.

Examples of variables of this type are the spread of revolutionary production technology or of innovative consumer trends. Sometimes these variables catalyse the attention of public opinion and activate groups (*publics*) which, although not part of the company stakeholder category, may nevertheless exercise pressure on the stakeholders and influence their attitudes and behaviours with regard to the company.

Secondly, the analysis of the on-going dynamics may be applied to the company stakeholders and aim at mapping out the prominent persons among them (Mitchell et al., 1997), monitoring, not only the changes in quality of their relationship to the organisation, but also their more or less explicitly expressed expectations and needs. (Grunig, Grunig, Dozier, 2002; Hamrefors, 2004).

Research on organisational context therefore permits communication to offer a strategic contribution to company decisional processes feeding the gathering of information, which, at a later stage, contributes to the formulation of choice options (*feeding*). Through such activities, communication stimulates management to formulate strategies and processes aligned with the on-going dynamics in the company social context and with the most relevant expectations of stakeholders, rather than just limiting itself to considering its own interests only (Steyn, 2007). This facilitates the progressive legitimisation of the company in its environment, which is a necessary condition so as to maintain its long-term “operating licence”. This strategic component of communication is a central element in the role of the communication professional and has been so defined “strategic–reflective” by several scholars (Van Ruler, Vercic, Balmer, 2002; Invernizzi, 2004).

This role gains relevance only when it is completed by a similarly significant “consultative–formative” role, whose founding element is the process of attribution of meaning to the information gathered. The interpretation of the information gathered, and the attribution of sense and meaning to it, is part of the process that Weick (1995) defined organisational sense-making. By including communication in the dominant coalition, the process of sense-making gains a more complete and articulated outlook, that is, that of the company as well as of all the interested parties within it (Van Ruler, Vercic, Buetschi, Flodin, 2001).

The role of sense-making can be utilized from inside to outside the corporation and can consist of pin-pointing in advance the communicative aspects of decisions taken, of the strategic options the organisation has at its disposal, and of the specific strategic objectives. In particular, the relevant aspects include the attitudes and behaviours of the stakeholders, and the resulting impact that the strategic decisions can have on the quality of the relationship network and on the value of the corporate reputation. Sense-making from outside to inside the organisation is also essential so as to understand the impact and the consequences of issues on the decisional, productive and managerial processes.

Activation of Symmetric Relationships with Company Stakeholders. Public relations scholars have traditionally identified the development of solid, lasting, and symmetric relations between the organisation and its stakeholders as the strategic objective of communication (Ledingham, Bruning, 2000; Grunig, 2001; Ferguson, 1999). Even

post-modern theoreticians, when referring to theories of complexity and chaos, have underlined the importance of this objective and affirmed that communication professionals should follow a proactive role within their organisation (Holtzhausen, 2002).

This role implies abandoning short-sighted management attitudes dedicated primarily to defending their own areas of interest (*buffering*), but instead dedicating their energies to encouraging greater open-mindedness on the part of the organisation to its reference environment, welcoming *stimuli* coming from outside, and valuing the wealth of opinions, positions, and experiences which constitute the organisational context.

Assuming an approach of this type means building bridges between the organisation and its most important stakeholders (*bridging*), as well as activating and facilitating the participation and involvement of company members, while taking care to maintain a balance between the weight of their voices and those of the management of the organisation.

This line of research is the concrete expression of what Knights (1997) defined as a post-modern approach to the strategic management of a corporation, where the efficacy of decision making increases proportionately to the number of participating members, that is, proportionately to the wealth of points of view and experiences. Strategic decisions should, therefore, be rooted in the interchange between the organisation and its most important interlocutors, rather than being defined autonomously by the dominant coalition (Stroh, 2007).

Communication professionals acting as activists should concentrate more on facilitating rather than on managing communication, thus contributing to creating processes which have meaning and which attribute priority to the strategic options of the organisation (Holtzhausen, 2002). The post-modern approach emphasizes the fact that corporate life is continually characterised by paradox and originates in dialogue among its principle figures. The meaning of organisational action, in fact, is created through constant interaction, participation, continuous change and self-regulation among the corporate parts. Thus diversity contributes to feeding the decisional, managerial, and productive processes with ever-new knowledge.

The literature highlights three components of the strategic role of communication, or three ways in which communication contributes significantly to the corporate decision-making process. Each of these aids in developing the efficacy of the strategic decision-making, managerial and operational processes in general, but, nevertheless, places special emphasis on given moments of the decisional processes.

The strategic contribution of the activities that build symmetric relationships with key stakeholders is, for example, particularly important in the initial phase of the decisional process, the phase that defines the problems which catalyse the attention of the management. The problems which give rise to the decisional processes should, in fact, be rooted in an on-going interchange between the organisation and its reference environment. It is in this interchange that the communication professional can play the role of activist and facilitator.

In particular, the activity of analysis and interpretation of the organisational context can contribute to formulate the strategic options available to the manager as well as to guide him/her towards the most suitable choice. Through such activities managers can, in fact, understand which dynamics within the organisational context may impact the decisional processes and, at the same time, what the communicative consequences could be of the various options available.

Lastly, communication can make a strategic contribution to the corporation by making known to key interlocutors the contents of company strategy and of the most relevant decisions taken. The professionalism of the communicator is in this case important in selecting the language best suited for the desired effect as well as in selecting the most appropriate techniques and messages. This strategic contribution of corporate communication is traditionally considered most important. In fact, it supports the implementation of decisions taken by the management as well as the evaluation of the effects, and, in this way, enables us to understand if a given communication strategy has been successful.

3. The Dimensions of Strategic Communication in Decision Making

In the preceding paragraphs we maintained that the strategic role of communication inside organisations has evolved and become increasingly more important. To illustrate this point we used data from a recent empirical study which provides evidence of the fact that more and more frequently the CCO takes part in the corporate decisions of the dominant coalition. In addition, we analysed publications on public relations and corporate communication to identify the meaning attributed to the concept of strategic contribution of communication to corporate decisions.

Analysing the data from empirical studies and publications, we can identify the following dimensions of communication contributions to decisional processes.

The enabling role of communication

The first and the most traditional dimension, defined by Zerfass et al. (2008:70) as the enabling role of communication, is how communication facilitates the implementation of company decisions. In this case the CCO contributes by following the actual decisional

momentum and exercising influence on the ways in which decisions are communicated and carried out. Communication helps govern the activities, mainly tactical in nature, which are necessary for the implementation of the decisions themselves. In fact, communication enables the decisional processes by transmitting their contents to interested parties, involving and motivating human resources, supporting the exercise of leadership, helping plan and organise the managerial and operational activities, and making it possible to check the results obtained (Steinmann, Schreyogg, 2005). Some authors define communication strategy (Argenti, 2007; Cornelissen, 2008; Van Riel, Fombrun, 2007; Steyn, 207) as that which makes known, inside and outside the organisation, the decisions regarding company strategy and business objectives, focusing the energies of the organisation's internal and external members towards a shared goal.

The enabling role coincides with the infrastructural role, traditionally attributed to communication, that is, the role of sustaining and supporting the company business (Kotler, 2001). It represents a crucial component as it substantially contributes to the efficacy and quality of the results in the decisional process. This component in the communication role does not, however, exercise influence on the content of the decision itself, but rather on the way in which the decision is carried out. The approach used has a functionalist matrix since it begins by asking which processes, structures, and communication systems are the most adequate and contribute the most to developing business decisions (Belasen, 2008)

Constitutive role of communication

A second type of strategic dimension can be defined as the constitutive role of communication. In this case, communication becomes something more than an infrastructural component of the business. It feeds the decisional process, influencing it through reflective activities of analysis and interpretation of the internal and external context. Here the listening activity plays a different role from that of the enabling role of communication, where listening aims at aligning the communication of the decisions taken with the opinions and attitudes of the stakeholders.

In the case of the constitutive role of communication, context analysis conditions the formulation of the strategic options to choose from, as it widens the choice of decisional criteria because it includes the communicational ones. In other words, through reflective activity, the communicational component enters the decisional process itself and contributes to influencing its content. By carefully listening to context and understanding the expectations of the principal stakeholders, the CCO can forecast the impact on them and thus contribute to making decisions in keeping with their context.

The decisions of the companies that use this type of approach end up being more sustainable, not only from the standpoint of financing, human resources and technology as traditionally occurs in the majority of corporations, but also from the communicational standpoint (Lurati, Eppler, 2006). Taking sustainable decisions from the communicational standpoint, therefore, means ensuring that the choices made are not communicated, but aligned with the expectations of the company stakeholders as well as with the public image and identity of the organisation (Lurati, Eppler, 2006).

The importance of the activity of dialogue between the corporation and its stakeholders within the constitutive role of communication is fundamental as it permits maintaining harmony among the respective values and helps legitimate the organisation in the environment in which it operates (Andriof, Waddock, 2002). Such dialogue may even be focused on business themes to encourage the direct involvement of certain stakeholders in decisional processes and to activate the exchange of innovative ideas.

The two enabling and constitutive dimensions described above, are the premise for further developing the strategic contribution of communication to corporate decisional processes. This most important strategic contribution makes it possible for the organization to become communication oriented: that is to say, the organization is communication driven in the sense that all strategic and operational decisions are taken so that their results communicate consistently with the organization's strategy and policy.

Communication Oriented Organisation

The strategic dimension that communication has acquired in running complex organisations and in ensuring their success is the one which supports the decisional processes of the individual corporate functions, and, more generally, the governance of the organisation itself. In fact, in addition to the two strategic dimensions, which we defined "enabling" and "constitutive", there is also a third which identifies communication as the reference point for all important decisional processes of the company. In other words, corporations are increasingly becoming communication oriented organisations.

Something like this occurred in the United States in the first decades of the previous century and in Europe in the post Second World War period, when all decisions were taken with the aim of making the manufacturing processes more efficient. Likewise, in the 1950's and 1960's, decisions were influenced by an approach dominated by marketing considerations and principles. In the first case, not only was the CEO often an engineer and expert in production, but also the production manager played a dominant role; in the second case, the CEO was frequently a manager with a sales

background, and the marketing manager held a very important role in the executive committee.

Additionally, in both cases all decisional processes related to company strategies, products, and management criteria had, as a common objective and as a cultural frame of reference, firstly productive efficiency and secondly the efficacy of attaining sales goals. In addition, all the division managers, from human resources to administration, shared the same cultural approach which had to do in the first case with production and, in the second, with marketing.

Today it is the turn of communication. It is now considered indispensable for all company initiatives to be properly communicated inside and outside the corporation. It is considered indispensable not only to pay attention to the ongoing changes among the various publics or stakeholders, but also to act on these changes. Today we see a growing awareness that the result of every company decision communicates: *therefore, it communicates not only through the use of proper methods of communication, but through the communicated contents themselves*. More concretely, we can say that the strategic dimension of communication does not solely consist in the development of listening skills and reflective activities by communication professionals. Neither does it consist in the growth of specialist initiatives in communication and in public relations, nor their governance through sophisticated managerial models.

The strategic dimension of communication manifests itself through the participation, from the very beginning, of communication professionals in all corporate and departmental decisional processes. Or through the decisional processes that the CEO himself starts up, after giving due consideration to their aims and to their communicational consequences. The reasons for this important change are to be found in the progressive recognition of the importance of the communication component in any company decision.

The presence of the director of the communication function in the executive committee has its justification in the fact that every decision must be evaluated, not only from the standpoint of necessary resources and financial impact, and, not only from the standpoint of necessary requirements and impact on human resources, but also from the standpoint of necessary communication resources and communication impact which those decisions require and imply.

The difference, therefore, in the approach that we define as communication oriented, and that of traditional communication, is precisely that communication takes on a predominant role in guiding both the strategic and the operational decisions of the company.

4. Four Italian Cases Studies

The cases of four companies (among many others) can be cited as an example supporting the aforementioned hypothesis of the communication oriented organization: *illycaffé*, *Banca Monte dei Paschi (BMPS)*, *Pastificio Rana* and *Ferrari*.

illycaffé and *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena (BMPS)* are interesting precisely because in both cases the CCO is not only a member of the company's executive board but also takes part in all decision making having to do with the company's strategy and also with the principal operational choices of the individual corporate divisions.

illycaffé

In *illycaffé* the person responsible for communication has been included in the executive committee, not only because the CEO considered this a good idea but also because, and this is the most interesting aspect, the other officers requested it. It is also interesting because it means that the contribution of the chief of communication was evaluated by all the managers as adding operating value to the decisional processes in which they are involved. There are numerous examples of the chief of communication being asked for support in the area of operating decisions, such as the time when the convenience of incorporating the logistic function by buying a new location outside Trieste was under discussion. The potential communicational impact of the decision was considered so significant as to require the participation of the chief of communication to help evaluate whether to proceed with the incorporation of the logistics function and purchase of the site, and the related purchasing procedure.

Banca Monte dei Paschi

In *BMPS* the most significant feature concerning communication is that, when any of its divisions has to invest in making public the results of its decisions, whether regarding new products, services, or new managerial policies, that division must have the approval of the CCO, seeing that he is the one that controls the communication budget. In the period immediately following the introduction of this rule, the individual divisions would ask the communication division to program a communication strategy for the outcome of their specific decisions, or else to approve their own communication proposal.

Very frequently the individual divisions would receive as a reply, if not an outright rejection, at least a request to re-think their decisions so as to make them more communicable. That would lead to a give-and-take situation between the divisions and the CCO, and sometimes to opposition on the part of the CCO, who would highlight the difficulty of communicating about a product or service that lacked easily communicable characteristics.

This period of instability led to the institution of a procedure, not yet fully definitive but applied more and more often, which calls for the involvement of the CCO from the initial phases of the decisional processes. In other words, the individual divisions are instituting the practice of getting the CCO, or a professional in his division, involved from the very start of individual decisional processes.

We can thus see that the aims and the communicational component at BMPS have a deep effect on the various decisional processes. In fact, the content of a product or service is, for example, often defined mostly (although obviously not entirely) on the basis of what BMPS wants it to communicate.

The other two cases, *Pastificio Rana* and *Ferrari*, also support the hypothesis of the Communication Oriented Organization. In both cases, the respective CEOs have always made use of principles based primarily on communicational and relational objectives to govern their companies and lead them, or re-lead them, as in the case of Ferrari, to success.

Pastificio Rana

In the case of *Pastificio Rana*, a hugely successful maker of fresh pasta products which in a few years has become a multinational corporation, the most important strategic and operating decisions have always taken the communicational impact of every strategic choice into great consideration. The founder and current president, Giovanni Rana, has always placed the relational and communicational aspect at the forefront of his decisions, even if they are of technical and commercial character.

An example of a technical decision is the design/engineering of a machine to produce tortellini that would be completely similar to the home-made product. Or else the decision not to enter the frozen foods market, not so much because the product would not have the same quality or be as pleasing to the palate as the fresh product, but rather to maintain the perception of high quality, which has always been a characteristic of Rana products in the eyes of the consumer, even at the price of a lower share of the market.

Ferrari

The re-birth of the well-known Formula 1 maker of sports automobiles, *Ferrari*, following a period of very serious crisis, during the Eighties of last century, is tied to the strategies put into effect by the new CEO, Luca di Montezemolo. In particular, as soon as he joined the company in 1991, Montezemolo, whose professional background was as a communicator and who rose to become CCO of the FIAT Group, started a program known as "Formula Persona", which consisted in continuously improving innovation and creativity, centring on the individual or person and on what s/he could contribute.

To this end a work environment was designed to optimize the production process and emphasise the individual identity and a sense of belonging of the personnel. In addition, a system was designed to recognise the contributions of the employees and to implement a series of company-sponsored services, including outside services, to simplify and better the lives of the employees. The CEO's idea, on which the "Formula Persona" was based, was that these measures would communicate to the employees the value the company placed on them as well as the recognition of the contribution of every person to the company's success.

Similarly to the case of Rana, we see that it is the entrepreneur himself that develops organizational and management programs able to communicate the centrality of the individual or person. It is these persons who are at the origin of the revival of Ferrari, which has once again become a success, both as an economic entity and as a Formula 1 contender. Typical of these programs are the work areas, some designed by famous architects, such as Renzo Piano.

5. Final Remarks

To conclude the thoughts presented in this paper we can say that communication is taking on a full role both in the corporation's strategic decision making and in that of the operational decisions of the single corporate functions.

It is a full role in the sense that communication has become a structural component of the strategic and operational processes of the corporation, be it because the Chief of communications and the professionals in the department participate in those processes, be it because communication has become indispensable in decision making and coordination.

To support this hypothesis we have presented four cases of successful Italian companies in which the strategic use of communication is particularly strong. In the first two, Illycaffé and BMPS, the role of the CCO and of the communication professionals, both in the area of strategic choices of the Board and in that of operational activity, has been emphasised. In Illycaffé not only did the CCO become a member of the board following a request by the other division heads, but he also has strong influence in the operational decision making of the remaining corporate functions. In BMPS the approval of the CCO is requested for all decisions having to do with new products, services or managerial policies, before they are made public.

In the other two cases, Pastificio Rana and Ferrari, communication is actually the managerial tool with which the respective CEOs have conducted the companies and have made them successful. In both cases the CEOs have assigned equal, and sometimes greater importance, to the communication and relational component in decision making, alongside the technical and commercial components.

In other words, the signs that point to the increase in the strategic importance of communication are not just the growth of the figure of the CCO, which has, in fact, reached surprising levels in large private and public corporations but, most of all, the role the CCO plays in the company's dominant coalition and the role communication professionals exercise in decision making in the principal corporate functions.

In fact, alongside the consolidated roles of analysis and interpretation of the context in which a company operates, a new strategic component of communication is growing in the creating of symmetrical relations with the corporate stakeholders and in transmitting the guiding principles and strategies of the corporation.

The new strategic dimension of the role of the CCO and of the communication professionals in the communication department is the contribution they can make, and which they are increasingly requested to make, to the decisions regarding the corporation's individual processes and products. To put it another way, this new component consists of participating in making decisions that concern the operation of the company and which are rooted in the implicit and gradual awareness of the importance that the communication component has on any corporate decision, be it a new product or service, or new corporate ways and methods.

This communication dimension is, therefore, fully part of the individual decision making processes and complements the contents and the quality of the results of those processes. It is a dimension that can in no case substitute the content and quality of the products and services of the company, as was the case in the past when communication was only a support for the image of the company and its activity.

We can therefore say that communication takes on central and strategic importance when, no longer limited to merely communicating image, it enters the decisional and productive processes of the corporation, whether strategic or operational, and is more and more associated with managerial methods, products, services, and in the final analysis, with quality.

Bibliography

1. Andriof J., Waddock S., (2002), "Unfolding Stakeholder Engagement", in Andriof J., Waddock S., Husted B., Rahman S. S., *Unfolding Stakeholder Thinking*, Greenleaf Publishing Limited.
2. Argenti P. (2008), *Corporate communication*, McGraw-Hill, New York
3. Belasen A.T., (2008), *The theory and practice of corporate communication*, Thousand Oak, CA
4. Cornelissen J. (2008), *Corporate Communication*, Sage, London

5. Ferguson S.D. (1999), *Communication planning: An integrated approach*, Sage, Thousand Oak, CA
6. GAP Study (2008), *Fifth Annual Research Public Relations Generally Accepted Practices*, Research Report, USC Annenberg, Strategic Public Relations Center, USA.
7. Grunig J.E. (2001), *Two-way symmetrical public relations: Past, present and future*, in Heat R.L. (edited by), *Handbook of public relations*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA
8. Grunig L.A., Grunig J.E., Dozier D.M. (2002), *Excellent organizations and effective organizations: A study of communication management in three countries*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ
9. Hallahan K., Holtzhausen D., van Ruler B., Verčič D., Sriramesh K. (2007), "On defining strategic communication", *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, vo.1, n°1, 3-35
10. Hamrefors S. (2004), *The Contribution of the Communication Function to the Environmental Scanning of the Organization*, Research Report, Sveriges Informations Forening, Stockholm.
11. Holtzhausen D. (2002), "Towards a Postmodern Research Agenda for Public Relations"; *Public Relations Review*, vol.28, n°2, 251-264
12. Invernizzi E. (2004), "RP e comunicazione aziendale", *Sviluppo&Organizzazione*, n°204, luglio-agosto, 69-88
13. Invernizzi E., Romenti S. (2009), "Institutionalization and Evaluation of Corporate Communication in Italian Companies", *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, vol. 3, n°2, 116-130
14. Knights D (1997), "Organization Theory in the Age of Deconstruction", *Organization Studies*, vol.18, n°1, 1-19
15. Kotler P., (2001), *Marketing Management*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice, New Jersey
16. Ledingham J.A., Bruning S.D. (2000), (edited by), *Public Relations as Relationship Management*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey
17. Lurati F., Eppler M.J., (2006), "Communication and management: researching corporate communication and knowledge communication in organizational settings", *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 6,2, 75-98.
18. Mitchell R.K., Agle B.R., Wood D.J. (1997), "Toward a Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of Who and What Really Count", *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 22, n°4, 853-886
19. Moreno A., Zerfass A., Tench R., Verčič D., Verhoeven P. (2009), "European Communication Monitor. Current developments, issues and tendencies of the

- professional practice of public relations in Europe”, *Public Relations Review*, vol.35, n°2, 79-82
20. Sciarelli S. (2007), *Etica e responsabilità sociale d'impresa*, Giuffrè Editore, Milano.
 21. Silverman R.E. (2000), “The words of tomorrow: a glossary of terms you’ll need to know”, *Wall Street Journal*, January, 1st.
 22. Steyn B. (2007), Contribution of Public Relations to Organizational Strategy Formulation in Toth E.L. (edited by), *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, Routledge, London
 23. Stokes D. (2000), “Entrepreneurial marketing: a conceptualisation from qualitative research”, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, vol. 3, n° 1, 47-54.
 24. Stroh U. (2007), An Alternative Postmodern Approach to Corporate Communication Strategy in Toth E.L. (edited by), *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, Routledge, London
 25. Valdani E. (2000), *L'impresa pro-attiva. Co-evolvere e competere nell'era dell'immaginazione*, McGraw-Hill, Milano.
 26. Van Riel C.B.M. (1995), *Principles of Corporate Communication*, Prentice Hall, London
 27. van Ruler B., Vercic D., Buetschi G., Flodin B., European Body of Knowledge on Public Relations/Communication Management Report of the Delphi Research Project 2000, Euprera, Ghent/Ljubljana
 28. van Ruler B., Vercic D., Balmer M. T., (2002), *The Bled Manifesto on Public Relations*, Ljubljana
 29. Velo D. (2008), “Continuità e discontinuità negli studi di marketing”, *Impresa Progetto. Rivista online del Ditea*, n° 2, 1-13.
 30. Wefald A.J., Downey R.G. (2009), “Construct dimensionality of engagement and its relation with satisfaction”, *Journal of Psychology*, vol. 143, n° 1, 91-111.
 31. Weick K.E. (1995), *Sensemaking in Organizations*, SAGE, Thousand Oak, CA
 32. White J., Vercic D. (2001), “An examination of possible obstacles to management acceptance of public relations’ contribution to decision making, planning and organisation functioning”, *Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 6, n° 2, 194.
 33. Zerfass A., van Ruler B., Krishnamurthy S., (2008), *Public Relations Research. European and International Perspectives and Innovations*, Vs Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften, Germany.