THE CHANGING ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS. ARE REQUIRED PRACTITIONER COMPETENCIES KEEPING PACE WITH THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES?

Sally Chalmers, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, schalmers@qmu.ac.uk

BACKGROUND

"Internal communications have advanced a long way from the management-sponsored house journals of yesteryear to well-organized systems of internal communication" (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004, p. 312).

This paper contributes to the debate surrounding the institutionalisation of public relations by seeking to identify the role of the internal communications practitioner today. It asks what key competencies – personal attributes, skills and ways of working - do practitioners need to have to meet the challenges presented by working in an internal communications role?

To achieve this it firstly looks at the role of internal communications as described in contemporary public relations, internal communication and employee communications texts. It asks how internal communications is defined in literature and what this means for the people who work within the discipline. It then seeks to identify the extent to which the role described in literature can be observed in the jobs that internal communication practitioners are recruited to do. In other words is practice keeping pace with the theory?

Do indeed the employment opportunities on offer to internal communication practitioners today suggest that the practice has as Baines, Egan and Jefkins purport (2004)? Has the role of internal communications grown to include such issues as building effective relationships, having business focus, consulting, coaching and

listening as well as writing, design, innovation and creativity skills (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007) or is this advancement more theoretical than real?

To answer these questions the content of internal communication job advertisements were analysed to identify the competencies required by employers today.

This is an area of study that is important to the contemporary practice of public relations. Recognition is given in literature to the importance of internal stakeholder audiences. Employees are described as "an organisation's most important public" (Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003, p. 120) and internal communication as the "'first frontier' in the battle for the customer" (Chong, 2007, p. 201) and an "important, challenging area" (Welch and Jackson, 2007, p. 177).

Links between good internal communications and organisational success are abundant (Welch and Jackson, 2007. Watson Wyatt Worldwide, 2005/2006. Grunig, 1992. Clampitt and Downs, 1993). It is described as a core process for organisations (Welch and Jackson, 2007) and one that should be on the agenda for all management strategic meetings (Barrett, 2002). Smith (2005) warns that companies "underestimate the power of internal communication at their peril" (p. 19).

Internal communications is an immature (Watson Helby in Smith, 2005) but growing specialism (Yeomans, 2006, p. 333). There is evidence of greater investment - "most organisations have either maintained or increased spending in internal communications in the past three years" (Communicators in Business, 2008) – and The Work Foundation reports an increase of in internal communication budgets 42% over the three years from 2003/4 to 2006/7 (The Work Foundation, 2007).

Despite being a young industry – 72.6% of practitioners are reported as having less that ten years experience with over half (56.5%) having less than six years experience (Communicators in Business, 2008) - there is evidence that internal communications has importance and influence in organisations. Internal communication departments are working increasingly closely with chief executives (The Work Foundation, 2007) and, according to Communicators in Business, 82.5% of practitioners operate at senior level (2008).

The picture that is emerging here is one of a young, but growing industry which is recognised as making an important contribution to organisations and, as a result, is finding it has influence. This research project seeks to gain an insight into how those recruiting into internal communications jobs are defining the role and what competencies they are requiring professionals to display.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review seeks to identify the key issues associated with the practice of internal communications in contemporary literature. The purpose is to support the identification of competencies internal communication practitioners will need to perform their jobs effectively and to provide a framework for the analysis of further research that aims to assess whether the role described for internal communication practitioners in contemporary texts matches the roles to which individuals are being recruited. Public relations, internal communication and employee communications texts are reviewed.

In preparing this literature review the researcher has consulted academic published texts and used ejournal access to search communication and business publications. Key word search (internal communications) was conducted. In the following chapter, literature is critiques under the emerging themes.

A changing role

The role of internal communications is one that is seen to be undergoing and have undergone considerable change (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004. Keenan and Hazelton, 2006. Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003. Yeomans, 2006).

Its various iterations – described as "eras" (Theaker, 2004) - include those of entertaining employees (1940s), informing (1950s) and persuading (1960s) to open communication (1980s to date) (Theaker, 2004). Today's internal communication practitioner is focussed on challenging and stimulating employees, managing change and gaining employee engagement and commitment (Tourish and Hargie, 1998. Smith, 2005. Tench and Yeomans, 2006). The aim has moved from controlling and directing

people, through providing information, making announcements and supporting industrial relations, to supporting the development of a flexible work environment which adapts to change, seeks improvement, shares knowledge and know-how, generates ideas and involves people in achieving strategic goals (Keenan and Hazelton, 2006. Smith, 2005. Tourish and Hargie, 1998).

Internal communication practitioners need to understand people in organisations and how to influence employee, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (Strauss and Hoffman, 2000). They must be able to gauge an organisation's communications climate (L'Etang, 2008) and analyse the cultural, political and relational dimensions present within their organisations (Conrad, 1994). This is role which is complex and challenging. This is illustrated by Conrad and Poole's assertion that "strictly rational theories of decision making simply do not reflect the complex maze of personal, interpersonal, political, and ethical considerations that employees incorporate into their choices." (Conrad and Poole, 2005, p. 291).

So this development seems to require not only the application of different skills sets at each stage but the acquisition of skills which support practitioners in dealing with this complexity. Arguably the entertaining and informing iterations involve technician skills (Grunig and Hunt, 1984) while persuading employees, gaining employee commitment, challenging employees and maintaining open communications demand more strategic understanding and involvement. It is the adopting of a strategic approach to communication and the viewing of that approach as an important issues which leads to high performance (The Work Foundation, 2007).

While some organisations have embraced this development and the strategic support that internal communications can offer, there has not been a uniform change (Smith, 005). The continuation of the technician model is observed across public relations practice (Gregory in Theaker, 2001). It can, therefore, be argued that instead of the focus of internal communications practice shifting, it has expanded and the skill set grown. Practitioners still need to be able to use the traditional craft skills, design messages (Bambacas et al, 2008) and be "innovative, entertaining and face-to-face" (Farrant, 2003, p. 85). Importantly, it would appear that today's internal

communication practitioner is required to have a broader range of more highly developed skills and the ability to apply them more sensitively (Keenan and Hazelton, 2006).

What we are seeing here is an acknowledgement in literature that the role of internal communications is varied, multifaceted and demands a range of competencies from its practitioners. Internal communications is seen as having contributed, and continuing to contribute, to the success of organisations in terms of tactics and increasingly at a strategic level. The literature also acknowledges that the development of the function varies widely across organisations.

Commitment and involvement

One of the most commonly cited roles for the internal communications function is that of developing employee commitment, involvement and engagement in support of the achievement of business goals (Arnott, 1987. Welch and Jackson, 2007. The Work Foundation, 2007. Barrett, 2002). This is important as organisational success is dependent on employee support (Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003) and employees who are committed to an organisation identify personally with it, are concerned for its future and are loyal to it (Garbarina and Johnson, in Thomson et al, 1999).

Welch and Jackson see non-task internal communication as having "a role to play in developing employee commitment and trust" (2007, p. 190) and L'Etang (2008) points to the link between a positive communications climate and building consensus. Involvement requires the existence of positive relationships in organisations. These rely on two-way, participative communications (Stroh and Jaatinen, 2002).

Technological change

Public relations has been changed radically by the growth of new technology (Springston, 2001). This applies equally in the field of internal communications where intranet potential is still an emerging concept (Denton, 2005).

The intranet can improve access, increase speed and facilitate global communication

(Holtz, S. 2003). Internal communication practitioners will need the skills and knowledge to make good decisions about technology use for effective communications (Ryan, 1999) and to develop that knowledge with the technology. But it is not just a matter to grasping the technological aspects.

Technology offers internal communications practitioners the opportunity to find different ways of reaching and communicating with employees. Intranets have developed from being used as filing cabinets for the posting and retrieval of documents, into channels for ongoing dialogue allowing employee-to-employee information sharing and collaborative online working (Cheney et al, 2003) as well as delivering multmedia.

Technological communications need to run alongside more traditional channels such as face-to-face and print communication (Holtz, S. 2003). Internal communications practitioners need to make decisions about channel choice and judge the readiness of an organisation to accept technological solutions to communication problems, balancing "technological concerns and the humanity of employees" (Keenan and Hazelton, 2006, p. 314).

The development of the intranet has made editors powerful gatekeepers and agenda setters within organisations (Lehmuskallio, 2008). They need the knowledge and skills to perform this role effectively.

In summary, what we see here is a growing need for internal communication practitioners to, if not have, then certainly to understand technical issues in relation to the functionality of information technology systems, married with an understanding of how people in organisations behave and cultural considerations.

Planning

Planning is a consistent theme in relevant literature. Whilst the importance of understanding stakeholders for public relations is emphasised (Tench and Yeomans, 2006), it is also acknowledged that greater sensitivity and deeper knowledge is required in the more complex internal communications arena (Smith, 2005).

Internal communication planners need to plan for diverse stakeholder groups (Welch and Jackson, 2007), maintain both upwards and downward communication (Quirke, 2004. The Work Foundation, 2007), analyse communications climate (L'Etang, 2008) and the internal environment that creates it (Welch and Jackson, 2007) - including the corporate culture, communications systems and the psychological contract – and constantly update their understanding of what employees want (Farrant, 2003).

Practitioners, it would seem, need to understand how organisational processes work, how to undertake effective organisational environmental and cultural analysis and how to ensure the flow of two-way communication in organisations.

Strategic approach

To make a full contribution, internal communications must be strategic, support strategic objectives and focus on relationships (Barrett, D. 2002. Welch and Jackson, 2007). It needs to form part of the business planning and performance management process at both individual and functional level (Barrett, 2002). The implications for competencies here are around such issues as strategic understanding, business planning and process management.

Coaching and consulting

Developing communication competencies emerges as a theme in literature. Employees attach importance to communication with line managers or supervisors (Smith, 2005) and employee views of line manager relationships affect their levels of satisfaction, commitment and team performance (CIPD, 2003. Keenan and Hazelton, 2006). Internal communication practitioners, therefore, need to prioritise understanding organisational communication roles, seeking to engage those with responsibilities in communicating effectively and providing relevant support through coaching and skill development (The Work Foundation, 2007. Barrett, 2002).

Using communication to achieve change

Effective employee communication is crucial to achieving successful change in organisations (Barrett, 2002.Cheney et al, 2004. Kitchen and Daly, 2002).

Organisational change employee communications programmes must motivate employee support for the new direction, encourage high performance, limit misunderstandings and rumours and align employees behind the company (Barrett, 2002). Communication has a role to play at the formulation, implementation and institutionalisation phases of a change programme as well as in the dissemination stage (Cheney et al, 2004). As individuals progress through change, communication plays an important but different role at each stage (Harkness in Theaker, 2004) from developing awareness of environmental change and an understanding of an organisation's evolving aims (Welch and Jackson, 2007), giving facts and communicating the big picture, listening and showing concerns during phases of denial and anger, communicating the vision and involving and, as employees begin to accept the change, to build enthusiasm, provide feedback and inspire to create commitment to the new way.

 To fulfil this role effectively internal communication practitioners must have some knowledge of the dynamics of a change process and be seen as "facilitators of change not just as producers of publications" (Barrett, 2002, p. 222).

Tactical expertise

The craft side remain important across the public relations arena (Ahles, 2004. McCleneghan, 2006). Clarity of writing and media choice are key to employee commitment (Bambacas and Patrickson, 2008). The best employee communications need to be relevant, "innovative, entertaining and face-to-face" (Farrant, 2003, p.85). There remains a key role for employee communication in informing and educating employees and a responsibility on internal communication practitioners of translating corporate messages for all employees (Barrett, 2002).

Competency models

Models that provide an indication of internal communication practitioner competencies were included in this literature review. These included those proposed by Keenan and Hazelton (2006), Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick (2007) and a joint working party comprising the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' Internal Communication Alliance, Communicators in Business and International Association of Business Communicators and the Internal Communication Association (Smith, 2005). Key themes are addressed here.

Internal communications has a strategic role (Smith, 2005) and needs to focus on organisational outcomes and enable individual employees to see the relationship between their role and those outcomes (Keenan and Hazelton, 2006. Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007). Brand management is also referenced (Smith, 2005), as is the relevance of organisational culture to the internal communications role (Smith, 2005).

The importance of relationships and relationships building are common themes (Smith, 2005. Keenan and Hazelton, 2006. Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007). Coaching, consulting and training is emphasised along with behaviours (Keenan and Hazelton, 2006). Practitioners need to be able to work supportively and possess facilitation skills (Smith, 2005).

Journalistic skills continue to have importance (Dewhurst and FitzPatrick, 2007. Smith, 2005) as messages must be clear and powerful. Organisational skills associated with event and project management are also referenced (Smith, 2005) along with the need for creativity, innovation and design (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007).

The role of the internal communications practitioner as a planner is a common feature (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007. Smith, 2005) with the need to undertake research, evaluate, audit and manage channels (Smith, 2005) and provide opportunities for feedback. Channel management and managing the flow of communications is referenced (Smith, 2005).

Expertise in the specialist or sectoral area is also highlighted (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007, Smith, 2005), as is professional knowledge of, for example, communications law and regulation (Smith, 2005).

The models point to a number of attributes that are relevant to this study. Internal communication practitioners are expected to be action and goal orientated (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007), to be able to work well as part of a team (Smith, 2005) and to have influencing skills (Smith, 2005).

The need for internal communications to be integrated within the wider public relations effort as well as with other organisational processes, including Human Resources and Marketing is also highlighted (Smith, 2005. Welch and Jackson, 2007).

Areas of competency emerging from the literature review

This review has identified a number of areas of competency that appear from literature to be relevant to the practice on internal communication and needed for a practitioner to be effective.

Areas of competency identified are:

- Understanding people in organisations.

- Strategic focus

- Planning and process management

- Change management

- Coaching and consulting

- Communications through technology

- Tactical skills

- Management skills

- Sectoral knowledge

- Professional knowledge

METHODOLOGY

This aim of this paper is to identify the role of the internal communications practitioner today. It is doing that by asking what key competencies, skills and experiences internal communication practitioners need.

Contemporary public relations, internal communication and employee communications texts have been reviewed in order to identify how internal communications is defined in literature and what this means for the people who work within the discipline. The next step is to identify the extent to which the role described in literature can be observed in the jobs that internal communication practitioners are recruited to do. In other words is practice keeping pace with the theory?

Relevant existing research has been reviewed and primary research conducted. The latter consisted of content analysis of internal communication job advertisements appearing in the Appointments section of PR Week and in the PR Jobshop section of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations website.

Content analysis is viewed as an appropriate methodology for research of this type as it allows for the "systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe, 2005. p 23).

Recruitment advertisements appearing in PR Week during the period January 2007 to March 2008 inclusive were collected and analysed. PR Week was chosen as it is the primary publication aimed at the PR industry in the UK. Its recruitment section specialises in advertising job vacancies in PR and communications.

Advertisements appearing in the Jobshop pages of the CIPR website between 20 April and 31 May 2008 were also analysed.

Advertisements for positions with titles including the words "internal communications" or "employee communications" were included in this study. To ensure that all relevant advertisements were captured advertisement copy was reviewed. This led to a number of jobs with other titles being included in the sample. Examples of the types of titles included are Internal News Editor and Engagement Consultant.

Advertisements were then sorted to ensure that that sample only included one instance of a job being advertised. The months either side of an advertisement appearing were checked to ensure that there were no duplicate entries.

Each advertisement was given a unique identification number. Analysis then focussed on identifying the occurrence of references to the areas of competency identified by the literature review and a coding guide was created. To ensure that all potential competencies and attributes were identified an Other category was created. This allowed the researcher to identify themes that did not emerge from the literature review as well as those which appear as a subset of a larger theme above but were so frequently or regularly mentioned that the researcher felt they warranted highlighting.

LIMITATIONS

This report is limited by it concentration on content analysis as a sole form of primary research. It is recommended that in order to gain a fuller picture of the issues underlying the findings, qualitative interviews with relevant employers and recruitment consultants should be undertaken.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

The results of research done by Watson Helsby and reported in Smith (2005) were reviewed. These highlight the need for strategic and tactical skills as well as hard (e.g. writing, media management, change management) and soft (e.g. influencing,

relationship building, listening) skills. Skills that the internal communication practitioners surveyed stated that they needed to develop included the psychology of communication, organisational understanding, coaching and leadership communication. The authors judged there was inadequate focus on measurement and business awareness skills.

Robertson (2008) has produced further relevant research relating to public relations skills. She identified a requirement for internal communications managers to possess the tactical skills of writing and media relations, as well as people skills - employee relations. Some further tactical skills – event management, project management, technological/online communication and client relation - were also mentioned.
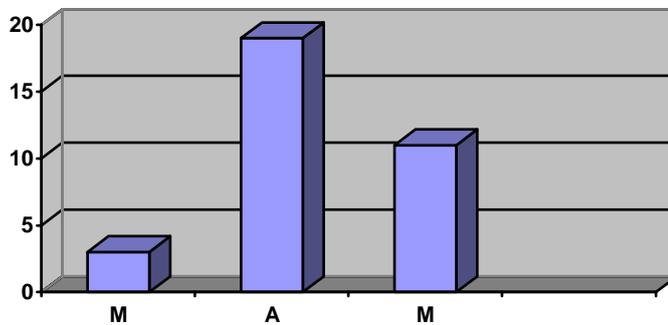
FINDINGS

Top line data

A total of 234 separate relevant job advertisements were identified in PR Week over the Jan 07 – Mar 08 period. Distribution was as follows:

Figure 1
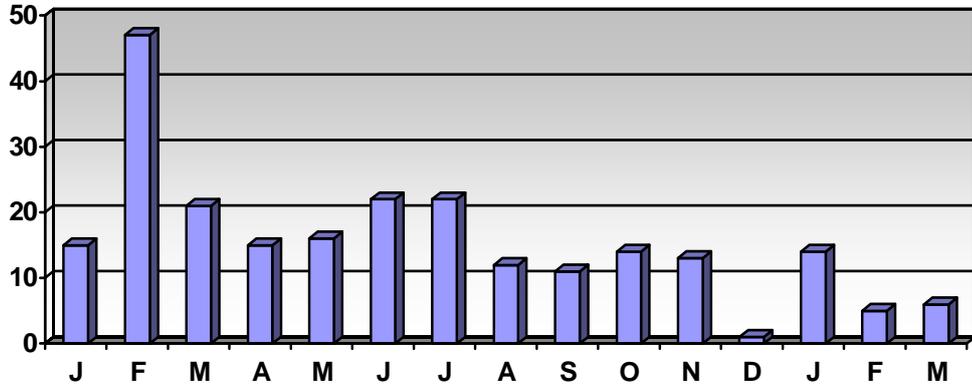
Thirty-three advertisements appeared in the CIPR Jobshop site from Mar-May 08.
Distribution was as follows:

Figure 2

Thirty-eight of the total 267 advertisements did not include the words "internal communications" or external communications" in the title. Of the remainder (229), 148 were for managerial roles. Included in this category were job titles such as Head of Internal Communications, Internal Communications Manager, and Internal Communications Director. The remaining 81 posts advertised were for other internal communication roles. These included less senior role (e.g. Executive, Officer) or posts where the job level was unclear (e.g. consultant).

Figure 3

Other title 14%

IC Other 30%

IC Managerial 56%
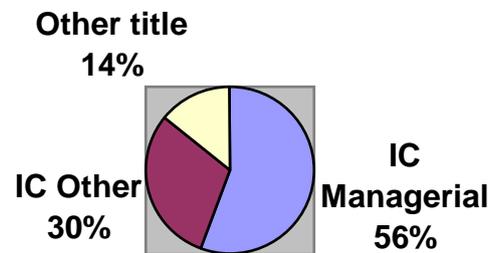
The 38 Other titles were categorised as follows:

Figure 4

Other title category	Number
Business partner titles	11
Journalism titles	7
Change titles	6
Technology titles	4
Engagement titles	4
International titles	2
No title	1
Others	3 (1 of each)

A full list of Other titles is at Appendix I

Areas of competency findings for managers

Twenty-three of the 148 job advertisements in this category contained no further information that the job title and salary. These were excluded from further analysis.

Content analysis of the remaining 125 job advertisements in this group sought firstly to identify references to the area of competency identified by the literature review. The mostly frequently mentioned was the need for internal communication managers to be able to take a strategic focus (50%). This normally involved a role in strategy development or supporting business strategy through internal communications.

Other frequently mentioned themes included the need for internal communication managers to have tactical skills (40%) and relevant experience (40%). The latter needed to be gained either in a role in an organisation operating in the same sector as the recruiting organisation or in a role with a similar context.

Figure 5 below shows the percentage of all managerial advertisements analysed that made reference to each of the key areas of competency.

Areas of competency findings for other Internal Communications roles

Eighty-one advertisements fell into this category. Eighteen of these contained no information beyond the job title and salary details. These were excluded from further analysis. The mostly frequently mentioned of the areas of competency identified by the literature review, in the remaining sample of 63 advertisements, were the need for practitioners to have tactical (44%) and technological skills and knowledge (32%).

Other frequently mentioned themes identified in the literature review included the need for internal communication practitioners to be able to support or have experience of change management or change projects (24%). They were also expected to be able to contribute at a strategic level (24%) and sector or relevant context experience was valued (22%).

For a full breakdown see Figure 5 below.

Areas of competency findings for all roles

Forty-five of the 267 job advertisements appearing contained no further information that job title and salary details. These were excluded from further analysis. Looking across all remaining relevant positions advertised over the period (222) the mostly frequently mentioned of the areas of competency identified by the literature review were the need for practitioners to have tactical skills (42%) and play a strategic role (41%). Having sector or relevant experience was also highly valued by potential employers (35%).

Figure 5 Percentage of advertisements in each category including identified areas of competency
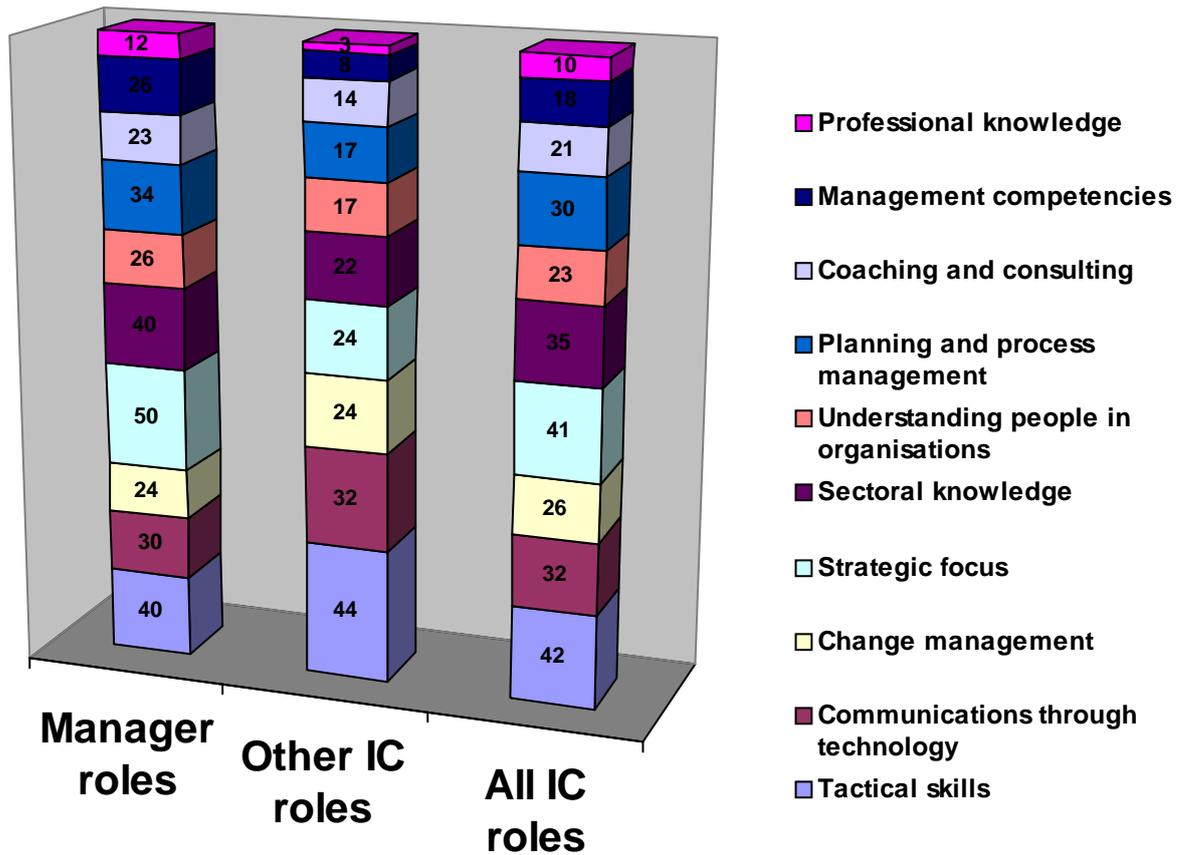
Other competencies identified

In undertaking the content analysis the researcher also sought to identify other areas of competency. This was done in order to ensure that those not identified through the literature review were captured. The main other areas of competency identified in each of the categories analysed are summarised in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6

Theme	Manager roles	Other IC roles	All roles
Integrated working	21%		14%
Motivation, dynamism, ambition, passion, tenacity, resilience	14%	16%	18%
Creativity, innovation and lateral thinking	13%	13%	14%
Senior management engagement	13%		16%
Influencing and persuasion skills	12%		12%
Ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity	11%		21%
Networking and relationships building	11%		11%
Personal credibility, confidence and gravitas.	10%		
Research/evaluation/analytical skills		19%	
Able to deliver on time and to budget		11%	
Work with people at all levels		11%	
Business and results focussed		11%	

These additional themes were categorised under the titles of personal attributes, skills and ways of working. Table showing this data for manager, other internal communication and all internal communication roles, including the number of advertisements making mention of relevant competencies, is at Appendix 2.

Among the other competency areas identified the most frequently mentioned personal attributes for managerial Internal Communication roles were self-motivation and creativity. Employers wanted to employ managers who were able to work effectively with senior management, had influencing and negotiation skills, were able to network and build relationships and handle complexity and ambiguity. Integrated working and being business and results focussed were the most desirable ways of working.

In addition to the competencies identified earlier, when advertising for non-managerial internal communication roles, employers appear to value the personal attributes of self-motivation and creativity. They want research and evaluation skills and a focus on business results.

Overall, employers want internal communication practitioners to be self-motivated and creative, to be able to work with senior managers and to handle complexity and ambiguity, balancing multiple projects and tasks. Influencing, negotiation and engagement skills are valued as those associated with networking and relationship building. Practitioners are expected to work in an integrated way, particularly with the wider public relations function, HR and marketing and to have a clear focus on achieving business results.

ANALYSIS

This project has sought to reveal the key competencies required of internal communication practitioners today and to discover whether the internal communication role today has indeed "advanced a long way from the management-sponsored house journals of yesteryear to well-organized systems of internal communications" (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004, p. 312).

On initial consideration of the results of the content analysis it would appear that, in line with the findings of Robertson (2008) the role of the internal communications practitioner as a tactician remains key. Tactical skills were the most frequently mentioned theme in all the advertisements included in this research. However on deeper consideration what can be seen is that a strategic focus is, it can be argued, an equally important requirement for internal communication practitioners, particularly at managerial level.

For Internal Communication Manager roles strategic focus was the most frequently mentioned theme (half of all of these advertisement required competency in this area). Tactical skills were mentioned in 39% of the relevant advertisements. When looking at the more junior jobs in the Internal Communication the situation is reversed. Twenty-eight of the 63 jobs in this category cited tactical skills as a requirement (44%) while only 15 of these roles (24%) referenced a strategic focus. The overall impact is that the requirements for strategic focus and tactical skills are level pegging in terms of competency requirements for internal communication practitioner roles (41% and 42% respectively).

Of relevance here, though, is the requirement for planning and process management skills. For internal communication managers this was the fourth most frequently mentioned theme being cited in 34% of all relevant advertisements.

It can be argued therefore that while the requirement for tactical skills remains strong the strategic role of internal communications is widely recognised particularly at senior level. Employers want practitioners with strategic ability who have the knowledge to develop deliverable tactical plans.

This conclusion is supported by evidence from the other themes identified during the research. Particularly relevant to the strategic role, is the desire for practitioners to be capable of working with senior management. This was the most frequently mentioned skill for all roles and the second most frequently mentioned attribute overall. Strategic involvement is also evidenced by the frequency of the requirements for practitioners to integrate their internal communications with those of other functions (including PR, HR

and Marketing). This was the most frequently cited way of working requirement and the third most mentioned attributed for all roles in the research. Another piece of evidence supporting the need for internal communication practitioners to operate at strategic level is the requirement, as evidenced in the research, for them to be able to deal with ambiguity and complexity.

Of relevance to the conclusion about the importance of internal communications practitioners taking a strategic focus is the findings that the most frequently noted other title was that of "Business Partner". The 11 roles identified in this group were all for in-house posts. It is suggested that the Business Partner title reflects the desire of the organisation for the successful candidate to play a full role at board level.

As stated earlier for the more junior internal communication roles the tactician theme is dominant. This may be unsurprising but what is interesting is the focus there appears to be on competencies associated with planning and improvement in these roles. Research, evaluation, analytical skills as well as those connected with gathering feedback were highly valued for these roles. Candidates were expected to take a business/results focus, to deliver on time and on budget and to be focussed on best practice. This suggests that while junior internal communication practitioners are looked to provide tactical support they are expected to do this in strategic way and to seek improvement in performance.

The requirement for these more junior roles to be able to use technology for effective communications was also frequently mentioned (32% of relevant advertisements). It was the second most frequently mentioned theme for this group. Indeed references to tactical skills and communicating through technology were clearly the most dominant of the literature review themes analysed for more junior internal communications positions. Although of relatively lesser importance overall 32% of all advertisements included in this research stated that competency in relation to using technology for communications was required. This evidences the high profile that technological channels have for internal communications and the recognition of the need for expertise to reside in the internal communications teams.

The value to job applicants of having experience in the same sector or a similar context to that which pertains to the role on offer as highlighted by Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick (2007) is also evidenced by the research. Around 35% of all advertisements mentioned this. The competency derived by sector or relevant experience was most clearly valued at managerial level where 49% of advertisements stated that this was required or an advantage.

All other themes identified from the literature review were evidenced in the research. The most frequently mentioned of these was the role of internal communications practitioners in change management which was cited in 26% of all the advertisements included in this research, followed by understanding people in organisations (23%) and coaching and consulting (21%).

Beyond the analysis of evidence against the literature review themes, interesting conclusions can also be drawn from the data gathered on other competencies noted in the advertisements included in this research. Most striking is the frequency of mention in advertisements of the importance of personal attributes connected with motivation and dynamism. Advertisements used such terms as high-energy, getup-and-go and a can-do attitude. Potential candidates were asked to show tenacity, resilience and be good under pressure. This area of competency was the most sought after personal attribute for internal communication manager, non-managers and overall. Other attributes appearing consistently in all categories were the need for creativity and innovation and the ability to influence, negotiate and persuade.

For managers the ability to deal with ambiguity and complexity was valued as were networking and relationship building skills. Being able to deal effectively with people at all levels within an organisation was regularly cited for junior internal communication roles.

CONCLUSIONS

This project aimed to reveal the key competencies required of internal communication practitioners today and to discover whether the internal communication role today has

indeed "advanced a long way from the management-sponsored house journals of yesteryear to well-organized systems of internal communications" (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004, p. 312).

While it can be argued from these results that the role of the internal communications practitioner as an expert in the production of communication and tactical skills remains, it is evident that the strategic role for senior internal communication personnel is clearly recognised. In fulfilling this role internal communication managers are expected to be capable of working effectively with senior management, integrate their work with that of other functions and deal effectively with ambiguity and complexity.

Competency in tactical skills remains key for non-managerial internal communication roles although there is a clear expectation that they will be capable of undertaking research to support the delivery of effective internal communication campaigns. There is also a requirement for non-managerial staff to have expertise in using technology for internal communication.

Beyond the tactician/strategist argument the research revealed that there is a requirement for internal communication practitioners to demonstrate competency in dealing with change management projects. They also need to have the capability to understand people in organisations and need to provide coaching and consultancy in organisations.

In searching for internal communication practitioners, employers are also looking for candidates who display the personal attributes connected with motivation and dynamism, have high levels of energy, getup-and-go and a can-do attitude. Potential candidates also need to show tenacity, resilience and that they are good under pressure. Creativity, innovation and the ability to influence, negotiate and persuade are also sought after.

Internal communication managers need the demonstrate networking and relationship building skills. Candidates for non-managerial roles need to be able to deal effectively with people at all levels within an organisation.

This project aimed to reveal the key competencies required of internal communication practitioners today and to discover whether the internal communication role today has indeed "advanced a long way from the management-sponsored house journals of yesteryear to well-organized systems of internal communications" (Baines, Egan and Jefkins, 2004, p. 312). Its conclusion is that the competencies required of internal communication practitioners today do indeed suggest that the role has advanced, become broader and more strategic. Internal communications roles continue, however, to retain the requirement for expertise in tactical skills and this portfolio has increased to include competencies connected with the inclusion of technology as an important communication channel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Argenti, P.A. and Forman, J., (2002), *The Power of Corporate Communication: Crafting the Voice and Image of Your Business*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

Ahles, C.B., (2004), "PR skills vs., personal skills: What matters most to the boss?", *Public Relations Tactics*, April 2004.

Baines, P., Egan, J. and Jefkins, F., (2004), *Public Relations: Contemporary issues and techniques*, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

Arnott, M., (1987). *Effective employee communication* in Hart, N (ed). Effective Corporate Relations. London: McGraw-Hill.

Bambacas. M. and Patrickson, M., (2008), "Interpersonal communication skills that enhance organisational commitment", *Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 12, nNo. 1, pp. 51-72.

Barrett, D., (2002), "Change communication: using strategic employee communication to facilitate major change*", Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 219-231.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, (2003).

Cheney, G., Christensen, L. T., Zorn, T. E. Jr. and Ganesh, S., (2004), *Organizational Communication in an Age of Globalization: Issues, Reflections, Practices*, Waveland, Long Grove, Illinois.

Chong, M., (2007), "The Role of Internal Communication and Training in Infusing Corporate Values and Delivering Brand Promise: Singapore Airlines' Experience", *Corporate Reputation Review*, n. 10, pp. 201 – 212.

Clampitt, P. and Downs, C., (1993), "Employee perceptions of the relationship between communication and productivity: a field study", *Journal of Business Communication*, vol. 30, no. 1.

Conrad, C.,(1994*), Strategic Organizational Communication: Toward the Twenty-First Century*, Harcourt Brace: Fort Worth.

Communicators in Business, (2008), *Internal comms. holds its own in difficult financial climate.* (on-line). Available from: http://www.cib.uk.com/artman/publish/article_1085.shtml (accessed April 1 2008).

Conrad, C. and Poole, M. S., (2005), *Strategic Organizational Communication in a Global Economy*, Thomson Wadsworth: Belmont, CA.

Denton, K., (2006), "Strategic Intranets: the next big thing?", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. II, no. I, p. 5.

Dewhurst, S and Fitzpatrick, L., (2007), *How to Develop Outstanding Internal Communicators*, Melcrum Publishing.

Farrant, J., (2003). *Internal Communications.* London: Thorogood.

Grunig, J. and Hunt, T., (1984), *Managing Public Relations*. Fort Worth, Tex.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Harkness, J in Theaker, A., (2004), *The Public Relations Handbook*, Routledge.

Holtz, Shel., (2003), *Corporate Conversations : A Guide to Crafting Effective and Appropriate Internal Communications.* Saranac Lake, NY, USA: AMACOM.

Keenan, W. R. and Hazelton, V., (2006), "Internal Public Relations, Social Capital, and the Role of Effective Organizational Communication" in Botan, C. H. and Hazelton, V. (Eds.), *Public Relations Theory II*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, Mahwah, NJ.

Key, R., (2005) "How the PR Profession Can Flourish in this New Digital Age". *Public Relations Tactics,* 12 (11), pp.18-19.

Kitchen, P. J. and Daly, F., (2002), "Internal Communication during change management", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 7, issue 1, pp. 46-53.

Lehmuskallio, S., (2008),"Intranet editors as corporate gatekeepers and agenda setters", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 95-111.

L'Etang, J., (2008), *Public Relations: Concepts, Practice and Critique.* London: Sage.

McCleneghan, J.S., (2006) "PR Executives Rank 11 Communication Skills", *Public Relations Quarterly,* 51 (4), pp.42-46.

Grunig, J., (1992), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Riffe, D., (2005), *Analyzing Media Messages:Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, Mahwah, NJ, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Incorporated.

Robertson, S., (2008), *An investigation into the skills needed to work in public relations and the recruitment processes involved*, unpublished dissertation, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

Ryan, M., (1999), "Practitioners and the World Wide Web: Involvement in Web Sites is Crucial", *Public Relations Quarterly*, Fall 1999, pp.29-31.

Smith, L and Mounter, P., (2005*), Effective Internal Communication*, Kogan Page, London.

Springston, J. K., (2001), "Public relations and new media technology: the impact of the internet" in Heath, R. L., (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Relations.* Sage, Thousand Oaks, pp 603-14.

Stroh, U. and Jaatinen, M. (2001), "New approaches to communication management for transformation and change in organisations*", Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 148-165.

Theaker, A., (2001), *The Public Relations Handbook*. Routledge.

Therkelsen, D. J. and Fiebich, C. J., (2003), "The supervisor: The linchpin of employee relations", *Journal of Communication Management*, vol.8, 2, pp. 120-129.

Tourish, D. and Hargie, O., (1998), "Auditing staff-management communication in schools: a framework for evaluation performance", *International Journal of Education Management*, 12/4, pp 176-18.

Tourish, D. and Hargie, O., (2004), "Preface", in Tourish, D. and Hargie, O., (Eds), *Key Issues in Organizational Communication*, Routledge, London.

Watson Wyatt Worldwide. *Effective Communication: A Leading Indicator of Financial Performance - 2005/2006 Communication ROI Study*™

Welsh and Jackson, (2007), "Rethinking Internal Communication: a stakeholder approach", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal,* vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 177-198.

Work Foundation (The), (2007), *IC: UK 2006/7. The definitive analysis of current internal communication practice.* (on-line), http://theworkfoundation.com/Assets/PDFs/ICUK_final1.pdf, accessed 1 April 2008.

APPENDIX I

Full list of titles in the Other category

<u>Business Partner titles</u>
Business Partner x11

<u>Journalistic titles</u>
Internal News Editor x2
Journalist x2
Head of Internal Media
Managing Editor
Campaigns and Channel Manager

<u>Change titles</u>
 Interim Change and IC Partner, Public Sector
Consultants for Change
Change Communications Manager
Internal Communications – Change
Internal Communications Change Management Strategist
Change Communications Executive

<u>Technology titles</u>
Intranet Manager x2
Intranet Specialist
Intranet/Internet Management

<u>Engagement titles</u>
Consultants – Employee Engagement
Employee Engagement Specialist
Strategic Consultant – Employee Communication and Engagement
Engagement Consultant

<u>International titles</u>
Communications Executive – Global Customer Relations
Global Communications Specialist

<u>Other titles</u>
Managing Consultants
Professional Services
Marcomms Manager, Internal Brand

APPENDIX II

Personal attributes, skills and ways of working - managers

Personal attributes	Skills	Way of working
Self motivation (18)	Able to work with senior management (16)	Integrated working (26)
Creativity (16)	Influencing/negotiation/persuasion/gaining engagement (15)	Business/results focussed (9)
Credibility (13)	Networking/relationship building (14)	International focus (7)
Track record (7)	Handling complexity/ambiguity/multiple projects/tasks (14)	Focus on best practice (5)
Graduate (5)	Brand/reputation management (12)	
Sensitivity and diplomacy (3)	Leadership (12)	
Team player (3)	Managing climate/context/culture (10)	
	Translating business strategy into messages (8)	
	Able to deal with people at all levels (6)	
	Research/evaluation/feedback/analytical skills (5)	
	Interpersonal skills (4)	
	Second language (2)	
	Stakeholder management (2)	

Personal attributes, skills and ways of working –other IC roles

Personal attributes	Skills	Way of working
Self-motivation (10)	Research/evaluation/feedback/analytical skills (12)	Business/results focussed (7)
Creative (8)	Time/budget management (7)	Focus on best practice (5)
Flexible/adaptable (4)	Able to deal with people at all levels (7)	International focus (5)
Graduate (3)	Influencing/negotiation/persuasion/gaining engagement (5)	Integrated working (4)
Good under pressure/confident (3)	Stakeholder management (5)	
Track record (2)	Translate business strategy into messages (4)	
Journalistic background (2)	Able to work with senior management (4)	
	Networking/relationship building (3)	
	Handling complexity/ambiguity/multiple projects/tasks (3)	
	Listening skills (2)	
	Managing climate/context/culture (1)	
	Second language (1)	

Personal attributes, skills and ways of working – all IC roles

Personal attributes	Skills	Way of working
Self-motivation (41)	Able to work with senior management (35)	Integrated working (32)
Creative (30)	Handling complexity/ambiguity/multiple projects/tasks (27)	Business/results focussed (21)
Credibility (16)	Influencing/negotiation/persuasion/gaining engagement (26)	International focus (17)
Track record (13)	Networking/relationship building (25)	Focus on best practice (12)
Graduate (10)	Research/evaluation/feedback/analytical skills (21)	Working in partnership (3)
Flexible/adaptable (8)	Leadership (20)	
Good under pressure/confident (4)	Brand/reputation management (19)	
Team player (4)	Managing climate/context/culture (16)	
Journalistic backgrounds (3)	Able to deal with people at all levels (14)	
Detailed/accurate (3)	Translate business strategy into messages (14)	
Sensitivity and diplomacy (3)	Time/budget management (11)	
	Interpersonal communication (8)	
	Stakeholder management (8)	
	Second language (4)	