ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

Part-time Executive International Master of Science in Corporate Communication

BOOK OF GRADUATES

Research Abstracts 2017

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Executive International Master of Science in Corporate Communication Programme

This year we celebrate the 19th graduation of the Part-time Executive International Master of Science in Corporate Communication Programme (MCC) at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. Eight new graduates have officially been awarded the **Master of Science in Corporate Communication** Degree as a result. We are proud to present the abstracts of the eight theses that have been written by the graduates of this Master programme.

Including this year's graduates, the MCC programme has delivered around 300 MCC graduates. Many of them made a significant career move after their graduation, which they were able to realise by the knowledge, insights and skills gained by the programme, and even more so by their own perseverance and ability to bring this into practice.

Over the last years they have been challenged with intensive courses, case studies, role plays, management games, the most recent academic theories and guest lectures from worldwide renowned professors of a diverse range of universities and businesses practitioners from different (inter)national companies, in order to support their goals to become even more successful communication professionals.

The new Masters of Science in Corporate Communication are:

Johanna Breuning, *TenneT;*
Stella van Emmerik, *Ziekenhuis Bernhoven;*
Fedde Heijmans, *VodafoneZiggo;*
Joanne Kelleher, *Jumbo Maritime;*
Francesco Lovecchio, *Banca d'Italia;*
Ursela Schennink, *TenneT;*
Ilona Wielemaker, *Ilona Wielemaker Communicatie;*
Meltem Zourdos, *Soroptimist International.*

We hope they have learned a lot during the courses over the past years, not only from our education but also from their peers, their 'colleagues' in the corporate communication field. The least we could say, also on behalf of all the teaching staff that worked with them, is that we have learned a lot from them too. Their willingness to discuss situations and challenges from practice in their own organisations and to relate these to the topics discussed in the lectures were inspiring and exciting.

In the nineteen years of the Master of Science in Corporate Communication Programme we succeeded in creating an international programme that presents all leading experts in a teaching role. We would like to thank the following people (teaching staff) who contributed tremendously to the success of this programme: Paul Argenti of Darthmouth College U.S.A.; John Balmer of Bradford University UK; Mignon van Halderen, Fontys Hogeschool; Joan Hemels, Universiteit van Amsterdam; Mark Hunter, INSEAD; Jan Kleinnijenhuis, VU University Amsterdam; Onno Maathuis, De Positioneerders; Michael Pratt of University of Illinois, Urbana / Champaign; Davide Ravasi of Bocconi University; Betteke van Ruler, UVA ; Eliane Schoonman of Issues Management Institute; Gabi Schaap, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen; Majken Schultz of Copenhagen Business School, Denmark; Bob de Wit of Nyenrode Business University and from our Faculty: Cees van Riel, Guido Berens, Frans van den Bosch, Dirk Brounen, Gerrit van Bruggen, Fred Gertsen, Pursey

Heugens, Muel Kaptein, Slawek Magala, Gerard Mertens, Lucas Meijs, Rob van Tulder, Eric Waarts, Rolf Zwaan, all working at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.

It is also with great pride that we welcome Emeritus Professor Cees van Riel to award for the first time the 'Impact in Corporate Communication Award' for the most impactful thesis in the field of Corporate Communication. The award is created in recognition to the founder of the Master of Science programme Prof. dr. Cees van Riel.

'The Andreas Innovation in Communication Award' is presented by Ing. Dries van de Beek, Former Chairman of the Board, CCC BV, to the author of the most innovative thesis of 2017. The winners are announced on November, 24th during the official graduation ceremony.

We wish all the graduates a bright future with successfulcareers and we congratulate them with their accomplishment.

Marijke Baumann   **Prof. dr. Joep Cornelissen**

Executive Director   *Academic Director*

Part-time Executive International Master of Science in Corporate Communication Programme

No surprises!

Issue management at State Owned Enterprises (SEO) in the Netherlands

All companies are dependent of their stakeholders. Stakeholders give companies their license to operate, because they either invest in the company, buy products from it, work at the company, influence public opinion or regulate the company.
When it comes to issue management, commercial or private organizations can decide rather independently how to deal with their issues This is different for companies that are State Owned.

In the Netherlands there are different governmental organizations that influence these SOEs. These SOEs do not only have to deal with their shareholder, but also with their regulator and policy makers at specific ministries. The public tasks of SOEs makes them interesting targets for opponents and since the government is accountable for their actions political stakeholders do not only have a say in the way the company is managed, but also influence the way issues are managed.

Issue management is an important way for all companies to not only protect, but also to build and enhance their reputation. In our changing world where social media has become a fast way to influence public opinion, where it makes our actions more transparent and where issues easily can develop into crisis, the way issues are handled is gaining importance.

The objective of this thesis is to provide insights and considerations in how communication leaders at state owned enterprises in the Netherlands should manage their issues taking their public role and their political stakeholders into account. The central research question of this thesis has been defined as: 'What is the most effective way for a State Owned Company to manage their issues?'

This research is divided in desk research and field research. The desk research comprises a literature review on theories about issue management and the characteristics of State Owned Enterprises and what distinguishes them from other companies. The field research consisted of 12 interviews with experts from SOEs and political stakeholders.

All the respondents that were interviewed at SOEs have to manage many different issues for the companies they work for. These issues are mostly related to external factors that affect the organisation and their public role. The public role that these companies have, gives the public the right to ask questions about the way companies are managed and organised. The more these companies are visible, the more the public gets involved and the more the house of representatives will focus on the way issues are managed since the Minister of Finance and other Minister who are responsible for the policy of the SOE are accountable for these companies.

The complexity of stakeholders and the social role of SOEs have an effect on the performance of these companies and makes them different from other organizations when it comes to issue management. The public interest SOEs fulfil come with social constraints, because SOEs are using public money to fulfill their goals and should therefor account for how they spend this money, but also focus on their ecological footprint, employability, diversity and accountability on all their choices and actions. Political constraints lie in the fact that every four years after elections the government can change their focus when it comes to steering the SOE and new Ministers can also have a different focus.

Since Ministries are accountable for a lot of actions of SOEs, alignment of issues with the shareholder and policy making ministries is very important. To political stakeholders the performance yard stick of SOEs has to do with transparency and trust. Since they are the ones who are accountable for the SOE's actions they have to know what issues are evolving and how these issues are managed. Ministers need to be prepared for questions and should not be surprised.

Most SOEs in the Netherlands have vital roles for society and are often complex organisations. When issues are managed badly this will have a negative effect on their reputation and the reputation of their political stakeholder. Therefore issue management should be organised.

To do this effectively I have developed a six-step action plan:

1. **Develop a formal process for issue management in which you organise:**
   - Identification, monitoring and analysis of future and existing issues
   - Assignment of responsibilities and ownership
   - Alignment with both external and internal stakeholders
   - Evaluation and improvement of the way specific issues are handled

2. **Prepare for issues:**
   Prepare statements and action plans, think ahead and align with strategy.

3. **Make sure there are no surprises for political stakeholders:**
   Work on a strong relationship, align all issues and inform them in time.

4. **Take care of internal communication:**
   Make sure they know how issues are managed within your company, inform them on occurring issues and the way they are managed and educate them about your social role.

5. **Show leadership:**
   Use your knowledge to show consequences of issues and political decisions and stick to your responsibilities as a company.

6. **Evaluate:**
   Evaluate the issue management process, the issues that are managed itself and the way you align with stakeholders.

Trust and transparency are the key factors when it comes to issue management for an SOE in The Netherlands for all stakeholders, political and public. Always remember your public task and make sure there are no surprises!

Johanna Breuning

Johanna (1974) is an all-round Communications professional with almost 20 years of experience. Her parents always told her to become a lawyer, because she liked to talk so much. However, she found out that Communications was an even better fit.

After her studies at the Higher Institute for European Studies in The Hague, Johanna started her career at the marketing communication department of Akzo Nobel Chemicals. Since then she worked in different communication jobs in the profit-, non-profit and financial sector at both Corporate- and Marketing Communications.

In 2009 she started at TenneT as a Senior Communication Advisor for infrastructural projects. In this job she started to develop a special interest in Issue Management, Stakeholder management and Crisis communication. After being a spokesperson for TenneT for the last four years she recently made the shift to the Public Affairs department in which she works on Issues concerning the Energy Transition and the improvement of Stakeholder management.

Johanna has a passion for traveling, running, skiing and cooking and lives with her husband and two children in Oosterbeek.

Moving forward after transition

How to become a 'magnet' hospital?

In the Netherlands healthcare is subject to significant change. The way healthcare is organized is not sustainable for the future. People live longer and contract more and more chronic diseases, which increases health care costs year after year (Huber, 2015). Furthermore evidence indicates that more care is not always better care (Welch, 2015). Fee for service payment and overestimation of the effectiveness of medical care contribute to volume growth. To ensure the continuity of healthcare organizations, change is inevitable to keep the healthcare system healthy, and make organizations future proof. An appropriate strategy leads organizations into the future.

Case study Bernhoven

Bernhoven, a general regional hospital located in the south of the Netherlands, launched a five year change program in 2014 based upon the strategy 'better care by less care'. The hospital employs 150 medical specialists and more than 2000 employees. With 380 beds, and revenue of 200 million euro's the hospital serves around 300.000 patients. The hospital has 18,000 annual admissions and performs 13,000 surgeries. The program entails a full-scale hospital transformation, starting with the new strategy aimed at improving quality and reducing volumes. Bernhoven makes the transition from production-oriented care to patient-centered care, a paradigm shift which requires a different mindset. At this moment (2017), the organization is in the phase of institutionalizing the change process.

The purpose of my thesis is to strengthen the organizational identity of Bernhoven and to improve alignment so that the reputation of Bernhoven will be strong, transparent and attractive.

The research design is based on the methodology from Robert K. Yin (2014). The primary competence of each hospital is the medical competence. Therefore I focused on the cultural aspect within the medical staff, as identity is very much in the eye of the beholder.

Research question

'How does a core group of professionals (medical staff) make sense of an ongoing and radical organizational identity change, and how can they be supported and helped to internalize the change?'

This case study investigated a radical change process and the implementation of an innovative strategy in a regional hospital in the Netherlands. The new innovative strategy is an answer to a national healthcare challenge

where costs are growing. Healthcare organizations can take responsibility by decreasing growing healthcare costs themselves. Keep the focus on quality instead of quantity and direct the interests of stakeholders. The hospital is thought leader and driven by novel points of view on how healthcare costs can be decreased in our Dutch economy. Leadership showed they translated these viewpoints into real behavior and results. The title of my thesis; "Moving forward after transition, how to become a 'magnet' hospital" is chosen to reinforce the unique position Bernhoven earned by the implementation of the new strategy. The organizational identity is a key to strengthen (hybrid) leadership and to align all staff and stakeholders.

In the context of my thesis I will introduce the term 'magnet' hospital in a broader spectrum. I apply the term 'magnet' as the heart of the organization, where the organizational identity is guiding all staff in the same direction. The identity allows them to connect with all relevant stakeholders. This interaction will have a positive effect on the hospital's reputation. In line with Fombrun and van Riel (2004) statement; 'A good reputation acts like a magnet, it attracts us to those who have it'.

The main purpose of this study was to better understand how the new strategy influenced the organizational

identity of Bernhoven, and how leadership plays a role in the transition process the organization is in. In order to maintain our front runner's position and to strengthen our organizational identity, I came up with three recommendations that are ready to implement. The recommendations do justice to the research and the collective ideas of the interviewees. I sincerely believe that these recommendations add value to Bernhoven to become a more aligned organization and therefore gain a stronger and glowing reputation.

Recommendations

✓ **Explain the WHY of the organization to all stakeholders**

After the new strategy has been implemented, the implementation of the new organizational model is a fact, and the new leadership has been appointed, it is now time to re-engage with all stakeholders of the organization to connect with the organization's belief system. What makes Bernhoven extraordinary to work for and to serve? How do we make the difference for our patients together? By redirecting our mission, vision, core values, and through adding purpose, we can let all stakeholders identify with the Bernhoven principles.

✓ **Special program 'Excellent doctors'**
When combining the research findings with theoretical background on organizational behavior and identity ambiguity, my advice is to invest in identity development within the group of medical specialists. The introduction of a special program called 'Excellent doctors', can motivate them to return to the core of their profession as it is the ambition of Bernhoven to steer on quality and not on volume.

✓ **Leadership development**
A well-thought-out leadership program is crucial in the shaping of the new organizational model and aligning processes and people. All starts with the doctors in the lead, but must be in sync with the development of leadership of business leaders and team managers. All from the same basic idea and organization identity, the Bernhoven 'magnet'.

Wrap-up

This case study gave a good insight on where Bernhoven stands today from the perspective of change management, leadership and organizational identity. After the radical change process it is in this phase of the change process time to restore and built trust towards all stakeholder groups and to move forward.

The addition of a purpose statement is a great tool to internalize the new strategy 'better care by less care' as the company's philosophy. The purpose statement Bernhoven is the true north for all stakeholders. As a magnet that attract us to those who have it.

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Stella van Emmerik

Stella van Emmerik (1973) graduated from the Hotel Management School in Maastricht in 1996 and earned her bachelor in financial hospitality management. She started her career on Aruba were she worked as a Total Quality Manager for the Divi & Tamarijn Aruba Beach Resorts. Returning from the island she started in 1999 to work for Amersfoort Zoo as a communications manager. After having the nicest job in the zoo world she continued her working life in the health care sector. First at the Helen Dowling Institute and since 2010 with a lot of enthusiasm for the Bernhoven Hospital as manager communications & relations. First she accompanied the move from two hospitals to a new building in Uden (2013) and is now responsible for the communication of the hospital transformation.

The pragmatic approach from the Hotel Management School integrated with the academic framework from the CCC-program, makes that Stella can fully explore her profession. Hospitality and communication go hand in hand and are great tools to strengthen organizations identities. With this background she can combine the best of both.

Stella lives in Zaltbommel, the Netherlands, with Eppo and their two daughters Tessel and Vicki. In her free time she spends time with her family and friends, her horse Smart and support Eppo with running B&B In de Oude Smederij located in their backyard.

Visions and reflections

How CEOs and their executive leadership team play an increasingly important role in driving strategic communication

Recent research, trends and best practices in the field of corporate communication show that the personal communication of CEOs and their executive leadership team, or 'the C-suite', plays an increasingly important role in building (or restoring) the reputation and ensuring internal and external strategic alignment – and as a result, the successful delivery of their company's strategy.

In this research I have explored the role of the CEO and the executive leadership team in strategic corporate communication. I have researched recent trends and best practices, using insights from, amongst others, the leading professional research on this subject by the Arthur W. Page Society (2007, 2013, 3017), Weber Shandwick (2012, 2015) and Leslie Gaines-Ross (2003, 2016) in particular.

Building further on the recent academic research by Paul Argenti (2017) on 'strategic communication in the C-suite' and the relevant academic literature on strategic leadership communication including that of Men (2012, 2015), Murray (2013, 2015, 2917), Zerfass & Sherzada (2015) and Zerfass et al (2017), I wanted to research the role of CEOs and their senior leadership teams in strategic communication even more in-depth, focusing on the central research question:

In what way and to what extent do CEOs of current successful companies and their supporting team deliberately, actively and structurally communicate their vision, purpose, values and strategy as a means to drive their strategic agenda?

To find answers to my supporting research questions I designed and followed an explorative and comparative multi-case research approach aimed at finding relevant data, focusing on two main research outcomes:

- Firstly, I wanted to investigate three clear cases and find examples of and similarities in strategic leadership communication applied in these companies and compare them with the existing academic research, to be able to capture and recommend good practice examples.

- Secondly, I wanted to test my hypothesis about a particular type of strategic leadership communication that seems to emerge, in which CEOs and executive leadership are very visible, internally and externally, in a communication role in which they deliberately and regularly communicate about their company's purpose, strategy and values.

For this purpose, I have researched three companies for their strategic CEO and leadership communication:

- **VodafoneZiggo,** a telecommunications and media company that was formed recently by merging Vodafone Netherlands and Ziggo in a joint venture construction equally owned by two multinational parent companies: Vodafone Group and Liberty Global.

- **ING Group,** a Dutch multinational banking and financial services company, which had to recover from a global financial crisis, made some forced divestments, and currently is going through a big business transformation process.

- **NN Group,** a Dutch based multinational insurer and asset management company, which has recently separated their business from ING Group, to become an independent company again. They also recently acquired Delta Lloyd, their biggest competitor in the Benelux market.

My research focuses on the current strategic corporate communication of these companies, in particular on their CEOs, their vision on strategic communication, their involvement in it, how their communication is managed strategically, how it is being delivered and what role the corporate communication support function plays in this process.

As shown by this research, these companies share a lot of similarities; the nature of their business and industry, the strategic challenges that they face, how they approach strategic communication and the fact that they have clearly visible CEOs who play an active role in strategic communication. All three companies share a purpose centric strategy and put high emphasis on values, which they try to make come to live in writing, telling and doing.

All three CEOs show strong personal ownership, involvement and advocacy of their strategic communication role and work closely together with their corporate communication support team in delivering clear, compelling and consistent leadership communication.

CEOs and executive leadership prefer face-to-face meetings and corporate events as key channels and to use new media such as video and (internal) social media to amplify their visibility and story. They seek ways to continuously bring their strategic narrative across and they are very aware of the personal impact they have on changing the culture of the company, and aligning all stakeholders on their vision and (new) strategic direction.

This research seems to confirm the earlier findings of Argenti (2017) that CEOs (1) create and actively deliver a clear and consistently repeated strategy, (2) create a culture of strategically aligned execution and (3) try to be present to personally deliver the message as much as possible.

Furthermore, as part of my research I have tested ten hypothetical propositions (see text insert) to find patterns in strategic leadership communication of the three companies, to answer the central research question what role CEOs and executive leadership teams play in the strategic communication for their company.

The outcome of this research supports my thesis that

CEOs of successful companies have a personal commitment and deliberate strategy to communicate their vision on the company's mission, purpose, values, strategy and performance, to all the company's key constituencies, in a consistent, clear and well-orchestrated flow of communication, as part of an integrated corporate communication strategy.

Even though my research had some limitations in methodology and access to data, I do believe it provides a useful conceptual model that allows to build and elaborate further on existing theories on CEO and leadership communication, as well as provide some interesting examples from current best practices.

Although it is hard to make conclusive inferences about the role of CEO and leadership communication in other companies, I do believe that this research provides some relevant insights in the inner workings of corporations and leadership with regard to the adoption, management and execution of strategic and leadership communication.

The outcomes and practical examples of this research may be valuable to leadership, communication professionals and students, both as an inspiration for developing new (best) practices in real life, as well as for further conceptualization and testing of the evolving academic theories and models.

Ten characteristics of strategic leadership communication

1. Leadership ownership
2. Strategic focus
3. Critically driven
4. Personally involved
5. Clear personal agenda
6. Strong vision & values
7. Clear & consistent narrative
8. Deliberate & targeted
9. Well-orchestrated delivery
10. Professionally supported

Fedde Heijmans

Since the start of his career in corporate communication, Fedde Heijmans (Den Helder, 1979) has been working in the rapidly evolving fields of digital, internal and leadership communication. Starting from a background in the culinary world he followed a study in Nutrition in Marketing at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, focusing on a diverse range of topics including food science, product development, marketing and communication. He was awarded the honorary title of Bachelor in Health, cum laude, in 2003.

After his internship and his graduation, Fedde joined Unilever Foods R&D in Vlaardingen as a member of the Science Communication Support team that supported Unilever's global nutrition network. During this role, Fedde joined the global marketing team for a six month secondment in a global marketing excellence program to establish a marketing knowledge management platform for Unilever's global brands. After completing that assignment, Fedde moved back to R&D as assistant communication manager supporting the Senior Vice President Foods R&D as part of the global Foods Category Communication team.

Fedde joined Vodafone Netherlands in 2013, to become member of the Internal Communication team. He became the single responsible internal communication manager supporting the Vodafone Netherlands CEO and his general management team in 2013. After the announced merger of Vodafone Netherlands with Ziggo, Fedde joined the pre-merger integration team. Since the official start of VodafoneZiggo, he is a member of the Internal Communication & Engagement team currently responsible for advising and supporting the new Senior Leadership Team and managing several corporate communication and employee engagement programs.

Time to rock the boat?

Leadership in the maritime industry: What dominates, what is desired?

The maritime industry is recognised by many as a vital industry for international trade and the effective and efficient operation of the global supply chain network, yet it continues to be a rather unknown and unexplored area of research.

The purpose of this study is to explore and discover the leadership that exists in the shore based maritime industry today and to establish what current maritime professionals desire from their leaders of tomorrow in an age of change and transformation.

To achieve this, we examine leadership theories, styles, and characteristics and compare the theory to practice. We also uncover the existing research and studies concerning leadership in the maritime industry and attempt to build on this research. We then explain the field research along with revealing the key findings and recommendations.

Method of data gathering and analysis

37 European maritime professionals' opinions were gathered through a combination of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires. Participants range from junior to senior level with varying experience in the industry. They work in organisations from across the shipping, maritime and logistics sector, coming from various countries including the Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Germany and Denmark, where they have worked at some point during their maritime careers. Each focus group contained professionals of a similar level of seniority and experience.

The interviews / focus groups and questionnaires were structured as follows:
1. Current Leadership Characteristics Exercise
2. Interview / Focus Group/Questionnaire – consisting of 7-14 open-ended questions
3. Desired Leadership Characteristics Exercise

Steps 1 and 3 involved participants selecting characteristics of a chosen current leader and characteristics of their desired leader based on a table of characteristics provided.

In step 2, participants were asked various questions concerning the following themes:
1. Leadership
2. The Traditional Maritime Industry
3. Maritime Leaders
4. Gender
5. Industry Change
6. Technology and Innovation
7. Future Leadership

Overview of findings

The findings from the participants reveal a substantial need for improved leadership in the shore based maritime industry. The findings did not show that the current industry leaders practice poor or ineffective leadership, however they did reveal that the future leaders need to possess more people related skills and use more characteristics from the leadership styles of Transformational, Transactional, Servant, Participative, and Team oriented leadership.

Academic leadership theory literature findings

- Good Leadership involves the three dimensions of Leaders, Followers and Context. Many different leadership styles exist and can be used depending on the leader, the follower and the context.
- When multiple leadership theories were compared and contrasted, we found that recent academic studies focus more on the follower-centred styles such as Transformational, Participative, and Servant leadership, and that some leadership styles can be combined.
- Other concepts that the literature found to be of increasing interest is that of diversity leadership, authentic leadership and emotional intelligence.

Maritime leadership studies and literature findings

- In the maritime studies and literature, team-oriented leadership, charismatic leadership and entrepreneurship were identified as desired leadership for the future maritime industry.
- Participative Leadership is a recommended style for females leading in the male dominated environment of the maritime industry.

Field research findings

Characteristics exercise findings

- Characteristics of the 5 leadership styles of Transformation, Transactional, Participative, Servant, and Authoritarian are used and present in the current leaders of the maritime industry.
- Characteristics of the same leadership styles, with the exception of Authoritarian, are desired in the future leaders of the industry.
- Of the characteristics provided, Vision, Open-mindedness and Inspiring are the top desired characteristics of future leaders.

Participant responses – current maritime industry

- Participants described desired attributes from Participative, Transformational, Servant, People Oriented, Situational, Conditional, and Authoritarian styles. This again shows us that there is not one clear leadership style that is predominantly desired. A mixture or combination of styles exist in the industry.
- Overall we can conclude that the industry is conservative, hierarchical and slow to change and less creative than other industries.
- Overall the industry is male dominated and there are very few women in leadership positions within the maritime and shipping companies that participants know. There are low levels of females working in the industry particularly at a senior level. The participants are divided on whether or not there is a difference

between male and female leadership, with almost everyone agreeing there should not be a difference.

Participant responses – future maritime industry

- Leaders with people management skills along with maritime industry knowledge and experience are desired. Currently this is rarely seen in maritime leaders who tend to have one or the other.
- Main changes participants would like to see are: better educated professionals, increased transparency, initiatives to attract younger professionals to the industry, a new image for the industry, improved communications and marketing, environmentally conscious initiatives, taking more social responsibility, allowing for creative thinking, greater empathy, and emotional intelligence.
- Most agreed that leaders need to be adaptable to digitisation changes, and to do this they have to have IT knowledge, skill and understanding.
- A mixture or combination of leadership styles is also desired for the future of the industry. Many suggestions were found, including: less focus on decision making, giving people mandates to decide, goal setting, an increase in people-management skills, clear communication, team-orientation, open-mindedness, listening, empowerment, social responsibility, greater awareness of the importance of communications, using industry influence to improve environmental impact, and more female leaders.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is difficult to recommend one overall/particular leadership style that maritime organisations or leaders themselves should apply, however, we can suggest that transformational, servant, participative, and team-oriented leadership styles or a combination of these styles all have a place in leading the future of the maritime industry.

Characteristics from all these styles are already seen in the industry's leaders of today and more of these leadership traits are desired for the future.
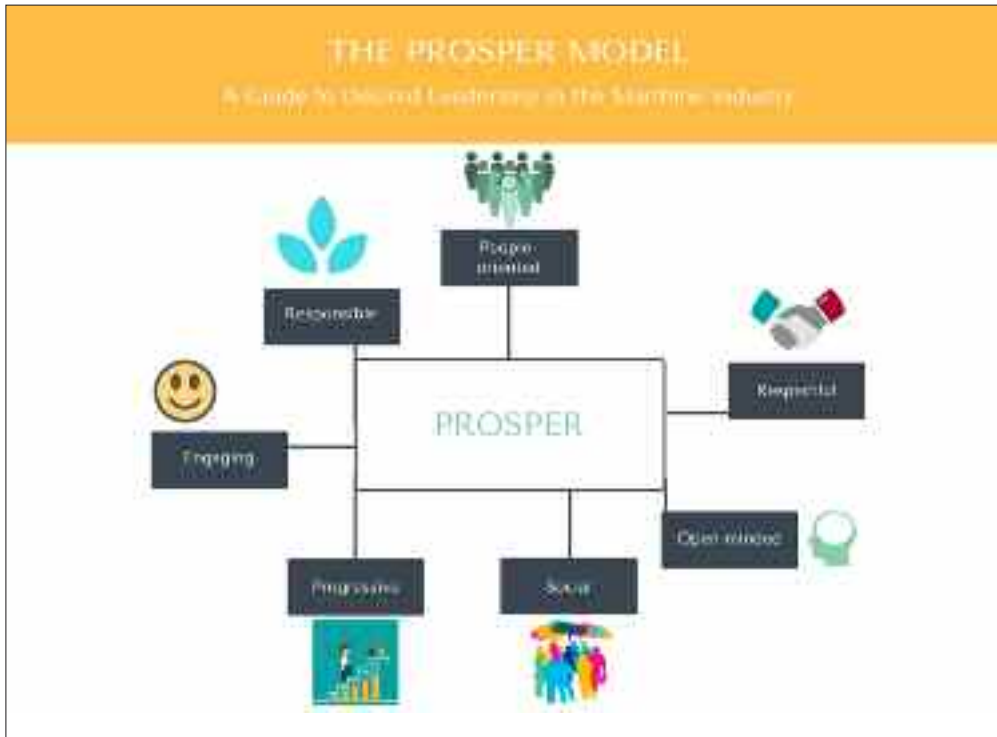
Situational leadership could also be used and applied but this research did not give us ample findings to determine whether or not leaders can succeed by adjusting their leadership styles depending on the employee or the context.

Our overall recommendation to the industry and to the current and future leaders of the industry is to pay attention to PROSPER, a guide that we created based on our findings. PROSPER stands for People-oriented, Respectful, Open minded, Social, Progressive, Engaging, and Responsible.

This model could be used as a guide to assist tomorrow's leaders and is an easy way to remember what professionals in the industry want and need from their leaders. We recommend leaders to work on the development of these skills and attributes as this is what professionals in the industry are missing and is what they desire from their future leaders. Some of the professionals interviewed in this study will hopefully go on to perform key leadership roles in the maritime industry, the PROSPER model could also be a valuable guide for them, as well as to newcomers to the industry.

If we were to select one key element from the PROSPER model it would be the people-oriented aspect. This issue was overwhelmingly prominent in our findings. It was made abundantly clear that professionals are looking for leaders with people management skills.

It is clear that professionals in the industry are looking for change to happen within the industry, to improve the industry and the organisations therein. However, the research did not uncover poor leadership in the industry, it merely uncovered the need for key improvements that can be made to lead the industry through transformation. We are not certain that is it 'time to rock the boat' in that the entire boat may not need to be rocked. Perhaps 'shake the boat' is a more appropriate phrase to use here? In this case, we would recommend without hesitation that the time has come to shake the boat.

Further research

Whilst most levels in the industry were covered by our participants, the opinions of senior management and leadership were not included. To include this in the research would give a more holistic representation of the

leadership in the maritime industry and could give more opinions from today's leaders on today's followers and the variety of situational contexts that exist. Even though this was an intentional choice, it also means that the findings are lacking this key perspective.

This study was also limited to European maritime professionals. Perhaps future studies could expand on this and include maritime professionals from different markets across the globe. Perhaps the difference in leadership styles per country or per market could also be compared. Nevertheless, this study can be seen as a solid base for multiple future studies concerning leadership in the maritime industry.

Further research into the styles leaders can use in relation to changing contexts and situations could be interesting. Can a leader really change their style depending on the situation? Can a leader change their style depending on the individual or group they are dealing with? Perhaps more empirical research could be carried out and evidence gathered in relation to contingency leadership theory.

Lastly, academics interested in the maritime field should consider conducting this research and similar on an annual, bi-annual, or on-going basis. It was recognised during this study that the findings acquired are very current, captured in the moment. Twelve months from now, these findings will need to be captured again. Perhaps the results will remain the same but perhaps the industry will have moved on or changed in ways that require the leaders and followers to change in response.

This study has revealed part of the industry that has been relatively undiscovered. It will help aspiring leaders of tomorrow as well as present leaders in understanding the current landscape and what needs to be done to succeed in providing the right leadership to maritime professionals.

Joanne Kelleher

Joanne started her communications career over ten years ago. She is no stranger to the maritime industry having worked with various organisations in the industry throughout her professional career. She is also a member of the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers (ICS) having finalised her exams in 2013 and sits on the board of the ICS Netherlands development branch.

Currently Joanne is living the dream as Corporate Communications Advisor with Jumbo, a specialist Shipping and Offshore company in the heart of Rotterdam. She takes pride in protecting the brand and reputation of Jumbo and gets a kick out of managing their messaging and storytelling as well as transforming their communications and marketing operations.

Joanne truly believes that "good leadership and communication has the power to change everything!"

This research has given her the unique opportunity to combine her passion for the maritime industry, her fascination with leadership and her love of communication. For Joanne, this is just the beginning. There is a wealth of untapped research just waiting to be discovered in the maritime industry and she intends to find it.

To contact Joanne, please visit her LinkedIn profile.

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The effects of polarization and uncertainty on the reputation of public sector organizations

Public sector organizations range from enterprises operating in competitive markets and agencies that are owned or controlled by the government, to the government itself. In general, they exist to supply services, generally of public value, and often outside the marketplace, but they also perform policy tasks aimed at resolving thorny societal problems and conflicting demands with distributive and redistributive effects. Public organizations are expected to create value for the public by supplying public goods that market mechanisms would not provide (e.g., justice, police, defense), by regulating activities with externalities that either cause social costs (e.g., pollution, traffic congestion), or that positively or negatively affect the public welfare (e.g., education, health, pollution). Public sector organizations may be redistributors of income and wealth through taxes, subsidies, regulations, and other political instruments. Public agencies may vary from policy analysis and evaluation to decision making with policy outcomes and regulations that may reconcile multiple conflicting interests. Therefore, they also need public consent and legitimacy to enhance institutional effectiveness. Despite the importance of general approval for public organizations, whose weight and significance in Western economies remain high, the study of the reputation of public organizations has so far remained a neglected area of research, mainly limited to political scientists.

Literature

The literature on corporate reputation has paid little attention to the specific features and characteristics of public sector organizations and, on occasions, it has simply extended existing corporate reputation constructs and models, to public sector organizations, assuming that there are an analogy and parallelism between public and private organizations. The main contributions to this literature have dealt with the types of public sector organizations that have many touching points with corporate entities, as in the case of an organization that has comparison groups, by which to measure them (e.g., municipalities and local governments, public health administrations, hospitals, and universities.) However, Byrkjeflot (2015) warns scholars and practitioners against applying corporate reputation management models to public organizations, since practitioners and managers will risk generating mistrust and unintended consequences, as public organizations' values, missions, goals, and activities are inherently different from those of the corporate world. By paraphrasing Holmstrom and Milgrom (1994), an organization can be portrayed as "an incentive system." However, private and public institutions have entirely different incentive systems.

Focus and research questions

This dissertation discusses the relevant strands of literature on corporate reputation and compares and contrasts them with the emerging literature on the reputation of public sector organizations. Moreover, it presents a model of public sector reputation, to analyze the effects of polarization of expectations among citizens, as well as the role of uncertainty. Theoretical and practical implications for reputation management are discussed.

The juxtaposition of this literature shows the lack of communication between the two areas of scholarship and the inadequacy of corporate reputation tools of analysis to inform the reputation management of public sector organizations. While private organizations have to maximize a result, public organizations may aim at different objectives.

By taking stock of the relevant literature on this subject, this dissertation contributes to the theory and practice of reputation management within public sector organizations by presenting a theoretical model of public sector reputation with multiple stakeholders and with uncertainty in the environment, or during policy formulation and execution. The model describes a public organization with policymaking authority and multiple stakeholders. Stakeholders have loss functions that depend on the distance between their desired policy outcomes and the actual policy results. Each stakeholder group has a different desired policy outcome, which depends on the characteristics (or type) of the stakeholder. The closer the policy outcome is to the stakeholders' desideratum, the higher the perception and reputation of the public sector organization as seen by the stakeholders. The policy outcome, in turn, depends on the policy preferences of the public organization and the costs of its efforts to meet the expectations of society. The organizational performance has an element of uncertainty that may be part and parcel of the external environment, or it may depend on the fact that the stakeholders do not know the organization's preference or that the execution of the policy is subject to random errors or other flaws. Therefore, the unpredictability of the final policy outcome may add to the general uncertainty built into the model. The source of risk is not relevant to the reputational effect, but it becomes relevant when reputational management is discussed.

The effects of polarization and uncertainty on the reputation of public sector organizations

The model is then used to analyze the effects of both the polarization of stakeholders' preferences and the degree of uncertainty. The main results of the reputation model presented here can be summarized as follows: public sector organizations may find it impossible to maximize their reputations and meet their stakeholders' expectations at the same time, the polarization of stakeholders' types and preferences reduces the reputation of the organization regardless of its effort and performance, and environmental uncertainty and unpredictability in the policy outcome also reduce the reputation of the organization.

Implications

The model also provides practical implications for the construction of indicators of reputation and for the management of a public organization's reputation. The model suggests including, along the existing measures of reputation, both an indicator of the degree of polarization of stakeholders' expectations (while remaining cognizant that it is not only important to identify stakeholders' expectations but also to assess how distant reciprocal positions are) and an indicator of the degree of uncertainty in which the organization operates.

The implications for reputation management are that public sector organizations – especially those operating in areas in which policy outcomes may be controversial and uncertainties high – should increase the degree of their transparency to reduce the uncertainty caused by the environment or by the information asymmetry between the organization and its primary stakeholders.

Transparency might contribute toward building more informed expectations of the type and preferences of the organizations and the operational risks and challenges that they have to face and manage. Public organizations might wish to be even more transparent than what is expected by social norms not only because of their stewardship of public resources but also to gain public acceptance, trust, and thus, reputation.

Moreover, public sector organizations should be cognizant of the risks of the polarization for their reputations and should, therefore, step up their efforts to establish channels of more open dialogue and cooperation with, and also amongst, the stakeholders to narrow the distance between their various positions.

Francesco Lovecchio

Francesco Lovecchio is currently deputy head of the communications division at the Italian Central Bank, where he has served with different capacities for over 20 years, in fields ranging from international finance policy analysis to emerging economies and international relations. He also served under the Italian Ministry of Finance as tax expert and under the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as financial attaché in the United States.

He earned a B.Sc. in Business and Economics from the University of Bari (Italy), a M.Sc. in Economics from the University of York (U.K.), and a Ph.D. in Public Finance from the University of Pavia (Italy).

He spends his free time as a runner, and reading history. He is married, with a daughter of 17. They live in Rome, Italy.
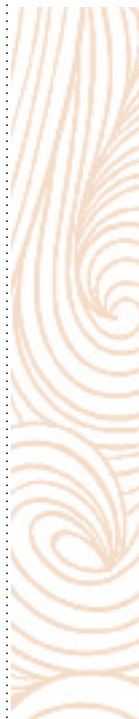
Creating stakeholder alignment via two-way symmetrical communication

Goal 'per definitionem' or a preference direction?

The climate of the TenneT-organization provides opportunities for further professionalization. Although Communication within TenneT is now – based on clear principles – more often involved in enabling transparent stakeholder communication and although communication management already is brought to a higher, more strategic level, there are still significant steps to take in the development of excellence in PR and communication management, especially where two-way symmetrical stakeholder communication is concerned. That led me to the "Excellence Question" posed by Grunig, jointly with Lauri Grunig and David Dozier, in collaboration with the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation: How must public relations be practiced and the communication function be organized for it to contribute the most to organizational effectiveness? (Grunig et al., 1992, p. 3.).

In 1984 James Grunig and Todd Hunt published the "Four Models of Public Relations" as part of the book Managing Public Relations.[1] The models describe different variants of communication between an organization and its stakeholders (Press Agentry model, Public Information model, Two-way asymmetrical model and Two-way symmetrical model) . They identified an "ideal" approach to public relations, which they called the two-way symmetrical model. According to them, the goal of the model is one that embraces negotiation between the organization and its publics, and one that also fosters mutual understanding. Two-way symmetrical communication is still a leading component of the Excellence theory.[2]

The four models and especially the two-way symmetrical model, have been the most controversial and the most debated component of the Excellency Theory. But it was and still is, one of the most influential theories of word-wide views on public relations, which also shapes the way we look at the most excellent way of practicing strategic communication.

This led to the following questions:

Are the "Four models of public relations" and more specific two-way communication as one of the most important characteristics of excellent communication still relevant?
Which one, if any, of Grunig's public-relations models is dominant within TenneT?

Literary findings

As with any dominant framework, the Excellence theory and more specific the four models of public relations had its share of criticism. Some critics like Pieczka, Van der Meiden and Cameron have suggested that Grunig is too

idealistic in his theory of two-way symmetrical communication, with some arguing that it simply is not realistic in the practical setting. I have to disagree with these arguments. The critics say that the two-way symmetrical model, thus, is being engaged when asymmetrical communications fail and it helps the company "to dilute the negotiating power of those (critical) stakeholders"[3] by making comprises that in the long run are still in the interests of organization rather than society or critical stakeholders. I do not agree. From both an academically as well as practical point of view I support Grunig's opinion that twoway symmetrical communication fosters mutual understanding and maximizes the extent to which an organization is able to manage its relationships with strategic publics. If communication is inherently a part of the organization's activities and strategies for future development, it strengthens the relationship between a company at its important stakeholders and in the end its reputation. (Keh and Xie, 2009).[4]

Both the models and the Excellence theory have been developed further and expanded based on intensive research, as is illustrated by Grunig's conclusion in his 1992 book that excellent departments generally practice a mixture of two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models – a mixed-motive model – although their practice is more symmetrical than asymmetrical. This also in response to Murphy (1987, 1989, 1991) who combined the principles of game theory with the concepts of symmetry to construct the mixed motive model of public relations. Within TenneT there are many examples of two-way symmetrical communication with benefits for both organization and stakeholders. However – like in Murphy's mixed motive theory – organizational communication strategies both internally and externally use several strategies – sometimes also

[1] Grunig, James E., and Todd Hunt. Managing Public Relations. Philadelphia [etc.]: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1984. Print.

[2] Grunig, James, and Larissa Grunig. "Public Relations in Strategic Management and Strategic Management of Public Relations: Theory and Evidence from the IABC Excellence Project." Journalism Studies 1.2 (2000): 303-321. Print.

[3] Laskin, The evolution of models in PR: an outsider's perspective, Journal of Communication Management v13 n1, 2009, page 37-54

[4] Craig E. Carroll, Handbook of Communication and Corporate Reputation, 2008.

two-way asymmetrical or one-way – rather than only using the two-way symmetrical model. Also new insights on for example on Ethics changed the dimensions related to the four models and core values on the global profession of public relations were developed.

Since the completion of the Excellence study, important adjustments were made due to new theories like the mixed motive theory and new insights for example on the measurement of the models, development of the dimensions, the growing role of ethics and globalization and digitalization.

The conclusion and the answer to my first thesis question is that the essence of the models and Excellence theory are still relevant, proven and adjusted over the years in a growing international and global research context.

Results research TenneT

Both the factor analysis and the analysis of the total respondents group and the subgroups show a high level of consensus. The results of the Q-sort show a mixed motive model with a high preference for two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical communication. Some statements also score positively on the Press model and Public Information model, but they concern in particular the task of the departments public affairs and communication and the speaking of truth (Public Information model).

Via data collection – a digital Q-sort methodology[5] (Figure 1.) in total 55 respondents both professionals and managers and board members (dominant coalition) from both the German as well as Dutch part of the company were given 28 statements (For every model seven statements were used with a characteristic of the model based on the underlying dimensions).

The respondents recognized the different dimensions in Grunig's four models. There are no large differences between statement scores of professionals and management in general. Both respondent groups score far more positive on the two-way symmetrical model and the two-way asymmetrical model than on Press model and Public Information model. The professionals score a little more positive on these two models than management. The response to statements about conducting research (two-way (a)symmetrical) scores more positive by the Dutch compared to the German respondents.

In the qualitative interview we elaborated on the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical focus except for the statements on the functions of the communication and PA department. They concluded to have some difficulties in weighting the statements about the function of the departments and maybe therefore selected within their own Q-sort some conflicting statements. Statements about the process of communication, two-way and one-way communication, asymmetrical and symmetrical and statements about research and truth seemed more easy to select.

Speaking the truth is a very important value and is reflected in all subgroup scores and both factor groups. This is acknowledged and viewed as a part of our corporate culture. Overall, respondents recognize the negative score on conducting a stakeholder and / or issue analysis prior to initiating a communication process with stakeholders. In addition, it's not standard to start research to establish the degree of mutual understanding between management and our stakeholders. This method is currently not standard practice, and is not standard employed prior to a project. Standardization and improvement of the process is therefore required. This outcome was also confirmed during the qualitative interview.

5   Zabala, A. 2014. Q method: a package to explore human perspectives using Q methodology, The R Journal Reults6/2: 163–173.

Figure 1. Example Q-sort diagram total respondents

Via the Screeplot on four Factors, two Factors were selected. Factor 1 has the highest Screeplot score and is the most unambiguously and distinguished of the 2 factors. Factor 1 respondents perceived the way stakeholder communication is performed by the TenneT-organisation more along the lines of a two-way symmetrical style of communication with some asymmetrical aspects as well (especially truth). Their highest positive score statement concerns the fact that most communication activities between stakeholders and the organization is two-way (1.66). Factor 1 has a strong positive focus on telling the truth and doing research and also sees that research is done within the organisation. Also they find it highly important that two-way communication takes into account mutual effects on both our organization and our stakeholders.

Factor 2 respondents score lower negative as well as positive, except on telling the truth (2.43) Factor 2 perceived the way stakeholder communication is performed by the TenneT-organisation more along the lines of a combined one-way and two-way style of communication. Although the scores overall are more positive on aspects of two-way asymmetrical communications, the Factor group's opinion is that most communication processes in the field of stakeholders and media relations are still one-way traffic at TenneT

(this is not a significant high score, 0.58). On the other hand they emphasize on the fact that a two-way communication process has to take into account mutual effects on both our organization and our stakeholders. In the qualitative interview this was – also by the two respondents that relate most to the Factor 2 scores – explained by the fact that these is still a lot of one-way communication (brochures, leaflets, websites etcetera) but it supports the growing two-way communication and stakeholder dialogue. If there is two-way communication, TenneT puts energy into the realization of "benefits" for both. Neither of the two factor groups applied a particular model exclusively, but rather used one dominant public relations model while using the others to a lesser extent.

Next steps

Literature research and practical experience on two-way symmetrical communication tell me two-way symmetrical communication is a direction towards excellence in communication and not a goal 'per definitionem'. To create excellence in communication it should be the preferenced direction: two-way symmetrical communication where possible and effective, mixed-motive in practice.

I will use the results of my research as proof points for the further development of an integrated stakeholder communication vision and focus points for improvement. When delivering a vision on stakeholder communication it is also important to clearly define the role and task of the department of public affairs and Communication. Also the framework for timely and structured research should improved.

Ursela Schennink

Collaboration must start with dialogue

With a broad background in corporate communications, Ursela Schennink (born 1971) has developed a passion for complex stakeholder communications in the past few years of her career. She recently completed a vision document on stakeholder management including a stakeholder game based on the principles of stakeholder management and the brand values of the company. The game allows employees to learn how to achieve strategic alignment among stakeholders. Such alignment presents an excellent opportunity to improve an organization's reputation and relationships.

Ursela Schennink is an experienced communications manager with a strong background in the strategic, tactical as well as operational elements of communication. She started as a professional in the broader field of corporate communications, initially focusing mainly on internal communications and change management. She later served as a press spokesperson and external communications advisor for SEP, a company engaged in energy production and transport. In 1998, she was appointed Corporate Communications Manager and was charged with helping to build a new brand identity: TenneT, the newly established Dutch Transmission System Operator. At that time, TenneT employed approx. 270 people and had an investment portfolio of some EUR 880 million, but with a strategy based on the motto 'Strengthen and Build'. Until 2012, Ursela managed a team of more than 20 communication professionals, improved corporate branding and reputation management, and was in charge of communications for a number of acquisitions and integration programmes.

Ursela enjoys developing the reputation of remarkable companies like TenneT – organizations that can truly make a difference and are socially relevant. TenneT's ongoing investment programme of more than EUR 25 billion in large infrastructural projects has a significant impact on society at large. Since her appointment as Business and Project Communications Manager in 2012, Ursela has been responsible for the overall communications for all offshore and onshore projects in the Netherlands. Perhaps not surprisingly, Ursela has selected 'two-way symmetrical stakeholder communication' as the subject of her thesis. To gain a better understanding of how an organization can improve stakeholder dialogue, one needs to know what the status quo is within the organization.

Luctor et emergo

Economic development and communication skills

Zeeland is the most beautiful part of the Netherlands. With its rich history, its constant battle with the water surrounding it, it's liveliness and welcoming character, this province embodies everything our little country is about. Our motto isn't "LUCTOR ET EMERGO" for nothing. We are fighters, we "Struggle and emerge"! But… Do we really?

The economic situation in Zeeland is alarming. Young people leave the region in search of education and companies move elsewhere to cut costs and to find better personnel. The region has tried to persuade the national government to help them. Several attempts to gain attention for this regional economic challenge failed and Zeeland has trouble setting the national agenda. The fact that Zeeland is not able to set the national political agenda towards dealing with there issues, can have numerous causes. Possible economic growth, promoting your region with Regional Marketing and how Public Affairs Management is organized are possible causes I researched in order to make recommendations to Zeeland (in general) concerning setting the national political agenda towards dealing with regional issues.

In my thesis I challenged the outcome of the report 'Zeeland in stroomversnelling' (Zeeland accelerating. I researched literature about Economic growth, Regional Marketing, Public Affairs Management and Reputation Management and I spoke to five key player in Public Affairs Management in Zeeland to determine if I could agree with the conclusions in the report or not.

Economic viability

At the end of 2015 the Chamber of Commons supported a motion to research the flexibility of Zeeland as a region of economic growth. A Committee, led by old prime minister Balkenende did extensive research and presented the report 'Zeeland in stroomversnelling' (Zeeland accelerating). Balkenende stressed the importance of political and financial aid, the potential the region has and the fact that this region is confronted with problems way beyond their regional borders. I agree with the Committee Balkenende. Zeeland is suitable for economic growth. But, I want to comment on that with information I gathered from my interviews and attention in the media: the situation our region is in, is precarious. To have a sustainable future, there is a lot to be done.

Regional marketing is under rated

Regional marketing can play a structural role in increasing competitive advantage. From an economic point of view, where it is seen as "the strategic market-oriented planning of a region with a view to matching

stakeholders needs and local economic objectives" (Kotler, 2002)[1], it can do much more for a region. Especially for a region in crisis and in search of economic growth. From this point of view regional marketing does not imply ways of selling places. According to Kotler (2001) this should be last on the agenda of a long list of tasks based on strategic planning and market-research.

Regional Marketing in Zeeland is highly under rated. When taken seriously and applied structurally, Regional Marketing can help Zeeland with gaining competitive advantage and structural economic growth.

Public affairs in the Netherlands is not professional enough

Although Public Affairs is well researched there is not a lot of professional basis for practitioners to fall back on. Public Affairs, especially in The Netherlands needs to be professionalized with rules, agreements and standards (Von Den Driesch and Van Der Wurff , 2015)[2].

Looking at the different role conceptions (Von Den Driesch and Van Der Wurff, 2015) my research shows Public Affairs in Zeeland is practiced mostly in the Advocate role, where the lobbyist is loyal to his client, competitive with other lobbyists and advocating the client's interest as best as possible. Shifting roles to a more Expert position, where accuracy and transparency are important and decisions are being made on expert information, would help the region enormously.

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[1] Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. Kotler, P. and Gertner, D., 2002. Journal of brand management, 9(4), pp.249-261.

[2] Role conceptios of public affairs practitioners in The Netherlands. Von den Driesch, D. & Van der Wurff, R., 2016. Public Relations Review, Issue 1, p. 10.

There is a rift dividing government and businesses

During the interviews in my field research I noticed very quickly and in each conversation I had that when it comes to Zeeland, economic challenges and Public Affairs management you are either positive or skeptical.

In my thesis I also refer to the 'positives' and the 'skepticals'. The 'positives' are mainly employed (or have an important relationship) with the (regional) administration.

'Positives' and 'skeptical' disagree on almost all the important topics. 'Positives' think Zeeland is doing fine, 'Skepticals' worry about the future and the current decisions that are made to 'ensure' this future. 'Positives' think our Public Affairs Management is very effective, 'Skepticals' criticize the fact that we as a region are simple not able to speak with one voice. It is clear there are some contradictions as to how we are doing as a region and how we act upon changing this.

Keep it simple

The economic situation Zeeland is in is precarious. There is a lot to be done. Starting small and keeping it simple should be the way to go about. I can make four simple recommendations:

1. 'Zeeland in stroomversnelling' as a platform: get government and businesses together
2. Be brave and brainstorm: talk to each other and be creative
3. Organize and professionalize: to compete, you need to be seen as a professional
4. Speak as one: what is good for Zeeland, is good for all of us. Sort out your differences.

Limitations

I am aware of the limitations my research has. Partiality and one-sidedness did occur and my subjectivity, is a challenge I put myself up to. As I have been working as a Communications advisor and Public Affairs practitioner for the 'skeptical' side for almost ten years. That is one of the main reasons that I also recommend follow-up research. I advise a quantitative research amongst smaller companies, because I expect they have a useful opinion about positioning our region.

Ilona Wielemaker

Ilona Wielemaker, born and raised in Zeeland, completed her bachelor in Communications at the HZ, University of Applied Science in Vlissingen in 2001. After a couple of years in Rotterdam, where she worked for the municipality of Rotterdam and housing association Comwonen, she decided to move back to Zeeland. Ilona worked at DELTA N.V. for almost ten years, where she was responsible for marketing communication, corporate communication and reputation and brand management. In her last job at DELTA N.V. Ilona was Media and Issue manager. Forced to leave, because of economic conditions, Ilona joint TenneT to assist in Project Communications in Zeeland. Currently Ilona is Senior advisor Communications & Marketing at the regional hospital ADRZ. With her marketing communications background and expertise in Reputation Management and Branding she will help the hospital in becoming more patient driven and proactive.

Ilona will continue to contribute, where she can, in making Zeeland a challenging region for young professionals to work and live at.

Job advertisements: An untapped resource in Employer Branding?

A comparative content analysis of the top 10 companies voted "Best Employers in Switzerland" in 2016

The idea for this thesis came about through personal experience. After having resigned from an execute communications position I hit the Swiss job market end 2015. Reading many job advertisements, I could not help but notice the shortcomings from a communications point of view. The rising importance of employer branding in the "war for talent" today is a universal truth and I was intrigued to conduct research on the role of job advertisements in this regard.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explain employer branding by establishing a link to the core discipline of branding. Branding is based on the idea that companies need to differentiate from competition to attract and retain customers, especially in view of the rising similarity of products and services offered. The same logic applies to employer branding, which consequently is about communicating unique company attributes to raise attractiveness and establish differentiation on the labor market. Its target is twofold, attracting new and retaining talented employees alike.

At the heart of this thesis is the hypothesis, that even though companies invest a lot of resources into best practice employer branding activities, job advertisements are not tapped to their full potential to position a company as a great place to work.

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The study focuses on the top 10 Swiss companies voted most attractive employers in Switzerland (Universum Global, 2016) and is based on the assumption that their ranking suggests successful employer branding practices. A case study approach was chosen for qualitative conceptual content analysis of job advertisements. The job advertisements were limited to mid-senior level positions in the field of communications and sourced uniquely from online job boards. A focus group of three experts reviewed and assessed two advertisements for each of the 10 companies. A checklist was developed to facilitate content review and assessment of the selected job advertisements. The checklist categories and subcategories were mainly determined by employer branding dimensions and interrelated concepts as will be explained in this thesis.

The starting point was the question what criteria actually guide a job seeker's decision to respond to a specific job advertisement? Without doubt a company's general reputation, image and opinion about the industry or sector plays a role in employer attractiveness. Balmer and Greyser (2003) for instance point out, that next to the larger field of branding, the concepts of organizational identity and culture as well as corporate reputation and image are of relevance to the understanding of employer branding. This is why these topics form the theoretical framework of the study at hand.

Two concepts are particularly of interest for confirming and completing the checklist for job advertisements: Organizational Attractiveness and Employer Value Proposition (EVP). EVP addresses topics such as culture, mission, values and employment advantages offered. Organizational attractiveness in contrast to EVP is about potential employees' perception of organizational and job characteristics, which make the company an attractive place to work (Encyclopedia of Management Theory). In this regard the Institute for Employment Studies (Hirsch and Jackson) has pointed out as early as 1996 the importance of development opportunities and career progression. Others, like Lievens et al. (2001) have also brought forward organizational characteristics (company size, level of internationalism, compensation, hierarchy and decision making processes) and personality characteristics.

The study found that there is consistency as to the style, format and content of job advertisements within each of the companies analyzed. Furthermore, companies adequately covered in ads those checklist content categories which could be classified as traditional, such as job description, corporate identity or company introduction. These types of categories have been around for decades and it is thus to assume that they have become a staple in HR job advertisement repertoire of companies paying attention to employer branding.

In contrast, all the categories covering employer attributes of a newer generation, such as work climate or compensation, perform poorly or are not mentioned at all in the job advertisements.

The study concludes that the evidence leans in support of the thesis hypothesis that companies fall short of using job advertisements to their full potential as a recruitment tool. The results are even the more striking as they measure the performance of the top performers in employer branding on the Swiss market. One can only assume that the results of such a study for other companies would yield even more flagrant results. All

points to the need of improving job advertisements so as to elevate them to the level of other powerful employer branding tools.

Especially, with generation Y and the ever-intensifying war for talent in mind companies and their HR departments would be well advised to step up their game and tailor job advertisements to the changing needs of job seekers. It can be assumed that the same logic should also be applied to other groups, such as middle-aged employees. Perceptions, needs and priorities change and companies need to be at the pulse of socio-economic changes.

Meltem Zourdos

Meltem Zourdos, has studied in Germany, Italy and the US and holds a Masters degree in Political Science from the Freie Universität Berlin and a postgraduate diploma in International Studies from the Johns Hopkins University. Fluent in German, English, French and Turkish, Meltem has held communication and program management positions in international environments. She spent two years at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) where she managed return assistance programs. During the following six years at the International Air Transport Association (IATA) she led program activities for revolutionizing passenger experience, such as e-ticketing, self check-in and Smartphone enabled boarding passes. In her subsequent position as Head of Internal Communication / Deputy Head of Communication at GF Machining Solutions, Meltem was a trusted advisor to management and drove employee engagement, branding and web projects. In 2016 she achieved her long held wish of working in the humanitarian area when she was named Executive Director to the European Headquarters Office for Soroptimist International of Europe.
Meltem Zourdos is 44, holds Swiss and German citizenship and lives with her husband and daughter in Geneva.

Thesis coaches

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Joep Cornelissen is Professor of Corporate Communication and Management at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University. The main focus of his research involves studies of the role of corporate and managerial communication in the context of innovation, entrepreneurship and change, and of social evaluations of the legitimacy and reputation of start-up and established firms. In addition, he also has an interest in questions of scientific reasoning and theory development in management and organisation theory. His work has been published in the Academy of Management Review, Journal of Management Studies, Organisation Science and Organisation Studies, and he has written a general text on corporate communication (Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice, Sage Publications) which is now in its fourth edition. He is an Asso-ciate Editor for the Academy of Management Review, a Council member of the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies, a former General Editor of the Journal of Management Studies (2006-2012) and serves on the editorial boards of the Academy of Management Journal, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies and Organisation Studies.

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Notes