# Chapter 3
# Becoming a Successful Corporate Communication Practitioner in International Business Consultancy

**David Hall**

**Abstract** Corporate communication practitioners have a very wide range of professional responsibilities ranging from the almost ubiquitous, for example, media relations, public relations, communication strategy, crisis communications and public policy, to those that are less common, such as investor relations, government relations, technical communications and ethics (Goodman MB, Hirsch PB, Corporate communication: strategic adaptation for global practice. Peter Lang, New York, 2010).

This chapter examines how the most frequently encountered of these responsibilities are discharged and highlights the skills and technical practices that are necessary for their successful execution. It further examines the leadership roles of corporate communication professionals in the corporation, among the more commonly encountered of which include counsel to the CEO and the corporation, manager of the company's reputation, driver of the company's publicity and manager of the company's image (Goodman MB, Hirsch PB, Corporate communication: strategic adaptation for global practice. Peter Lang, New York, 2010).

It is these leadership roles of corporate communicators that highlight their importance both internally and externally in protecting, maintaining and enhancing the company's reputation. It also conditions the relationship of corporate communicators with those executives who have primary responsibility for critical programmes, such as investor and government relations, where corporate communicators have a secondary role. It is the task of corporate communicators working as a team with directors and senior managers to formulate and agree a coherent narrative that best represents the company's activities, aspirations and strategy.

In undertaking this work, corporate communicators may call on the support of communication consultancies (and they may themselves choose to spend part of

D. Hall (✉)
The former Head of Group Communications (Asia) at HSBC,
Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China
e-mail: dhallhkhk@yahoo.com



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their careers in consultancy), and the chapter discusses their differing roles and how optimum results can be achieved from their combined efforts.

If you consider your favourite brands, your estimation of their products and services and your view of them as companies of quality and integrity and analyse all your other reasons for admiring them, your impressions will in part have been influenced by the work of corporate communication professionals. For these professionals, when building, maintaining and protecting a corporation's reputation, their core tasks and objectives (Cornelissen 2008) are to provide stakeholders with professionally relevant information about the corporate's operations (Cornelissen 2004), for example, via annual reports and shareholder meetings and other appropriate channels for major investors and other shareholders and via advertising, sales promotions, in-store communications and information about products and services for existing and prospective customers. All of these communications help form your impressions of a corporation (Cornelissen 2004).

Corporate communication is thus the discipline that nurtures and enhances perceptions of an organisation and seeks to protect its reputation when problems, which threaten reputation, arise (Doorley and Garcia 2007). Goodman (2006) has defined corporate communication as a number of management functions that include reputational management. Argenti and Forman (2002) shared the belief of this chapter that corporate communication counteracts the persistent scrutiny and negative attention that businesses face. Further, that technological advances have enhanced the scope of public scrutiny, reinforcing the need for good strategy not only to offset any potentially overwhelming criticisms, but also essential to protect a corporation's long-term reputation (Argenti and Forman 2002).

The success of a company's communication strategy is largely contingent on how closely the communication strategy is linked to the strategy of the business as a whole (Clutterbuck 2001). To work effectively, corporate communication professionals must have a thorough understanding of their employer's business (or if a consultant, the client's business) and its values, products, services and strategies. This understanding will condition everything they do.

The audiences that must be addressed to achieve success will include customers (actual and potential), suppliers, distributors, the company's own employees (and potential employees; being seen as a bad employer makes recruitment of good staff challenging), investors, communities in which the company operates and, depending on the industry, regulators and government. All these audiences have in varying but significant degrees an influence both on the conduct of a company's business and how it is perceived, hence influencing a company and its prospects. Investors can sell down their shares, thereby reducing the value of a company. Governments often control the issuing of vital licences – broadcasting, for example – or the awarding of contracts, notably in areas of government procurement. Regulators can have a

powerful impact on some company operations, such as those in the finance industry, who have been instructing banks to increase their capital. Customers, of course, can decide to obtain their goods and services from an alternative supplier.

And general impressions of the company will not be confined to the quality and pricing of its products and services. A corporation builds its reality and engages with its constituencies not only by means of visual manifestation, including names, brands, symbols, self-presentations and corporate sponsorships, but, most significantly, its vision (Argenti and Forman 2002). Additionally, those with whom it deals can also influence the views of customers and other key audiences.

Potentially, its suppliers, wherever they may operate, can be a source of reputational damage. If, for example, the company buys garments from a factory in Bangladesh that has collapsed or from factories that employ child labour, then its reputation will be damaged and, probably, its sales impacted. And there will be NGOs (nongovernmental organisations) and journalists that will work to ensure that news of these connections will be disseminated internationally. In these circumstances, corporate communication professionals must have a clear and thorough understanding of their employer's business and the environment in which it operates.

In the area of customer perceptions, certain problems can do substantial damage to a reputation that has taken years to build. For many businesses, be they car manufacturers, cosmetic producers or beverage specialists, the most public and significant risk is that of a defective product which leads to a recall, necessitating wide publicity. Even the suspicion or allegation of product problems can lead to sharply falling sales. Examples in recent years have included melamine-contaminated milk from China and Toyota cars with alleged problems of accelerators being jammed wide open. In 2010, British Petroleum (BP), one of the six oil and gas 'super majors' and a highly regarded company, had its reputation severely damaged by the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, which had a massive impact on the environment. The spill also gave rise to considerable health consequences and economic losses.

Further, certain categories of customer can be a problem. For banks, offering services to those who are thought to be tax evaders can present major regulatory issues. Some industries, such as forestry, are increasingly shunned as borrowers on the grounds that their practices are not sustainable.

A company's sensitivity to the environment, green issues, is another critical factor, especially for those engaged in extractive industries such as mining and oil. In particular, the practice known as fracking by the oil and gas industry has recently attracted opposition from local communities in many parts of the world and, in France, an outright ban on hydraulic fracking for shale gas.

So while corporate communication professionals have a critical role in promoting the company's business, they must also be skilled in damage control. What this means in practice is that in addition to having a clear understanding of their employer's business, they must also have an acute awareness of the broader environment in which the company operates.

## 3.1 The Roles and Responsibilities of Corporate Communicators

The wide range of these responsibilities is one of the factors that make a career in corporate communications interesting and satisfying. The two following tables demonstrate how this works in practice. These tables draw on practice in the United States, but many of the disciplines and techniques they address are standards for international corporate communicators.

Table 3.1 (Goodman and Hirsch 2010: 17) was compiled in 2009 by corporate communication international (CCI) Studies (Goodman et al. 2009) and was based on ranked descriptions of the leadership role of corporate communications in major companies by chief communications officers. The percentages are derived from those who ranked each function first.

Two prefatory comments are required before considering the list. The first is simply that large companies, which are international in reach and publicly traded, are only broadly indicative of professional practice. Smaller companies and different organisational structures such as governments and government departments, trade associations, NGOs and charities, for example, will have different profiles.

Secondly, many professionals work for consultancies rather than in-house, which creates a different approach to dealing with communication issues. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

That said, Table 3.1 provides valuable professional insights.

First, the priority accorded to counselling the CEO and corporation demonstrates an awareness of the critical importance of communication issues. Second, the apparent overlaps of the various categories in the list hint at a degree of confusion either in professional terminology or the scope of activity encompassed by particular roles. For example, it is difficult to see clear distinctions between 'manager of

**Table 3.1** Ranked descriptions of the leadership role of communication professionals in the corporation

| | |
|---|---|
| 23.3 % | Counsel to CEO and the corporation [16.7 % #2] |
| 18.0 % | Manager of company's reputation [14.8 % #2] |
| 12.9 % | Source of public information about the company [14.5 % #2] |
| 10.2 % | Driver of company publicity |
| 9.7 % | Manager of the company's image |
| 6.8 % | Advocate or 'engineer of public opinion' |
| 5.8 % | Manager of relationships – co. and NON-customer constituencies |
| 5.0 % | Branding and brand perception steward |
| 3.5 % | Member of the strategic planning leadership team |
| 3.4 % | Manager of employee relations (internal comm.) |
| 1.9 % | Manager of relationships – co. and ALL key constituencies |
| 1.8 % | Support for marketing and sales |
| 1.8 % | Corporate philanthropy (citizenship) champion |

Source: Adapted from Goodman and Hirsch (2010, p. 17)

**Table 3.2** Core functional responsibilities of corporate communication

| Function | Responsibility (%) |
|---|---|
| Media relations | 100.0[a] |
| Public relations | 98.4[a] |
| Communication strategy | 96.9[a] |
| Crisis communication | 93.8[a] |
| Communication policy | 92.3 |
| Executive communication | 87.7[a] |
| Reputation management | 84.6[a] |
| Employee communication | 81.5[a] |
| Social media | 78.0 |
| Internet communication | 76.9 |
| Intranet communication | 76.6 |
| Annual report | 75.4 |
| Corporate identity | 69.2 |
| Issues management | 67.7 |
| Community relations | 61.5 |
| Mission statement | 56.9 |
| Corporate citizenship | 50.8 |
| Brand strategy | 50.8 |
| Marketing communication | 41.5 |
| Advertising | 41.5 |
| Corporate culture | 40.0 |
| Investor relations | 32.3 |
| Government relations | 15.4 |
| Technical communication | 13.8 |
| Ethics | 9.2 |
| Training and development | 7.7 |
| Labour relations | 4.6 |

Source: Adapted from Goodman and Hirsch (2010, p. 18)

[a]Almost ubiquitous

company's reputation' and 'manager of the company's image' or how these compare with 'branding and brand perception steward'.

However, the major conclusions to be drawn from this research are apparent. In addition to the importance attached to the corporate communication function by business leaders, it is viewed as a strategic role in respect of the organisation's audiences both internally and externally.

The CCI Studies also asked communication executives to indicate their core functional responsibilities drawn from a list of possible functions proffered by the researchers. The results are set out in Table 3.2 (Goodman and Hirsch 2010: 18).

The most immediate and striking indicator from this research is the primacy of media relations and related professional activities, such as communication strategy and policy. Also, crisis communication is largely played out in media, even if the problem sometimes ends up in the law courts. In the case of BP, described above,

the devastating consequences of the oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico have ended up in the US courts, where many people who were not directly impacted by the spill have nonetheless been granted compensation.

As for public relations – 'the predecessor to the corporate communication function' (Argenti 2007) – this is often an older synonym for corporate communications that some people still use as is clear from Table 3.2, while social media is an increasingly significant reputational factor for senior management in any large organisation. With the extraordinarily high levels of interactivity and transparency enabled by the Internet, the elemental practices of corporate communication, including corporate reputation management, are made unrecognisable to earlier practitioners, especially in the transparent web of social media that has had a profound impact on the speed and extent to which stakeholders can interact with the corporation and with each other in ways that have both positive and negative implications for the corporation (Goodman and Hirsch 2010). Social media will be discussed separately later in this chapter.

There is a particular link between these findings and those in the preceding table that set out the leadership roles of corporate communication professionals. It is the potential impact of media both positive and negative that requires counselling for the CEO and the corporation.

This is an area of sensitivity for two reasons, the first derived from the nature of media and the second derived from the role of directors and senior managers.

## 3.2 Core Responsibilities

### *3.2.1 Media Relations*

Media relations, in common with many of the activities and roles listed in the two tables, is an intermediated form of communication. What this means is that to reach your target audience with your message, you have to work through go-betweens or intermediaries. For example, if you give an interview to a journalist, she or he may quote you, accurately or otherwise, but how they interpret the message will be their decision. Subsequently, subeditors and editors will review the copy and decide whether or not and how prominently to run the story. A simple scan of differing media will confirm the wide interpretations accorded with any one news item.

Directors and senior managers are often required to be the public face or voice of the corporation. Different individuals will approach this task with very different levels of enthusiasm. Some will enjoy the exposure, the chance to air their views publicly. Some will seek to avoid it whenever possible. They see it as a high-risk activity they would prefer to avoid. Professional advisers need always to keep in mind that those who are most desirous of talking to journalists are not necessarily the most skilled at doing so, especially when they have not prepared properly for the encounter.

There are many risks involved in dealing with interviews and comments to media. And the risks are not just oral. In filmed or live interviews, the risks of body language, looking bored or disengaged when dealing with a serious subject or being

inappropriately dressed so that many viewers will only remember the strange dress or violently patterned tie have to be considered.

Interviews conducted at weekends or during leisure time carry particular sartorial risks. For a senior, middle-aged man to appear in a tee shirt does not work, while wearing a suit and tie would be equally inappropriate. Similar rules apply to women, who at least have a wider choice of attire from which to choose.

There are a number of essentials for any successful media encounter. The most basic, although often overlooked, is that the interviewee has something interesting to say.

She or he must be quite clear what the message is, that it accords with corporate policy and be satisfied that it is likely to match the interests of the interviewer. This analysis is straightforward when discussing major events – financial announcements, significant product developments, business acquisitions or disposals – but less so on other occasions. To seek interviews when there is no significant news value to offer risks overexposure for the executive and indifference or irritation on the part of journalists.

Timing is also important. Trying to give an interview about a new factory investment or a store opening on the day of a government budget announcement is unlikely to arouse much media interest. Selection of the time of day for an interview needs to take account of news deadlines and their impact on the work of journalists. Very few reporters will be tempted by an invitation to an early breakfast encounter.

And for any international organisation with offices in different time zones, when planning major announcements, consideration must be given to how the news will be released in different parts of the world. The usual decision-making process is that head office will decide what best suits them (together with a calculation for listed companies of stock exchange regulations) and then seek to fit everyone around their chosen time. Inevitably, somewhere in the world, it will be 3.00 am.

For the corporate communication professional, the key to success is preparation. For inexperienced executives, unaccustomed to dealing with media, training programmes can be sourced, but these are never a substitute for proper planning ahead of an interview.

First, the judgment has to be made about the news value of an interview and what the message should be. This needs to be discussed and agreed with the interviewee, who will need to be clear about what should be covered in the interview and what should not. A written brief may be appropriate, together with a background note about the journalist if the executive is unfamiliar with them.

Also vital is a discussion – probably supported by a note – of the likely questions that may arise and how they should be answered. Warnings should be given about the dangers of going 'off the record', a suggestion that interesting information will be divulged for background only and not to be reported. Such agreements are not necessarily honoured. And recording the encounter is useful in case of any dispute about what was or was not said during the interview.

Some executives will find these preparatory steps irksome, being confident that they know how to behave and what to say and are comfortable that they know the journalist well. These situations are not easy to deal with, and accidents will happen, with a piece being published or broadcast that differs significantly and embarrassingly from the intended message. The most difficult issue to deal with is an executive

taking an unplanned call from a journalist and chatting either on or off the record. This tendency must be discouraged.

Executives have to learn, one way or another, that journalists are not their friends – nor their enemies – but professional people with a job to do, get a newsworthy story, and that the executive has a professional job to do, deliver one, as planned.

It should be clear by now that talking to media is not a simple task. In order to manage the flow of corporate information and to ensure it is both accurate and on message, it is of critical importance that only those (few) people who have the necessary skills and experience are allowed to do so. A list of those who are authorised to speak to media should be maintained, and it must be made clear that nobody else is entitled to do so.

It is likely, but not invariably so, that an interview opportunity will have been triggered by the issuance of a press release, a summary of a potential news item circulated to media by the corporation. The corporate communication department will be responsible for drafting the release but will need to liaise with, and seek the approval of, those who have an interest in the subject of the release.

This list will include those who are to be quoted; those with a material interest in the subject, such as product or service managers, financial staff and potentially lawyers, depending on the sensitivity of the news; and those members of senior management who have the responsibility for signing off the final draft.

It is critical from the outset that the member of the corporate communication department responsible for the master copy is clearly identified so that various changes, of which there will be many, can be integrated without confusion or error.

The final version, which may or may not closely resemble the original draft, must meet certain criteria: it should be short, not always possible with complicated issues such as financial results, make its points clearly and be in simple language. Jargon should be avoided. Even with complex issues, it should be easily grasped by a nonspecialist reader.

If the release is to be circulated internationally, corporate communications will be responsible for translating the text. For example, if the draft is in simplified Chinese characters, traditional Chinese characters and English may be required. Discussions among translators and comparisons of various versions to ensure the original meaning is not corrupted and the style is elegant and appropriate can be time consuming, so the translators will wish to have the earliest possible view of a working draft, provided of course it will not be at a stage when it may be subject to radical alteration.

If the subject matter is confidential until the moment the release is circulated, a note will need to be kept of those who are entitled to see the text and steps taken to ensure that nobody else reads it. Information leaks from all types of organisation are quite common, always deplored, and in the case of highly sensitive information, such as the financial results of publicly listed companies, extremely damaging.

Major or sensitive releases will require a briefing for senior management on likely questions and appropriate answers. For international organisations, gathering and refining this material from relevant departments and managers takes time and effort: not everyone approached will share the sense of urgency of those asking the questions.

After the release has been distributed, corporate communication staff must be prepared to respond to calls from media seeking clarification and further information.

It will also fall to the corporate communication department to prepare lists of those to whom releases should be sent. Such lists will be tailored to corporate requirements and consist of individual journalists, news outlets and media organisations that are interested in the organisation and its field of operations. These lists should always be available and updated to ensure the contents remain accurate.

For major occasions, a press conference will be called. The first decision to be made is whether or not the subject of the proposed press conference is of sufficient value to justify the time and expense of its organisation. This is not just an internal calculation. Inviting media to a conference or briefing and having just a handful turn-up is not good news either internally with management or externally with media who will not respect the corporate communication team's professional judgment.

The decision made, the invitation list needed to be prepared, the logistics of setting up the venue agreed and executed and those appearing on the platform will require prepared statement, and rehearsals for them will have to be booked. With financial result announcements, separate briefings for financial analysts may be required. And, of course, preparation and approval of the press release will be taking place simultaneously.

### *3.2.2 Social Media*

Social media have brought huge benefits to our lives. They enable us to communicate instantly with family and friends, to access swiftly information that previously might have taken weeks to research, to contact like-minded social groups or to exchange information about the quality of commercial products and services. They provide entertainment and games. Online shopping can be a great boon, while posing a significant threat to traditional retailers. They also present at a more sinister level vast opportunities for surveillance and the invasion of privacy, as revealed by Edward Snowden's leaking of NSA documents. Social media have also enabled an aspiring US President, Barack Obama, to raise very large sums of money for his first presidential campaign.

It is both the ubiquity and the global reach of social media that pose the opportunity and the challenge to corporate communicators; from our point of view, social media are simply a global grapevine. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, grapevines, those informal networks common to all organisations that circulate information, rumours and gossip among staff, are uncontrollable and ineradicable; further, while frequently and conventionally deplored by senior management, most people are enthusiastic participants.

In dealing with social media, corporate communicators have to accept some potentially unwelcome realities. The first, and most critical, is that the emphasis on the management of corporate messaging that features elsewhere in this chapter is simply not possible. The targeting of selected media in controlled circumstances

through intermediating journalists cannot be achieved with social media, although some efforts have been made by fashion houses that invited widely followed fashion bloggers to couture shows.

However, in a world where celebrities can number their Twitter followers in hundreds of thousands, selectivity among audiences is difficult to achieve. Prudent engagement rather than message management becomes the necessary approach. But this is constrained by the second reality: that comment in social media is frequently vigorous, if not downright abusive, and seldom posted with any concern for accuracy or with any attribution. While picking up the phone to a journalist who may have published an inaccuracy is straightforward, responding to an anonymous post is next to impossible.

This presents the third reality: dealing with social media is a labour-intensive activity, and some corporations are slow to make the investment, either because they are reluctant to commit the resources or because they are nervous of engagement. But social media cannot be ignored.

How best to engage and how not to do so are best illustrated by two examples. In 2013, Amazon launched its instant delivery service using a combination of traditional media and Twitter/YouTube, underscoring the point that conventional and social media are not mutually exclusive channels. Its achievement was to start a conversation about the next steps in delivery service and to highlight its positioning as an innovative company.

In the same year, J.P. Morgan, the largest US bank defined by assets, had a less happy experience with Twitter. The bank had been hit by billions of US dollars in fines since the financial crisis of 2008/2009 and was thus a prominent institution in any discussion of the finance industry. Towards the end of the year, they announced they would host a Twitter conversation and invited people to tweet questions. The volume, variety and frequent hostility of the questions and comments were such that the event was cancelled. J.P. Morgan appeared to have believed they could focus the conversation in a way that was not achievable in social media.

Finally, a note about Twitter: celebrities, sports stars, movie stars and, yes, the President of the United States, all Twitter. It is just conceivable that prominent business figures whose names are synonymous with the companies they lead may be able to justify doing so. For every other business leader, it is a mistake for the same reason they should not blog: they have too little of value to offer. Twittering should be left to those who live in the public eye.

### *3.2.3 Crisis Communications*

Crisis communications, the process of dealing with sudden significant problems or events, in many organisations will or should be covered by a plan. No crisis plan can cover every contingency in detail, nor should it attempt to do so, or senior management will be confronted with a vast document at the very moment when they have to think and act quickly. Plans should deal with two categories of responsibility: how

disruption to the work of the organisation will be minimised and normal activity restored and the identity of those who will manage the crisis and its attendant communications. The chain of command and who should be informed and consulted and when should be addressed.

In a crisis, rapid response is vital. At the most basic level, it may avoid further damage to the business or even, on extreme occasions, help save lives. A major event – passenger plane crash, building fire, terrorist attack, computer network collapse and kidnapping of senior executives – will prompt close media scrutiny. Recent examples include the sudden shutdown of the world's most prominent Bitcoin Exchange – Mt. Gox – in February 2014 and the tragic disappearance of Malaysian Airlines' flight MH370 in March 2014, both of which have attracted tremendous media coverage and emotional discussion.

Apart from reporting the drama of the event, media will be looking for immediate responses from management and, failing such a response, are likely to fill the vacuum with suggestions the management is slow to respond or, even, incompetent. Once such a story is circulated, it is extremely difficult for management credibility to recover.

As will be obvious, the customary time-consuming processes of press release preparation are not possible in these circumstances. Nor can staff when preparing a management crisis plan anticipate the nature of every crisis and the manner in which it will develop, so there is unlikely to be a ready-made press release on file.

The most important rule when making the first response to a crisis is not to say too much. Hurried speculation as to cause, extent of damage, attribution of responsibility and other sensitive matters are almost certain to be inaccurate and may subsequently be used against the corporation. The best approach is to express sympathy or concern for those affected, be they customers, staff or members of the public, and assure that management is focusing on the issue and to give an assurance that further information will be given as soon as it is possible (accurately) to do so. On 16 April 2014, a South Korean ferry, MV Sewol, carrying 476 people and cargo between Incheon and Jeju, capsized and sank. Initially, South Korean officials reported that most people on board had been rescued, a statement subsequently proved to be extremely inaccurate. Tragically, many more had been lost (note to editors that no final number as yet confirmed). This misleading statement, plus subsequent allegations that the ferry was overloaded with cargo, led to the resignation of the South Korean Prime Minister before the end of the month.

While being clear about what to say, it is also important to be clear about who is to say it and who not. The rules about who is permitted and who is not allowed to talk to media, referred to above, may break down under stress. In these circumstances, general speculative comment from members of staff, at any level, can be as damaging as it can be inaccurate, which brings up two related issues: internal communications and the deployment of corporate communication staff.

The chain of command and communication procedures in the crisis plan should set out who should be told immediately when a major event occurs. Head office personnel dislike intensely learning about a major problem in the business from news headlines rather than from colleagues. Similarly, staff at all levels prefer to hear from line management or internal communication channels about the impact of

a crisis. So relaying the news and broad details of what has happened together with the approved response within the organisation is vital. It should also be made clear that nobody other than approved spokesmen should make any comment at all to media.

In deploying his or her resources, the head of corporate communications must consider where her media team should be located. For her, the decision will be clear: the plan should locate her at the central command team management office so that advice may be given on critical communications issue and these may be executed promptly.

The rest of the communication team will either be in their own offices or back-up offices if their own are disabled, while some should if possible be located at the site of a serious event. That is where teams of news media will gather and where management of the communication process will be important. While media have every right to discuss events with fire, police and other emergency responders, interviews with individual members of staff should be avoided.

The on-site corporate communication team must maintain an open channel with the head of corporate communications to ensure they have the most recent approved statements. And they can update the crisis managers on what is happening on the ground. Consideration will also be given to communication, where appropriate, with customers, suppliers, regulators and local government or any other critically interested party.

During a crisis, close attention must also be paid to social media, if such a process is not already routinely in place, and corporate communication teams must be prepared to engage as and when appropriate. Where those postings do identify themselves, then referrals to frequently asked question (FAQ) sites and websites can be made. The assumption is made in nearly all crisis plans, as indeed in this discussion, that crises are driven by a single and very sudden event. This is not, however, invariably the case.

For example, in the winter of 2002 in Asia, there were rumours of increasing numbers of pneumonia cases in southern China and, subsequently, in Hong Kong. These were initially dismissed as a seasonal phenomenon. Later, when cases multiplied, some governments recommended health and cleaning precautions; the virus H5N1 was identified as the cause of the disease that came to be known as SARS, severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Corporations, along with the medical profession, had to devise plans to deal with SARS, which appeared to be highly contagious, although the exact means of transmission was not at that time identified. It was believed that Tamiflu, an existing medication, was helpful in treatment, and the world was scoured for supplies.

Large companies split work teams to avoid entire critical functions being disabled, set up regular intensive office cleaning of programmes and issued face masks. All these and other measures had to be communicated to staff.

From this experience, there are two lessons to be learned: first, not all crises can be anticipated and, second, crises can arrive silently and by stealth.

### *3.2.4 Internal Communications*

The focus of attention properly devoted to communications with external audiences should never ignore the importance of communicating positively and effectively with an internal one, an organisation's own staff.

Staff are critical to an organisation's success. Indeed, for those companies operating in the service sector, they are possibly the most significant assets. Staff performance dictates the quality of service delivery, and while general managerial competence, or lack thereof, is important, it is also itself a determinant of how staff perform.

Organisations rely on a variety of channels to effect these communications: intranets, emails and, occasionally with very large organisations, their own internal television programming. The key point to grasp with internal communication programmes is that to be effective, staff must find them sufficiently interesting, in whatever format they may be produced, to pay attention to them. Four factors are key: relevance, good content, professional production values and trust.

Relevance is straightforward: the matter has to be of interest to staff in the context of their working lives and it must be timely. Information and comment from senior management immediately following the release of the company's financial results will be interesting, a hot topic. Two or three days later, it will be of far less interest. Media will have covered the results in detail and there will be little left to add. It will be old news and stale views.

To avoid these issues, those in charge of internal communication programmes must work to ensure that senior management pay appropriate attention to planning internal communications as well as external when making major announcements.

Maintaining staff interest in internal channels entails constant updating with a corresponding level of resources to meet these demands. An intranet that is updated on a weekly basis is an irrelevance. Daily is a minimum, and in times of major events or crises, more often will be needed.

Good content can be defined as relevance, described above, plus professional presentation – sharp and well written, illustrated and presented – together with subject matter that appeals to its audience. Internal communication programmes are by definition business communications. However, people at work are social beings as well as workers. They have interest in their colleagues and any social programmes the company may offer. A balance between, sometimes dry, business content and social issues must be maintained.

This raises the issue of presentation and production values. On a daily basis in their private lives, whether online or via conventional communication channels, staff are exposed to highly professional and often beautifully executed programming. Anything that falls far short of this level will be dismissed as amateur and uninteresting. While non-media organisations may lack the resources and skills of media companies, they must, nonetheless, strive for the highest standards.

This raises the issue of the deployment of the most senior management. They are occasions when a straight-to-camera message from the CEO or chairman is

important. They have something significant to say, and their appearance will underscore the importance of their message as well as giving staff, who may seldom encounter them in person, the chance to see them in action.

There are, however, two constraints. The first is the risk of overexposure. A CEO who is constantly exposed on the intranet or internal TV station will find her value at some point diminished by the sheer familiarity of her face or voice. The second point is that CEOs are not generally gifted broadcasters. That is not why they are hired. Thus they will need training, guidance and rehearsal to ensure that when they do speak, they do the best possible job.

Occasionally, a CEO will be tempted to blog. This should be avoided. While CEOs as private citizens will have through the breadth of their experience interesting views on many issues of public importance – with few repercussions from any offence caused by their publication – the same does not apply in their directorial role. As CEO they will be constrained by their responsibilities so that their blog will likely be indiscreet, infrequent or too trivial to be of much interest to staff.

But however well these channels are managed, staff still like to be kept informed through traditional line manager communication. They want to hear the message from their boss or boss's boss. This reinforces work place relationships as well as confidence in management. If a major announcement, either positive or negative, has been made, the ability of a manager to respond to a team's questions or to provide further background is important.

Advance briefing notes to managers, where confidentiality and regulatory restrictions permit, are valuable. But not every manager is a born communicator, and they will often find reasons why they are not able to take part in a line communication exercise. Training, practice and encouragement are then needed.

The value of an effective internal communication programme can be critical in building and maintaining staff morale. This raises the last of the four criteria mentioned above, trust.

Staff do not expect to be given highly sensitive or confidential information that, by definition, has to be restricted to a small group of people. On the other hand, as competent and professional people – and if they are not, the company may not remain in business for very long – they expect honesty and openness from their senior management. They will resent what they feel is propaganda or, worse, deception.

All organisations have grapevines, those informal channels of communication through which gossip, information and disinformation flow. Sometimes, this information, or just rumours, reach the outside world and appear in media. It should be noted that information also reaches the outside world in the form of leaks, when someone deliberately and anonymously speaks to a journalist.

These events are a not uncommon feature of corporate life. They become a particular concern for staff when they touch upon their own welfare, above all when there are leaks about possible cuts in staffing.

These leaks place senior managers in an extremely difficult position. For example, if staff cuts are in prospect, they demand careful planning – there are often contractual and legal issues to be resolved as well as logistics – and until these issues are resolved, nothing can be said or put into effect.

Thus, when they are confronted with such a leak, senior managers have a major problem. If they deny the report, they are lying. If they confirm, they may find implementation extremely difficult. There is nothing they can say.

Even if the report is untrue, to deny the leak or rumour can be fatal, as thereafter whenever reports of staff cuts appear and management refuses to deny them, they will in effect have confirmed the reports that will then spread everywhere.

The ability to keep information confidential is a vital but not always recognised quality in senior management. The other lesson to be noted is that the greater the number of people with access to a piece of confidential information, the greater the risk of a leak.

### *3.2.5 Values, Culture and Brand*

Returning to the first table in this chapter that listed leadership roles, it was noted that managing the company's reputation was very important for corporate communicators. So far, the discussion has tended to focus on the defensive aspects of this responsibility, how to avoid accidents in interviews or respond in a crisis, but the primary task for professionals is actively to promote the company, its values and its brand.

In the second table that deals with functional responsibilities, the corresponding items that cover this practice are reputation management, brand strategy, marketing communication and advertising.

All companies have a corporate culture and a set of values, beliefs and practices that determine how they run their business, interact with their customers and manage their staff. They may not have written down their culture or formalised it into a statement, but it will exist.

In respect of brand, the word started life as a trademark thus related to corporate identity, while for many professional people, it has evolved as a term that describes the sum of consumer perceptions of a company.

For the present discussion of the role of corporate communicators, these distinctions are not critical. What matters is that he or she should have a thorough understanding of the business, its culture and its values.

This is essential not merely so that any internal and external expression of the company and its products and services should be consistent with these qualities. It is also important in the event the senior management of the company at any time plan to embark on a course of action that is inconsistent with its culture and values. The task of the corporate communicator is then to advise of the possible consequences reputationally of their decision. If the senior management still judge they have proper grounds for proceeding, then it falls to the corporate communication team to present the decision in the best possible light and to manage any negative response.

Thus, the core of corporate communications is the promotion of the culture and values of the company whether that is through a projection of the values and business

of the corporate entity or of its component products and services. In carrying out the latter tasks, the corporate communication team will also work with relevant line managers and their staffs.

## 3.3 Shared Responsibilities

### *3.3.1 Brand and the Marketing Department*

A consideration of both tables one and two makes clear by the allocation of percentages that while certain roles and responsibilities are common to almost all professionals, others are not. Media and crisis communications have already been highlighted as among the almost universal tasks that fall to corporate communicators, but in respect of other roles, the job description and the list of responsibilities will vary from company to company.

Among these variations, already referred to above, are brand strategy, reputation management, marketing communication and advertising. Many large companies have marketing departments with explicit responsibility for these activities. In this context, brand is given its broader interpretation as the sum of consumers' thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the company, its products and services.

It is at this point that interpretations of brand, corporate culture and corporate values tend to overlap, at best, or become confused. There is also a lack of clarity, as may be deduced from the two tables, as to who has pre-emptive rights to particular tasks.

Marketing is seen by its practitioners as a process of analysis to identify target markets and particular customer groups within those markets, a process known as segmentation, and then devising or positioning products and services to appeal to them. This work inevitably involves consideration of distribution and price.

There are three critical points arising from this: First, the nature of their work places marketing personnel close to the core strategy of the business. Second, the budgets allocated to research and advertising are very large thereby increasing their influence within the company. Third, their work is focused on control, control of message, control of distribution and control of price.

The issue of control differentiates marketing and corporate communications in those organisations in which the two roles are separate. As noted earlier, in respect of corporate communications with media, there are intermediaries such as journalists, who interpret a corporate message before it is relayed to its intended targets, readers, listeners and viewers. Managing this message transmission requires particular skills.

The content of advertising, at least within the bounds of the law, regulation and concerns for public decency is entirely within the control of those paying for the advertisement. In making decisions about design and content, in-house advertising executives will be guided by research – usually commissioned externally – and by their advertising agency, who will probably also advise on the choice of media employed to maximise impact on the target audience.

Nonetheless, it is important for the organisations they serve that corporate communicators and marketers cooperate sufficiently to ensure that there are no variations in how they view the company's brand and values and how these are represented internally and externally.

But there are areas in which the skill set and methods of operation of marketing teams are unsuited to managing image. Crises, as discussed above, are played out in media and are not always susceptible to advertising's influence. Further, the need for flexible execution of an agreed strategy conducted through intermediated channels is a mode of operation alien to most marketers. Similarly, major financial announcements such as results, acquisitions or disposals involve consideration of media reactions, the views of financial markets and other key audiences. The team working on these projects will involve corporate communication professionals, either internal, external or both. Marketers are unlikely to be involved.

### *3.3.2 Corporate Citizenship*

Community relations and corporate citizenship, sometimes described as corporate and social responsibility (CSR), are an area of activity that often but not invariably falls within the corporate communication portfolio. They are influential in building and enhancing a company's image.

In older companies, CSR often has its roots in philanthropy, charitable giving and a policy of providing financial and other forms of support for areas of societal need. Issues supported often cover health, education, disaster relief, environmental causes and care for the elderly.

Over time, companies tend to focus on particular programmes in order to maximise their impact and adopt internal administrative procedures to ensure funds are channelled to the best-managed projects and are properly spent. Funds can be distributed locally, regionally or internationally.

These activities have become more prominent as national and international single-issue groups, or NGOs, have grown in number and influence. Companies are exhorted not just to give money but also modify their behaviour, avoiding, for example, trading with other companies that are judged to be either unethical or showing a proper lack of regard for the safety of their employees. Companies may also come under pressure to modify their business practices to avoid damaging the environment. NGOs are highly effective in running such campaigns.

The core activities of certain industries, especially extractive industries such as mining or drilling, are under particular scrutiny, while the environmental impacts of a company's own business, its suppliers, associates or customers are closely monitored.

Managing these programmes, which can flare into a crisis and which frequently play out in media, requires skills that typically are the province of corporate communicators.

### 3.3.3 Investor Relations

Investor relations is a practice usually confined to publicly listed companies, who need to communicate with financial analysts and rating agencies in order to explain and elucidate the progress and strategy of the business.

Financial analysts typically work for insurance companies, banks and investment banks, and their task is to produce reports both for internal and external consumption that may mark a company's stock on which they are reporting as either a buy, hold or, less frequently, a sell. These analysts are known as 'sell-side' analysts.

'Buy-side' analysts, who typically work for holders or potential holders of the company's stock, do not publish research or buy, hold or sell recommendations.

Also significant for investor relations are rating agencies, such as Moody's and Standard & Poor's, who are concerned with the company's ability to pay back its debts. They award credit ratings to the company's issued debt based on their analysis, and the nature of that rating may affect the cost to the company of raising money.

Investor relations is customarily the responsibility of the finance department, who has the technical skills necessary both to explain the presentation of the company's business in the accounts and to deal with technical questions. However, when announcing financial results or major events, such acquisitions and disposals, close cooperation is necessary with finance and corporate communications to ensure that the presentation to both audiences is aligned, accurate and properly understood.

### 3.3.4 Government Relations

Government relations, often called lobbying, is a highly specialised activity that sometimes forms part of the corporate communication portfolio. Otherwise, line reporting is to other senior corporate managers or board members with a particular interest or expertise.

Sometimes, the services of external consultants are employed to assist the company to achieve its goals. The issues influencing the choice and balance of in-house and external consultancy are explored later in this chapter.

Although government relations is probably more highly developed in the United States than elsewhere, it is nonetheless an almost universal phenomenon. The reasons are simple: even in economies that have a very low proportion of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the influence of government on the business sector is huge. In these circumstances, seeking to influence government policy is an obvious, if not inevitable, course of action.

Government policies and legislation that touch business in even the most avowedly capitalist economies include, but are not limited to, corporate taxation, health and safety legislation, employment law, interest rates and fiscal policy, environmental restrictions, tariffs and, where they exist, government subsidies.

Many other interests will also be clamouring for government attention: electorates, NGOs, political parties, foreign governments and various departments within the government itself that will be competing for scarce resources. Consequently, it

is unsurprising that companies often devote considerable resources of their own to influencing government.

The techniques employed in the conduct of government relations will vary depending on the national context. Broadly speaking, companies have two different but not mutually exclusive avenues of approach: to work through a trade association – probably one of the best known in the United States is the National Rifle Association (NRA), which has successfully resisted almost every effort to tighten US gun controls despite occasional massacres – or a chamber of commerce. Or they can create their own lobbying programme.

Techniques include simple persuasion through arguing a case or making a formal presentation, offering financial support for a party or candidate, advertising campaigns and the creation of alliances. Borrowing an example illustrated by Argenti (2007), in 2001, Microsoft had been lobbying against copyright violators resulting in a government crackdown on software privacy. It was only later that year, in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks that Microsoft was able to cite the incident to succeed with its allies in persuading the Bush administration to go further by allotting over $70 million to improve 'cybersecurity' in America.

Clearly, there are risks that such activities may be seen as an improper use of funds, and corporate communicators always need to be aware of what may be seen as legitimate activity and what may be considered, rightly or wrongly, improper activity liable to damage the company's reputation.

## 3.4 Remaining on Message

As was made clear in the earlier discussion of media relations and internal communications, being sure you have something interesting and newsworthy to communicate and then delivering it clearly and consistently is vital to corporate communication success.

More broadly in the context of corporate reputation, values, culture and brand, a consistent vision of a company's business that is understood and valued by customers and other critical audiences is vital to success. Delivering this goal requires a great deal more than briefing a director on the message to be conveyed in an interview. It requires more than the hard work of creating a strategy and vision for the company or group. It demands discipline.

There is a natural tendency to regard a company as a single entity, a seamless brand. Whatever the industry, we are likely to have views about major players such as Alibaba, Lenovo, Apple, Facebook, Mercedes-Benz, Louis Vuitton or Bank of China that take little account of the diversity of their products or divisions.

For companies, their brands have enormous value. They are carefully nurtured to promote sales and to gain an edge over competitors. They are also, to some extent, an illusion. International companies can include different products manufactured by separate divisions and often by units scattered around the globe. Or the final product may be an assembly of components sourced from independent suppliers in different continents. Service companies, such as giant financial institutions, will have different products for different market segments and will often be constrained in

their national offerings by local regulation. Taking Apple as an example, it is no news that the majority of its components are produced by overseas companies. According to a well-researched report (Duhigg and Bradsher 2012) published on The New York Times, all iPhones contain hundreds of parts, an estimated 90 % of which are manufactured abroad. The positioning of iPhone as a prestigious product crafted by the United States is to a considerable extent an illusion.

Further, international companies have to take account of local tastes when developing a new, or modifying an existing, product. Any company in the luxury good business that does not listen to its Chinese managers and heed the tastes of its Chinese customers is unlikely to have a prosperous future in one of the world's largest markets.

'The process of glocalization is that of hybridization, a continuum of adaptation between the global and the local' (Wang 2000, p. 108), which is an essential strategy for multinational companies in regional marketing for its local success. Taking Rolls-Royce's adaptation of its Ghost for the Chinese market as an example, it launched a limited edition Extended Wheelbase model with added length, in response to Chinese demands for more room in the back.

Within the company itself, different divisions will have different customer bases and be competing for investment and resources with other divisions, while at the most senior level decisions about future direction, expansion into new markets, or exiting existing markets, or discussion of acquisitions and disposals is likely to be the subject of vigorous debate.

All such internal differences are essential for a company's health and, on a lesser scale, will be echoed in small businesses everywhere. They can nonetheless complicate the delivery of clear and consistent messages by corporate communicators.

As suggested by van Riel and Fombrun (2007), one of the key tasks of corporate communication is to develop initiatives that bridge the company's desired identity and brand features for effective brand differentiation. To achieve this goal, it is the task of the board to create a coherent and efficient entity from the above diverse elements, select target markets in which the company can compete successfully with the competitors and create a strategy that delivers profits.

To assist the process, some companies produce mission statements that set out in a few short paragraphs, goals, ambitions and values. Much work and research will be devoted to branding and related promotion. And all this will provide context for the demanding logistics of creating, pricing, distributing, promoting and selling products.

The work of corporate communicators is to ensure that the strategy, brand, positioning and direction of the company are clearly understood both internally and externally. Their task is to ensure that those who are briefed and cleared to deliver such information do so when called upon and other people do not.

Ensuring this happens across a large company demands absolutely clear lines of responsibility and control. However, accidents will happen. Someone, somewhere, will offer an opinion on the record that is off-message, or a leak will occur.

Additionally, those variances in conditions between different international markets mentioned above ensure that what is perceived to be important in New York or Stuttgart will look very different in Delhi or Shanghai, and vice versa. In such

circumstances, the communications from head or regional offices can often be locally discounted or ignored.

The implicit assumption in this section so far is that the messages from the top will always be clear. This is not always the case.

Sometimes, a strategy will be in the process of creation. Possibly, the case for an acquisition or disposal may not be as compelling for an external audience as it appeared to the board when the decision was made. Occasionally, corporate communicators may be given a two-hour-long PowerPoint presentation and told to turn it into a press release.

This task requires skill as well as tact. Any project, strategy or policy, however long, that cannot be reduced to a summary paragraph – at a stretch two – does not exist. That is why the discipline of producing a release can be of great value.

However, it is not the task of the corporate communication team to tell the CEO or the chairman that they have produced nonsense. Its work is to produce the summary that will serve as a professional release and satisfy the board, plus its legal or other relevant advisers.

This conclusion takes us back to the tables introduced this chapter. Corporate communication team must work closely with the CEO and other senior managers to ensure that the business is clear in its aspirations and goals and that clarity is communicated internally and externally.

Achieving this demands the ability to render complicated issues in a coherent and succinct format, plus the management skills to control how and by whom such information is delivered.

## 3.5 In-House and Consultancy

While people who work in-house (they are employed full time by a single corporate entity) and those employed by consultancies (they sell their services to companies and any other entity that wishes to avail themselves of their work) employ the same skills and techniques with broadly shared objectives, the differences between them are such that a consideration of their differing operations is useful when making corporate communication career decisions.

This does not mean that a choice of either consultancy or in-house is a career-long decision. People can and do move backwards and forwards between them. And many companies have their own corporate communication departments and still choose from time to time to take on consultants. That said, some people are temperamentally better suited to one path or the other.

The major difference between in-house and consultancy is defined by cash flow. Those who work in-house generally enjoy a more reliable cash flow; those who work in consultancies are constantly searching for new business to maintain it.

Those working in-house are not entirely spared from financial pressures. In common with their colleagues, they will be subject to internal competition for resources, annual budgets and performance targets. They may, when economic

times are challenging, be subject to budget and resource cuts. Nonetheless, they will on a daily basis operate on a reasonable assumption that they have the resources to get through the year and can thus focus on meeting performance targets.

Apart from more junior staff, all consultants will have new business targets set for them. New business is needed not just to grow the consultancy but also to avoid contraction.

Consultancies operate on two bases: project work and retainer work. Project work by definition comes to an end. Even long-term retainers end eventually as individuals, either in the consultancy or in the client, move on, or the client decides to open a contract renewal to competitive bids or any number of other causes. The challenge therefore is to ensure that the volume and value of business coming in comfortably exceeds that which is being lost. Some people enjoy the constant search and pitching for business more than others.

The potential upside for consultants, especially those who are new to the corporate communication business, is that the variety of the work they are required to do is likely to be more varied and thus the opportunities for learning greater. People who work in-house always have internal clients whose needs must be properly addressed, but the consultant may have clients who work in different industries, while involvement in pitching for different companies, even when the contract is not won, can offer considerable variety.

Pitching for new business involves a particular and vital skill: setting fees that ensure the business is profitable for the consultancy. There are consultancies that are sufficiently competent and prominent in their field of operation to enable them to charge fees with substantial margins, but they are a minority.

For most consultancies, the eternal problem is overservicing (or undercharging, which is a different expression of the same phenomenon). The pressure to win the business and then keep the client happy creates a mismatch between time committed and income generated. This can be a particular problem in Asia where clients are often not sufficiently familiar with corporate communication work to allocate funding appropriate to its benefits. People who work in-house are likely to enjoy better and more stable resources.

When working for a client, the consultancy will wish to have strong relationships with the most senior people, preferably the chairman or CEO, they are able to reach. The more senior your client, the greater budget they will have at their disposal, and the more interesting the work is likely to be. This is potentially a source of friction with the in-house corporate communication team who will strive to maintain control of the consultancy while extracting the maximum amount of work for the lowest possible level of fees.

The reasons for a company with in-house resources to hire corporate communication consultancies fall broadly into two categories: a short-term requirement for particular skills or resources such that it would be impracticable to seek out, hire and dispose of in-house personnel or the need for particular skills that are either absent or under-resourced in-house. The former could be as simple as junior support staff for a major event. The latter could cover areas such as government relations or financial expertise, work for which highly specialised consultancies exist.

In respect of the latter, in-house staff will potentially be unhappy. The consultancy will be interacting with their internal clients, who may regard the consultants as an interesting new toy, and absorbing cash which otherwise could have been deployed in-house. The skill required of the consultants is to avoid such friction. Making enemies within your client organisation is not clever. The combination of professional authority, tact and occasional deference necessary for a consultant's role is a skill set of useful general application.

From a career point of view, experience of both in-house and consultancy is valuable. Having been a consultant highlights the need to identify and service internal clients for the greater corporate good. It also creates a degree of flexibility that can sometimes be absent from those who have spent many years within the same company.

And for those who work in-house, there is both the opportunity and the need to get to understand in depth how a business functions. Consultants may become extremely close to a company on a single issue or campaign, but they are not around long enough to have broader and deeper knowledge.

## 3.6 Measurement, Accountability and Success

How do you measure success? How can you tell when you have done well? Your boss praises you, pays you a bonus or gives you a good year-end appraisal?

Well, perhaps, but these rewards merely prompt the question: On what basis are they granted? Where are the hard data that support the accolades, or are they attributable to your personal charm, ingratiating manner and willingness to listen to your boss's anecdotes?

Your job description and objectives for the year (where these exist; some corporations are surprisingly lax about such things) are a good starting point, guiding your work and providing you with a checklist. They are a useful basis for any discussion of your performance.

However, unlike those managers who have revenue targets for the year and other hard goals that are easily measured, corporate communicators are at a disadvantage. They do not have clear metrics. Many attempts have been made to resolve this difficulty. None is entirely satisfactory.

Measuring media coverage achieved has been one such solution, modified with a recognition that allowance has to be made for prioritising good coverage over bad when considering the achievements of corporate communicators.

Further qualifications can be made based on the perceived quality of the media, with a piece on local radio in a remote town where there are few customers being judged of lesser value than an interview on, say, a major business channel such as Bloomberg. Trying to assess the performance of the interviewee, which can affect impact, is a controversial area.

Your CEO's Bloomberg interview may be acceptable, no obvious mistakes having been made, but a discussion about raising the level of that performance should be restricted to a private discussion rather than featuring in a free-ranging assessment of your performance at the end of the year.

Occasionally, attempts are made to ascribe a monetary value to coverage achieved based on advertising rates for equivalent space or airtime. These efforts are seldom judged to be credible.

There are two substantial objections to the general approach described above. The first is that maximising media coverage is not necessarily an appropriate or desirable objective. There will be times (awaiting financial results, during the discussion of acquisitions, mergers or disposals, pending staff reductions, in the course of crises) when absence of coverage and leaks is a critical goal. The preferences of individual CEOs will also make a difference. Some will be temperamentally disposed to court media; others will be media shy and encourage others to follow their example.

In such circumstances, corporate practitioners are deprived of their metric or put in the impossible position of trying to prove a negative – the crisis coverage would have been so much worse if we had not taken the steps that we did to modulate reporting.

The second objection is simply that the methodology focuses attention on just one criterion, media coverage, thereby overlooking other programmes such as internal communications, or, as noted above, crisis communication efforts, or CSR work.

There are indeed some highly experienced corporate communicators who say that their work defies measurement given some of the qualifications described above. But before a premature concession of defeat, it is worth looking at the issues of accountability.

When views are formed about the performance of any manager, consideration will be given to soft as well as hard targets and qualities. The soft issues will include considerations of management style and perceived abilities, whether or not the manager is a natural follower or a strong leader, temperament issues (is the manager calm in a crisis or prone to panic?), whether or not the manager is a team player and an assessment of that most elusive quality – 'judgment'.

Judgment in this context refers to critical insight and discernment. For example, your CEO or board may be about to take a decision – a controversial price increase, the site of a new factory or an investment in a country the government of which is widely considered to be oppressive – that may be controversial. Your input is requested on the scale of the controversy to which this may give rise. Will it pass quietly? Will it be manageable or seriously damaging to the company's reputation? Should the project be abandoned? In some industries, such as the extractive industries or tobacco, these questions will arise more often.

The timid response may always be to suggest that it is best not to proceed, but that will make you both predictable and useless. Your judgment will be assessed on the basis of how often you get the answer right.

These soft skills will become ever more important the more senior you become, and while they may not be as easy to measure as hard data targets, consensus among your peer group and superiors as to your possession of these vital qualities will form quickly.

The last aspect of accountability is your ability to manage the full range of your responsibilities. Your job description and your contract will define the person or persons to whom you report. As has been shown in the tables at the beginning of this

chapter, at the most senior level, the CEO will occupy much of your time and attention. However, if you are actively promoting the company, its values, its brand and its products, then you will have many other internal customers.

These internal customers will likely include subsidiary managers, where you may have staff deployed; product, brand or service managers; and finance, legal and even security. An important ingredient of your success will be correctly identifying these customers, building relationships with them and ensuring they receive from you and your staff the level of attention appropriate to their needs.

## 3.7 Success: Do You Have What It Takes?

So far this chapter has discussed technical skills and some of the broader management skills that success in corporate communications requires. Some of those soft skills are common to almost all senior management positions, but others are required to a greater degree for corporate communicators – judgment calls about internal and external reactions to controversial decisions, for example.

Another factor of a corporate communicator's life that can be stimulating, or distressing, depending on your point of view, is a lack of predictability. You can create plans and timetables for your year, but to an uncommon degree, you will be susceptible to disruption. Any unusual event in the organisation that has implications for internal and external communication implications will involve you and your team. Dealing with these disruptions successfully while maintaining a clear focus on your strategic plans to project the company's brand, products and values and protecting its reputation is key to longer-term success.

As discussed earlier, the ability to grasp quickly and accurately a variety of complex issues, summarise them in a form that can be grasped by nonexperts, and achieve this in a way that contributes to a narrative projecting the company's brand and values is essential.

Cultural sensitivity – knowing how to deal with different cultures and how these differences influence communication – is important. In this context, language counts. Whatever the primary language in which you operate, and this may change as you move from one organisation to another, a second or even third language is fast becoming an essential attribute.

And last, you should have a grasp of business culture and its dynamics. This contributes to an understanding of what your colleagues – or your clients – are trying to achieve and how they go about doing so. Some people gain the necessary experience from other career paths – journalists, accountants, lobbyists, even diplomats and politicians – before becoming corporate communicators, while others learn through academic and training programmes.

In a modern economy, tasks that were once performed by people are increasingly being performed perfectly adequately by technology. The skill set required to be a successful corporate communicator as set out in this chapter, especially those that revolve around complex judgment calls and cultural sensitivity, is unlikely to be

easily replicated by nonhuman means. Thus, corporate communications as well as providing the prospect of a stimulating, varied and exciting career also brings the prospect of a long one.

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