



How To Solve 2019's Communication Challenges

by The Centre For Strategic Communication
Excellence

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Former US President Woodrow Wilson once said: "The only use of an obstacle is to be overcome." So how did we do in 2018? Did we change the world with our communication? Are we still doing the same old things and expecting different results? How can we make a greater impact on our audiences and organisations next year? We asked our global faculty and some of our regular contributors to share their views on some of the biggest issues in the communication profession and how we should tackle them in 2019. Here's what they said:



Adrian Cropley OAM, FRSA, SCMP
CEO, Cropley Communication
(Australia)

Staying relevant is not a new concept for communication professionals, we've been talking about it for years. However, more than ever before, we need to focus our role on providing the right advice and leadership rather than constantly delivering outputs. As we hit the big issues of an evolving communication environment, impacted by new technologies like

AI, changing audience needs and expectations along with distrust of formal communication, we need to find our relevance in new ways. We should embrace and adopt new technologies that will not only help free-up our time but help our organisations communicate better. We should build our ethics and governance competencies, so we can take an active leadership role and be the organisation's conscience. I think most importantly our role has to be about connecting and building better relationships. The best relationships – the ones that really work – are because of open, honest and transparent communication and this is well within our hands to influence.



Mary Hills ABC, IABC Fellow
Business Principal, HeimannHills
Marketing Group (United States)

Ah yes, challenges facing the industry. I see the ability to ask the right question(s) as a significant distinction among communication professionals who say they are strategic and those that are strategic. This is not a new observation but rather one which has become almost timeless in its repetitiveness. It ranks up there in repetitiveness with research and measurement which have been a drum beat for decades. In 2019, with the digital revolution well in play, I think the gap will widen between communication professionals that say and those that do because the digital

marketplace will reward those in professional services industries, such as ours, who are strategic in their work choices and deliverables.



Cyrus Mavalwala ABC, MC
Founder, Advantis
Communications (Canada)

Working with municipalities, associations and corporations, one overarching theme for 2019 has become clear and this pervasive challenge transcends industry, geography and the size of the communication department. The pain point is that communication professionals are forced to cover more ground with fewer resources. More specifically, they need to find a way to somehow increase their communication team's capacity. The solution to increasing capacity will likely be a blend of auditing current communication practices and discarding what's broken, fine-tuning existing processes, collecting cleaner data to generate powerful insights and exposing team members to new techniques and technologies through training. Regardless of the path taken, evolving from a tactical to a strategic approach will help you increase your output while also improving your outcome.



Dr Amanda Hamilton-Attwell
ABC, IABC Fellow
Managing Director, Business DNA
(South Africa)

I recently read [There's a blind spot at the heart of most organizations—and we can fix it](#) by Zora Artis and Wayne Aspland in IABC's CW Observer and I realised our greatest challenge is not making an impact on the critical indices of an organisation. According to the article, employees are not aligned with the business strategy, vision and goals of organisations. They quote Covey who commented on this in 2008 – but this problem can be found in business literature long before 2008. This is a serious accusation against us – why are we not effective in creating understanding and buy-in for the strategy?

How should we address it? Simple – measurement and interventions that are focused on strategic alignment and behaviours reflecting strategic alignment. We should use

the appropriate measurement instruments to determine strategic alignment – and asking questions might not be the best way. Based on the insights gained from the first measurement we should formulate our measurable objectives, develop our roll-out plans and be brave to commit to achieving impact and proving it by measuring all the way.

This is not a new challenge and the solution offered is not unique but if we don't start making an impact where it matters, we might just go the dinosaur way.



Jane Mitchell FRSA
Director, JL&M Ltd.
(United Kingdom)

Creating connection with generations of people who are a bit confused about how they do that themselves is a challenge. Having spent their teenage, and sometimes younger, years making 'friends' through social media, they land in an alien work environment where they are expected to engage and connect with their work. This will be where communication professionals need to challenge themselves to think beyond their traditional methodology (which includes social media as it is now long established) and to go out of their way to really understand their audiences. Thankfully our organisations are full of cultural and demographic contrasts and differences. Communication professionals sit at the heart of closing the gaps, creating connection and nurturing a sense of belonging and meaning. This is no mean feat but has never been more necessary than in our world today.



Sia Papageorgiou FRSA, SCMP
Director, Strategic Internal
Communication and Digital
Media, Cropley Communication
(Australia)

Niccolo Machiavelli said: "Whosoever desires constant success must change his conduct with the times." And the times, they're not only changing, they're transforming, redefining the way we work and either making or breaking the future of an organisation. As communication professionals, it's essential then that we help

our organisations build the roadmap for change and transformation and communicate it in a more integrated and creative way. The discipline of change communication differs significantly from other forms of communication and requires a particular set of competencies. This means that change communication needs to become a key skill within the communication function and leaders should look at employing communication professionals with the expertise to advance transformation, so we can continue to create and sustain value in challenging environments.



Claire Watson ABC, MC
President, Words with Wings
(Canada)

Complex, demanding issues clamour for attention from communication professionals. We're surrounded with heavy topics like converging internal and external disciplines, internal marketing, where AI fits, trust, reputation, freedom of the press, and building bridges in an increasingly turbulent world. Is it possible we're missing the obvious?

We all give lip service to the idea that business acumen is table stakes for communication professionals seeking executive leadership. But how many among us know what profit margins are and why they're important? What is OPEX, EBITDA, and EPS? What's a tiger team? What does scalable mean? How would you describe your business ecosystem?

Until we understand the language of business, we will make precious little gain toward the C-suite.



Tilottama Pillai ABC
Manager, Professional
Development, Cropley
Communication (Malaysia)

While we continue to engage effectively with the C-suite, and fight for our spot in the boardroom, we have to be careful not to lose our connection with the people on the ground. The chief reason we're able to do our work so effectively is that we have insights into our audience and an ear

on the ground. This becomes vital when we have to manage crisis or change. Much of the work we do is with other functions and teams and if we partner effectively, we strengthen our reputation as strategic business partners. So, while it's critical that we focus on getting our seat at the table, we have to ensure that we don't lose our foot on the ground, or we might end up like a certain other function and lose our "human" touch.

A final word...



Lee Hopkins
Co-founder, Better
Communication Results, author
and social media evangelist
(Australia)

2019 is going to be an exciting year! Much change will hit our plates, and there will be new meals to feast upon.

Primarily, the increasing adoption of artificial intelligence by organisations will lead to significant changes in how not only our own jobs but those of our teams and fellow employees are carried out. What will be required of us will change our beliefs about what we can do and what we can offer.

Secondly, the pace of social media won't let up. New tools to manage all of your social activities keep popping up, each promising something new and exciting. I suggest you buy 'This is Marketing' by Seth Godin to help you out. The attrition rate of these shiny new baubles is high, so if you have spare time then invest it in playing with the new toys; if not, then stick with the knitting. Remember to keep your focus on the end consumer.

Viva 2019!