



Finally, A Framework For Thinking Strategically About Communication Value

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I value your friendship. The price of real-estate reflects the value of its location. Company salaries are commensurate with the value of education and experience. Value often is a part of our talk as we measure and prioritize parts of our everyday lives. Yet, value can be somewhat elusive when we try to pin down what value means in any given context. For instance, if we value a friendship, we need to identify the parts of a friendship that are meaningful to us – support, fun, availability and so on. Likewise, measuring the value communication delivers in businesses and organizations is also contextual as we measure what is of worth in an organization and align priorities with those communication activities that deliver the highest worth.

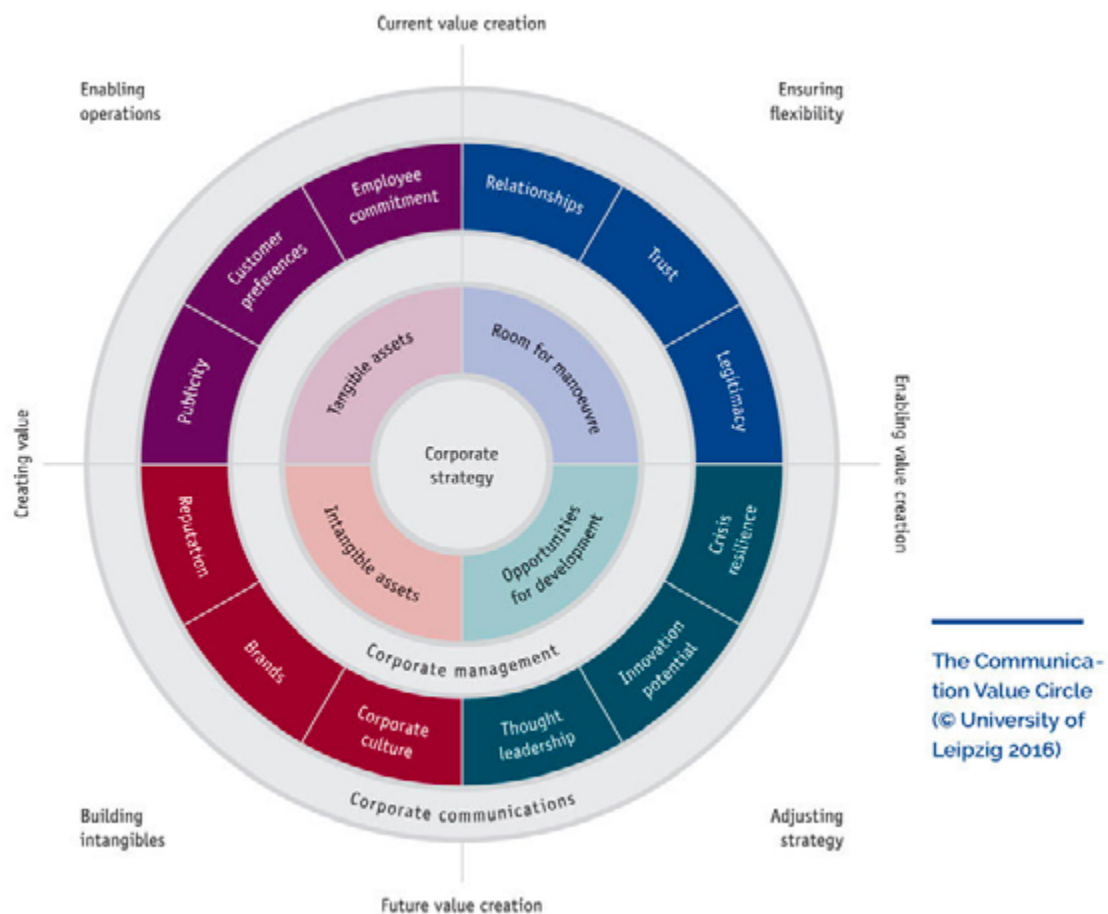
As an organizational function, communication has struggled with defining the value it brings to companies. We look at the [2011 Barcelona Principles](#), the [4 O's \(output, outtake, outcome, outgrowth\)](#) and [PESO \(paid, earned, shared, owned\)](#). All are good measurement concepts but come up short when talking defining value with business leadership. The [Communication Value Circle](#) may be the value tool to address the shortcomings we have been working around and through until now.

The Communication Value Circle is the result of research published in 2016 by Ansgar Zerfass and Christine Viertman, Institute of Communication and Media Studies, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany. The two researchers had seen the results of two surveys, in 2014 and 2015, of communication professionals across the globe, that showed practitioners ranked "improving the measurement of communication effectiveness to prove value" as one of the top most significant, relevant issues for the profession in the upcoming years. Zerfass and Viertman proceeded to review 815 publications in 36 international journals across several communication disciplines and published from 2000 onward, to discover what communication is asked to do in organizations and how value of these activities is determined.

The research review found four themes on what communication is asked to do:

- > Support business operations internally and externally to ensure fulfillment of the mission
- > Build reputation, brands and corporate culture to establish corporate identity
- > Foster trusted relationships with stakeholders to deal with uncertainty in the marketplace, and
- > Listen for shifts in external and internal environments to adjust strategy and planning if necessary.

The resulting Communication Value Circle framework from the research review does something no other communication value model or framework has been able to achieve. It establishes the organizational communication function as a key and supporting activity in the organization's life by:

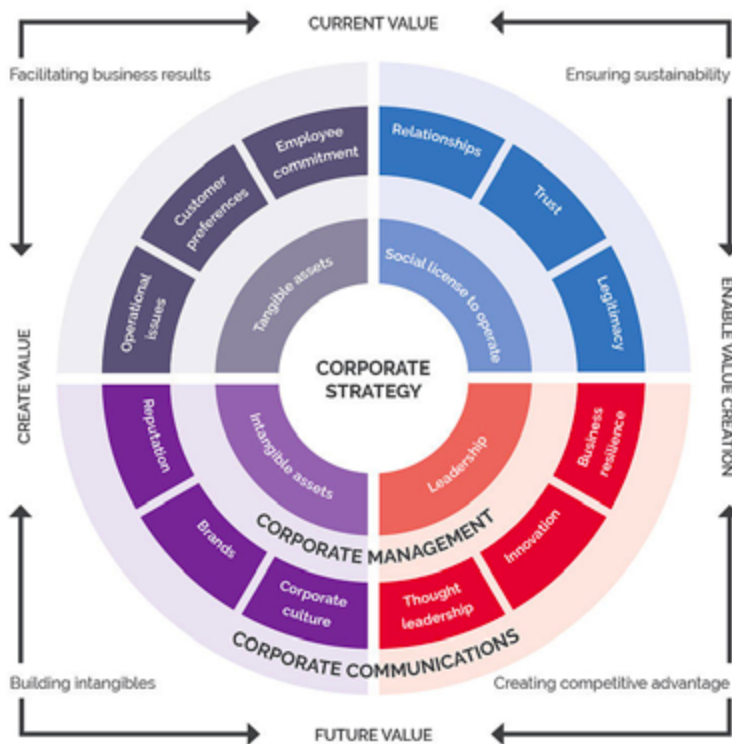


- > Defining the primary task of the communication function as - To strategically manage and measure the company's position in the market and with its stakeholders, listening and learning from the external and internal environments, and re-positioning the company and adjusting strategies as market and stakeholder dynamics shift.
- > Integrating communication value measurement with existing value frameworks used by other functions in the business that measure value as the fulfillment of corporate strategy.
- > And, aligning communication measurement with measuring value as fulfilling corporate strategy – how the company plans to achieve its mission in the marketplace.

Using the Communication Value Circle framework as a foundational concept, communication professionals are free to customize the framework to their company or market context and still capture the benefits the Value Circle provides, specifically, the components of the business where communication adds value, the value language to use and the communication activities that align with delivering value. For communication leaders, proving communication value can be as simple as adopting the Value Circle framework, customizing it to a company or market context and "talking the talk" of business value that other business function use.

We customized the framework for our markets -- Chicago and Pretoria, South Africa -- and now talk communication value with business decision-makers that aligns with their business strategy and delivers current and future value. The time to talk real business value has arrived.

The Communication Value Circle*



- The Communication Value Circle describes value creation on two levels:
 - corporate management
 - corporate communication
- At the core of the framework is corporate strategy - the starting point for all decisions
- Tangible and intangible assets create value
- License to operate and Leadership enable value creation.
- Tangible assets and License to operate are the current value
- Intangible assets and leadership will foster future value.

* The model was developed from original research conducted by Zerfass and Viertmann (2016)



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