



Competence management for corporate communications

Professional personnel development for communicators

- ▶ Expectations regarding the competences of communication specialists continue to increase due to the dynamics of the professional field. Organizations should implement a subject-specific competence management to further develop their communicators.
- ▶ Every communicator needs to know and master the diverse skill set that is needed for modern corporate communications. They also need to be able to explain their contribution to internal clients in order to be recognized as experts for communication tasks.
- ▶ This Communication Snapshot summarises the key findings of the world's first in-depth study on "Competence Management for Corporate Communications" and presents instruments, success factors and strategies.

What is competence and competence management?

Competence is the ability to solve an unforeseen problem in a self-organized way. **Competence management** for the communications department – often referred to as ‘personnel development’ or ‘talent management’ – is a management tool for enabling and legitimizing professional communication within a corporation.

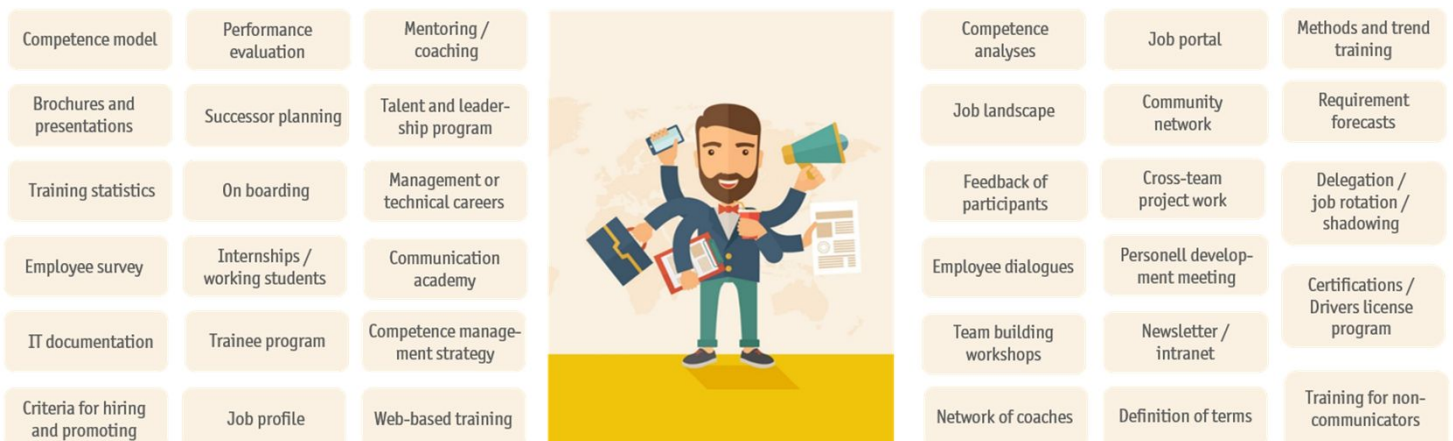
Target groups are primarily communication managers, but in principle also all other employees who interact with stakeholders. The aim is to improve the ability, willingness and entitlement of communication experts to communicate on behalf of the corporation in line with the corporate strategy.

Which tools exist?

Most communication departments apply a large number of instruments for competence development. As they are often isolated, it is beneficial to align all activities with an overall competence management strategy and a competence model for the communications department. These activities in turn should also align with the HR management strategy and the overall competence model of the company.

Why is a specific competence management needed for communicators?

- The rapidly **changing communications industry** requires communication managers to continuously develop their skills. For example, many employees feel the need to increase their digital expertise or improve their skills in areas such as big data analysis and controlling. An improved competence management can uncover and close these gaps.
- A too high or too low **staff turnover** and increasing **employee retention** are crucial topics for the communications industry. In particular, employees with specialist knowledge and many years of professional experience are in demand. A systematic competence management helps companies to keep track of their own talents and develop them in the long term.
- Most professionals agree that strategic communication creates **value for the company**. Nevertheless, top managers see communicators above all in the role of information provider and tend to overlook other contributions such as opinion monitoring or reputation building. In addition, colleagues from other departments are often unclear as to how a collaboration with communication specialists could work. Competence management can help communicators to build their own identity.



» A strategic competence management needs planning and time. But in the mid-term it will become crucial in the competition for the best minds.«

Dr. Juliane Kiesenbauer

- In the **field of corporate communications**, there is often a mix of specialists with an academic background in communications and those who have joined the profession from other fields. This is often cited as the main reason why the quality of communication work is not consistently good. In addition, few communicators are members of professional associations. Developing a competence management strategy can be a good opportunity to discuss and define **quality standards** for all communicators within a company and to agree how to comply with them.
- Compared to other corporate or business units, communications is often perceived as a rather **small and exotic department**. This is why Human Resources usually welcomes all efforts of the communications department to implement a specific competence management strategy. They often lack the expertise and the capacity to train individual communicators adequately. However, a close collaboration with the respective HR business partners is recommended and ensures a close fit with the corporate HR strategy. At the same time, communications can benefit from the methods and expertise of the HR experts.

How do you set up a strategic competence management for communicators?

- Companies wishing to improve their competence management for corporate communications should initially analyse how their personnel development strategy can support the objectives of the communications department.
- Firstly, it is recommended to get an overview of existing measures and best practices within the communications department. Such an audit will reveal which measures and potential trainers already exist.
- Secondly, an online survey and/or staff interviews can provide insights into how the existing competence management is perceived and into the needs of leaders and employees. When doing so, data protection standards and regulations of the personnel law must be observed.
- Another building block for a strategic competence management are guidelines outlining the long-term strategic approach, including a competence management strategy and a competence model. These will support managers and employees. These guidelines should be aligned with corporate strategy on a regular basis.

What are the factors for successful competence management?

- ✓ **Clear positioning:**
Make the competence management strategy transparent worldwide and regularly adapt it to the company's personnel development strategy.
- ✓ **The ideal mix:**
Carefully select activities from a wide range of standard and networked instruments to complement the existing competence management measures.
- ✓ **A matter of leadership:**
Promote a positive culture of error, build trust and adopt a situational leadership style; do not neglect the training of executives.
- ✓ **Cooperation on a level playing field:**
Maintain a personal relationship and close cooperation in all aspects of competence management with the HR business partner.
- ✓ **Together you are stronger:**
Establish a shared identity of communicators and promote networking worldwide through personal meetings and community management.
- ✓ **Think holistically:**
Offer trainings for company members outside the communication department and integrate them into cross-functional plans.

About the research project

Dr Juliane Kiesenbauer's doctoral thesis explains how personnel development for communicators in companies can be organized. The study design included five extensive case studies at Allianz Group, BASF SE, GIZ GmbH, Robert Bosch GmbH and Siemens AG.

The complete study was published by Springer VS in 2018.

Dr Juliane Kiesenbauer received a scholarship from the AG to complete this study.



© Dr. Juliane Kiesenbauer



The Academic Society for Corporate Management & Communication is an initiative of leading companies and universities in Germany and beyond. It aims to shape the future of corporate communications through joint research projects and knowledge sharing.

More information: www.academic-society.net | Contact: Dr. Juliane Kiesenbauer / Karen Berger, info@akademische-gesellschaft.com

