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# Beyond Communication

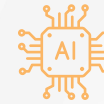
CCO Leadership in Navigating New Complexity

Executive Summary, May 2024

# Executive Summary

Amidst a global landscape marked by technological disruptions, societal shifts and evolving stakeholder expectations, the role of strategic communication leaders, often called chief communication officers (CCOs) or heads of corporate affairs<sup>1</sup>, has expanded and transformed.

This report delves into the nuanced dynamics shaping corporate communication today by leveraging a blend of surveys, in-depth interviews and extensive global consultations with Page member CCOs. It outlines the enhanced strategic role of CCOs in steering organizations through complexities and highlights their integral role in multistakeholder engagement and corporate governance.



## Expanded context and challenges

Since 2019, our world has faced a series of unprecedented challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to geopolitical unrest and the ethical dilemmas posed by artificial intelligence (AI). These developments have tested organizations' resilience and adaptability and underscored the critical need for strategic communication and engagement. CCOs, positioned at the helm of these efforts, face the daunting task of navigating their companies through a maze of stakeholder demands, technological advancements, and societal expectations, thereby redefining the essence of corporate communication.

Employee communications have leaned into ensuring that everyone understands the business strategy, participates in the company culture and can radiate all this into the marketplace. At the same time, employees have a growing potential to be both influencers and activists and are exerting more pressure on organizations to speak on a range of societal issues. As organizations grapple with a new world of work – challenged by factors including return-to-office expectations and a multigenerational workforce – CCOs are increasingly involved in managing the organization's relationship with its most essential stakeholders.



<sup>1</sup>The "chief communication officer" title is more common in the U.S. than in other parts of the world, particularly Europe, where titles containing "Corporate Affairs" and the like are more often used. In this report, our use of "CCO" refers to the senior-most executive responsible for communications, regardless of title.

## Key Findings

# 1

### CCOs are rising to the challenge

As businesses require more multistakeholder leadership, CCOs have significantly expanded their strategic influence. Beyond traditional roles, they are now pivotal in defining (or redefining) mission and purpose, decoding societal trends, fostering innovation and guiding companies through times of crisis. Their unique multistakeholder orientation, combined with effective communication and relationship building skills, are proving indispensable for businesses aiming to achieve long-term, sustainable success in an increasingly complex environment.

# 2

### Broadened scope and/or responsibilities

As CEOs seek help in this increasingly multistakeholder world, the remit of many CCOs has widened considerably, often encompassing areas such as sustainability, public affairs, brand and marketing, people and culture, societal responsibility and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I). This expansion is a testament to the evolving role of corporate communication, from a function focused on message dissemination to one deeply integrated into the strategic fabric of the organization, promoting a cohesive and inclusive corporate identity.

# 3


### Technological advancements and the rise of commtech

The integration of technology into communication strategies, or CommTech, is accelerating, offering both opportunities and challenges. While technology facilitates deeper insights and more personalized stakeholder engagement, CCOs are also tasked with navigating the ethical implications of AI and ensuring their teams are equipped to leverage these advanced tools effectively and responsibly. The pace of change is increasing while regulatory frameworks and organizations' ability to adapt struggle to keep up.

# 4

### Teams are not yet suited to new demands

The expanding scope and increasing complexity of the CCO's role present challenges related to skills, resources and team well-being. As CCOs pilot their functions through this transformative era, there is a pressing need for strategic investments in team development, technological tools, and supportive work environments that foster innovation and resilience.



## Envisioning the future role of the CCO

In the face of these evolving dynamics, the future role of the CCO is envisioned along three pivotal axes:

- 1 Championing Multistakeholder Engagement**

The imperative for CCOs to advocate for and sustain a multistakeholder approach is clearer than ever. By embracing this perspective, CCOs ensure that organizations are attuned to the diverse needs and expectations of their stakeholders, thereby fostering trust, innovation, and sustainable business practices.
- 2 Shaping Corporate Character and Trust**

As architects of corporate identity and trust, CCOs wield significant influence in shaping perceptions and building relationships. Utilizing advanced technologies and data analytics, they can glean nuanced insights into stakeholder preferences, crafting strategies that resonate on a deeper level and bolster corporate reputation.
- 3 Pioneering Societal Value Creation**

The role of CCOs in steering organizations towards positive societal impact is increasingly paramount. From environmental stewardship to social responsibility and ethical governance, CCOs are guiding lights, ensuring that corporate actions align with broader societal values and contribute to sustainable development and social well-being.



## Call to action

The transformation of the CCO role reflects a broader evolution within the corporate sector toward a more holistic, stakeholder-centric approach. As companies venture through the complexities of a rapidly changing world, the strategic insights, leadership, and ethical stewardship of CCOs are invaluable. This report highlights the challenges and opportunities facing CCOs and serves as a clarion call for these leaders to continue innovating, adapting, and guiding their organizations towards a future where business success and societal well-being are inextricably linked.