
A GLOBAL CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

FOR THE PUBLIC RELATIONS
AND COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT PROFESSION



RESEARCH TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF
HUDDERSFIELD



Dr Anne Gregory
Professor of Corporate
Communication (Director)

**Dr Elizabeth
Montoya-Martinez**

Research Fellow
June 2016 - October 2017



Dr Johanna Fawkes
Principal Research Fellow
(Principal Investigator)
March 2016 - June 2018

Dr Royce Turner
Research Fellow
December 2017 - June 2018

PARTNERS



Sweden
**Professor
Jesper Falkheimer,**
Lund University



Singapore
Professor Gregor Halff
Singapore Management
University



South Africa
**Professor
Ronel Rensburg**
University of Pretoria



Spain
**Professor Elena
Gutierrez-Garcia**
Universidad de Navarra



USA
**Professor
Katerina Tsetsura**
University of Oklahoma



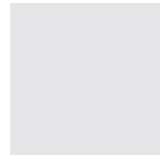
Canada
Dr. Amy Thurlow
Mount Saint Vincent
University



Australia
Dr Marianne Sison
RMIT University



Dr Alex Sevigny
McMaster University



Dr Katharina Wolf
Curtin University



Argentina
Professor Gabriel Sadi
Universidad Abierta
Interamericana

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the University of Huddersfield funded a two-year research project in support of the Global Alliance's aim to create a global capability framework for public relations and communication management.

Dr Anne Gregory, Professor of Corporate Communication at the University of Huddersfield and director of the project, assembled an international research group, with partners in eight countries, across all seven continents and appointed Dr Johanna Fawkes to lead the research.

The brief was to

- Offer practical value to Global Alliance (GA) affiliated professional bodies and their members, world-wide
- Reflect cultural and regional variations in public relations as a global profession
- Be forward looking in its approach
- Meet academic standards for rigour.

At the 2016 meeting of leaders of Global Alliance affiliated professional bodies in Toronto, the following issues emerged as context for the research:

- Tension between prioritising service to client & society
- Lack of agreement on terminology, descriptors and core duties
- Status variations of practitioners within organisations
- Reputational issues for the profession as a whole
- Variable access to public relations training & education
- Challenges in
 - Complex relationships
 - Complex channels
 - Complex social issues.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Between 2016-18, the research team and partners collected data using the techniques indicated below from the nine countries, designed to answer the following questions:

Is there a shared set of PR capabilities that defines the profession globally? *Delphi study*

What, if any, are the variations by region/ culture and by stakeholder groups? *Online survey*

How can such a framework(s) be of practical value for professional development, at individual, national, regional and global levels? *Focus Group discussions*

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A major challenge was to establish a research approach that would be genuinely global in outlook, rather than Western in orientation – which is the case for most competency/capability frameworks. The overall research design was influenced by ideas about capabilities put forward by leading thinkers about human development and social justice. Instead of asking what practitioners can already do, we asked what the profession – collectively and individually – is capable of. This meant finding out what people consider important for the profession's future and for their own. Opinions on this differ around the world depending on what opportunities are available and the choices people are able and want to make. It meant asking what might be holding them back and what would help them enhance their chosen capabilities.

It gave us ways of looking forward and ways of gathering a variety of responses to capture cultural and geographic variations worldwide in understanding public relations and communication management.

While the Huddersfield team developed all the research tools, partners were free to amend them to particular circumstances – again, ensuring there was no imposition of one way of undertaking the research on another country if that wasn't appropriate.

This means we cannot make strictly scientific comparisons, but when all the country-based research was collected, the partners met and were able to make observations about the similarities and differences that emerged from this process. These findings are presented on pages 10 – 19.

3.

How can such a framework(s) be of practical value for professional development, at individual, national, regional and global level?

Finally, partners conducted focus group discussions with members of professional bodies to discover their opinions about the emerging framework in their country and the ways they would like to use it – e.g. for career planning, team management, recruitment, curriculum development. Interviews with leading employers were also conducted in some countries to ensure the research would be of practical value to those who recruit communication professionals.

In addition to the framework, Huddersfield worked closely with a company of young entrepreneurs to produce software that allows practitioners, academics and employers to assess their individual and collective capabilities and set goals for a variety of time periods.

1.

Is there a shared set of PR capabilities that defines the profession globally?

To answer this question, each country assembled a panel of expert practitioners, academics and employers to volunteer their view of the profession's capabilities.

Results were circulated between (anonymous) members of the panel until there was broad general agreement on the capability lists for each country.

2.

What, if any, are the variations by region/culture and by stakeholder groups?

Next, we needed to see if a broader range of practitioners and academics agreed with the experts. We also wanted to see if these groups had different priorities. The results from each country can be compared to see if

different regions prefer some capabilities over others. This was achieved in most countries by conducting an online-survey, with the support of the national professional body in each country.

VARIATIONS BY COUNTRY


To reflect cultural sensitivity and local needs, partner countries adapted the above schedule to their own circumstances, leading to some variations in data collection, for example:

- The Swedish partner was satisfied by the outcome of two rounds of the Delphi research
- Rather than conduct another large-scale survey, Sweden selected data about capabilities from a research project called "communicative organisations"
- The Argentina partner conducted three focus groups in the capital and interviews with professionals based in other parts of the country
- The partner in South Africa made changes to the content of the survey following feedback from the pilot survey and conducted interviews rather than focus groups
- Canadian and Australian partners ran online focus groups in order to obtain a wider geographical spread across their countries
- USA conducted interviews rather than focus groups
- There were also differences in membership of professional bodies; for example the Spanish professional body mainly represents senior practitioners.

FINDINGS

GLOBAL CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

The research partners agreed that the GCF represents a fair summary of the shared capabilities that emerged from the world-wide research. The language was revised several times to avoid confusion. The sub-capabilities were created from partners' findings to clarify what is meant by the main headings. This is what we have in common globally:

 <p>Communication Capabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values To identify and address communication problems proactively To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies. 	 <p>Organisational Capabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities To build and enhance organisational reputation To provide contextual intelligence. 	 <p>Professional Capabilities (those expected of any professional)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor To offer organisational leadership To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and societal expectations To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning.
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CAPABILITIES	SUB CAPABILITIES
To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values	<p>You set clear communication objectives that are aligned to organisational objectives and then see them through</p> <p>You act as an architect of communication plans, enacting the purpose, values and policies of the organisation</p> <p>You understand how communication can – and cannot – help an organisation realise its objectives</p>
To identify and address communication problems proactively	<p>You create short and long-term narratives to facilitate communication with multiple organisational stakeholders</p> <p>You identify opportunities to design organisational communication, and outline core content</p> <p>You develop integrated communication operations</p>
To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics	<p>You use research to listen to and understand situations before, during and after communication and relationship-building activities</p> <p>You manage research design, data collection and analysis to improve communication outcomes</p> <p>You establish evaluation systems to demonstrate the impact of communication</p>

To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies	<p>You have command of communication specialties, such as investor relations, and understand the optimum channels for specific stakeholders</p> <p>You communicate effectively across paid, earned, shared and owned (PESO) channels</p> <p>You have or can source strong written and visual skills to create and tell stories that engage and connect with diverse publics</p> <p>You synthesise complex concepts and convert them to simple, clear and relevant content</p>
To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities	<p>You identify, analyse and listen to stakeholders and their communication needs</p> <p>You develop stakeholder engagement strategies and partnerships that are mutually beneficial</p> <p>You communicate sensitively with stakeholders and communities across a range of cultural and other values and beliefs</p>
To build and enhance organisational reputation	<p>You identify, analyse and strategically advise on key issues and risks for the organisation</p> <p>You help the organisation to define and enact its purpose and values</p> <p>You help shape organisational culture and its processes</p> <p>You understand and manage key intangible assets (e.g. brand, culture, sustainability)</p>
To provide contextual intelligence	<p>You see the bigger picture - socially, culturally, politically, technologically and economically</p> <p>You identify strategic opportunities and threats, issues and trends</p> <p>You operate in a connected world, demonstrating broad understanding of local and global diversity in culture, values and beliefs</p>
To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor	<p>You combine a long term perspective with the agility to manage crises</p> <p>You offer strategic counsel to executive management, particularly regarding the interests of multiple stakeholders</p> <p>You influence organisational decision-making and development</p> <p>You negotiate with empathy and respect for all parties</p>
To offer organisational leadership	<p>You are part of or have access to the executive management team and help build internal alliances within the organisation</p> <p>You demonstrate communication leadership by encouraging management based on dialogue</p> <p>You demonstrate business and financial acumen through sound knowledge of the organisation's business and core processes</p>
To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and society's expectations	<p>You consider business objectives in the light of society's expectations</p> <p>You clarify the consequences of a proposed action on others, ensuring potential outcomes are understood by decision-makers</p> <p>You understand and apply ethical frameworks</p> <p>You recognise and observe the societal obligations of professionals</p>
To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning	<p>You take responsibility for your own continuous professional development, through a range of activities including training and education</p> <p>You participate in industry events, represent the industry in public, and educate others on the role and value of public relations to employers and clients</p> <p>You are able to offer professional guidance which involves, motivates and contributes to personal and team development</p>

FINDINGS

COUNTRY FRAMEWORKS

Each country has its own framework and inspection reveals some variation between nations regarding the capabilities of the profession.

These frameworks are summarised on the following pages. Global Alliance-affiliated bodies are highlighted in blue.

The full research report and individual country reports are available on request from globalcap@hud.ac.uk

ARGENTINA

Academic Partners

UAI, Universidad Abierta Interamericana (Buenos Aires):
Professor Gabriel Sadi, Verónica Méndez, Evelyn Moyano, Luciana Accorsi, Leonardo Arana and Leonardo Mancusi

Leading Professional bodies

Professional Council of Public Relations of Argentina (Established 1958)

Size of practice population

15,000-20,000

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- Ethics was distinguished as an integral capability of the others
- The need for continuing professional development stood out through the process

Country-specific observations

Not yet enough links between professional practice and academia. Strengthening academic development, adapting curricula, and merging academic needs with those of the market, would strengthen communication areas and achieve the objectives of organisations more efficiently.

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 4; Academics: 5; Employers: 3.
Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 127

Focus Group Discussions

Three FGDs were held; one for practitioners; one for academics; one for employers. Twenty seven practitioners, academics, and employers participated.

- There was a conviction that the contribution to achieving the organisation's objectives should include commercial and social objectives.

A challenge faced during the study was the meaning of the concept of capability and the difference between competency and competences, possibly related to language issues from translation into Spanish.

AUSTRALIA

Academic Partners

RMIT University, Melbourne, Victoria:
Dr Marianne D. Sison

Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia:
Dr Katharina Wolf

Leading Professional bodies

Public Relations Institute of Australia (Established 1949)

Other bodies include: International Association of Business Communicators (IABC); International Association of Public Participation; The Communications Council; Australian Marketing Institution; Association of Corporate Directors

Size of practice population

25,700

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- For educators, the biggest obstacles preventing incorporation of the selected capabilities in the syllabus were curriculum restrictions, followed by skills shortages among existing teaching staff

Country-specific observations

Appropriateness of the "public relations" label was questioned by a number of participants; alternatives such as "communication management" or "strategic communication" suggested.

Australia is a westernised, developed country, though it prides itself in thinking of the 'social

Significant variations from standard research design

Online focus group discussions were held, to increase geographical reach

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 3; Academics: 5;
Employers: 2. Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 96

Focus Group Discussions

Seven FGDs were held. Thirty two people participated: 18 practitioners; 11 educators; 3 employers.

- Practitioners were mainly held back by pressures on time, followed by a lack of encouragement from their employer and pressure on funding
- The pressure on time was echoed by employers, as well as the perceived lack of suitably qualified applicants to address existing (and future) capability gaps.

context', privileging it over business and politics.

In particular, the capability that highlighted attention to 'cultural values' relates to the awareness of the country's multicultural and diverse society.



Academic Partners

Mount Saint Vincent University:
Associate Professor Amy Thurlow

McMaster University:
Associate Professor Alex Sevigny

Leading Professional bodies

Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS) (Established 1948)

Size of practice population

Approx. 2000 CPRS members or associated practitioners.

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- Delphi panel members were adamant that the relative importance of capabilities could not be ranked
- *To align communication planning with strategy and purpose, and to apply critical thinking and problem solving to organisational issues* are identified as preeminent in the minds of Canadian participants
- Respondents indicated that they saw professional associations as playing an important role in assisting practitioners and the profession in achieving the capabilities
- Most prominent barriers to achieving the capabilities identified in the survey, focus groups, and interviews were 1) support from employer (including lack of recognition of the importance of Professional Development for PR practitioners) and 2) time and resources to be able to access education around the capabilities.

Country-specific observations

Participants expressed interest in extending the software to incorporate features that would help build a PR community. These included a linkage to professional associations and social media sites.

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 6; Academics: 4;
Employers: 4. Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 115

Focus Group Discussions

Five FGDs were held.

Eighteen people participated.



Academic Partner

Singapore Management University:
Professor Gregor Halff

Leading Professional bodies

Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (Established 1970)

Size of practice population

Circa 2,000

Main findings

- The strategic capability deemed to be extremely important by nearly all participants of the Delphi study was: *Aligning communication with the business goals of the organisation and creating the narratives to create value*
- The strategic capabilities that were deemed to be at least very important by a wide majority of Delphi participants were: *supporting an organisation to interpret its position within complex environments; and identifying issues and mitigating potential sources of reputational risk*
- Survey participants identified *Aligning communication with the business goals of the organisation and creating the narratives to create value, Storytelling and messaging, and Using data to create content* as being the three most important capabilities for their own future
- Obstacles identified in the survey are pressures on time; pressures on funding; organisations' lack of understanding of PR
- Employer support, employer funded courses, a greater level of understanding of PR, and clearer career goals would enhance the realisation of capabilities.

Country-specific observations

Strong support for many of the capabilities identified in the Delphi- and survey-phases.

Overall there was preference for more specific capabilities, e.g. project management, cross-cultural management, accountability, applying principles of good governance.

Strong emphasis on management skills.

Singapore PR is a small community.



SOUTH AFRICA

Academic Partner

University of Pretoria:
Professor Ronel Rensburg

Leading Professional bodies

Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) (*Established 1957*)
SACOMM (*Established 1977*);
IABC (*Established 1970*)

Size of practice population

1,300 members of PRISA, though total number of practitioners unknown.

Significant variations from standard research design

No focus groups conducted; three interviews with employers were carried out.

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 12; Academics: 3; Employers: 3.
Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 197

Focus Group Discussions

No focus groups conducted; three interviews with employers were carried out.

Main findings

- The three most important capabilities for practitioners were *Reputation, Ethical conduct, and Conducting research*
- The three important capabilities for academics were *Building and maintaining a sustainable reputation for the organisation; Ethical conduct; and Gathering intelligence*
- The three important capabilities for employers were *Ethical conduct; Reputation; and Objective counsellor*
- Pressures on time and funding rate were seen as obstacles to the realisation of capabilities
- Training, employer support, and change in position would assist in the realisation of capabilities
- Academics believe that curriculum restrictions, skills shortages and problems with infrastructure will be impediments to the realisation of the important capabilities.

Country-specific observations

71% of survey respondents were PRISA members.

South Africa is often viewed as a “hybrid” or “second world”, and the corporate environment reflects a fusion of Western and African business elements and manoeuvres.



SPAIN

Academic Partner

Universidad De Navarra:
Dr. Elena Gutiérrez-García and
Dr. Mónica Recalde

Leading Professional bodies

Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación e España, DIRCOM [Spanish Association of Communication Directors], (*Established 1992*)
Asociación de Empresas Consultoras en Relaciones Públicas y Comunicación, ADECEC [Association of PR Consultancies in PR and Communication], (*Established 1991*)

Size of practice population

Dircom’s Association annual publication, Anuario de la Comunicación, has a database

of more than 3,000 practitioners. Total practice population unknown.

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 8; Academics: 5;
Employers: 4. Three rounds.

Survey

No survey conducted

Focus Group Discussions

Seven FGDs were held: five for practitioners; two with academics. Forty practitioners and fourteen academics participated.

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- Practitioners identified *To analyse and read the social environment, in order to identify opportunities and avoid risks* as being the most important for their own future career
- Perceived obstacles to achieving greater capability were a lack of understanding among executives that communication should be a strategic function; lack of education in management, financial acumen; lack of standardised measurement, making it difficult to demonstrate communication value
- Academics in focus groups identified *To design communication strategic plans*, *aligned with organisational goals as being the most important for the future of PR and communication management education*
- Academics saw obstacles as: inflexible higher education system making it difficult to reform curricula and innovate
- Academics and practitioners agreed on the importance of a capability framework as a useful tool for improving education, professionalisation and recognition of the profession as a relevant function for organisations.

Country-specific observations

There are no extended specific degrees in communications management that educate future professionals.

University programmes should focus on communication management degrees with an interdisciplinary approach (i.e. management and sociological approaches).

Introducing widespread strategic communication subjects in Spanish Business Schools must be one of the key solutions to the lack of understanding and recognition of PR among executives and CEOs.

**Academic Partner**

Lund University:
Professor Jesper Falkheimer

Leading Professional bodies

Swedish Communication Association
(Established 1950)

Association of Public Relations Consultancies
in Sweden, PRECIS (Established 1990)

Size of practice population

Circa 15,000

Significant variations from standard research design

New survey not conducted; instead material used from an existing survey that had been conducted by Department for Strategic Communication, Lund University; two Delphi rounds conducted; no academics in Focus Group discussions

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 11; Academics: 9. Two rounds.

Focus Group Discussions

Two FGDs were held. Ten people participated, all of whom were practitioners.

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- There is a need for both strategic and technical capabilities for professionals
- Delphi panel members emphasised: analytic capability – analysing attitudes and behaviour among internal and external stakeholders; knowledge about

organisational operations and core processes; operative capability as a communications coach and advisor

- In the future, understanding and developing strategies that integrate digital aspects into all communication processes will be crucial.

Country-specific observations

The concept of public relations has not been used in Sweden since this has been associated with spin and manipulation. After the 2nd World War the main concept has been “information” (e.g. information secretaries, information consultants). Since the late 1990s, the use of “information” has been challenged and today “communication” has taken over.

**Academic Partner**

University of Huddersfield:
Professor Anne Gregory, Dr Johanna Fawkes (P.I.), Dr Elizabeth Martinez Montoya and Dr Royce Turner

Leading Professional bodies

Chartered Institute of Public Relations
(Established 1948)

Public Relations and Communication
Association (Established 1969)

Various associations for internal
communication, public affairs and other
specialisms

Size of practice population

80-85,000

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 5; Academics: 5;
Employers: 4. Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 139

Focus Group Discussions

Seven FGDs were held: six for practitioners;
one academic only.

Forty practitioners and five academics
participated.

Main findings

- Delphi results were largely endorsed in later stages of research
- Practitioners identified *Planning strategic communication and Acting as Trusted Advisor* as their most preferred capabilities
- Perceived obstacles to achieving greater capability were lack of time and lack of employer support
- Academics stressed *Exercising Professional Judgement and Communicating Effectively*
- The main academic obstacle was perceived as lack of relevant skills in teaching staff
- All respondents expressed support for the framework to assist career development, education design and the future of the profession.

Country-specific observations

Most respondents were CIPR members; the low survey response may be due to this being an over-surveyed population.

The UK Capability Framework stresses organisational contributions, but reflects less interest in societal issues than some partner frameworks.

There was strong support for implementing the framework in a range of large workplaces.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Academic Partner

University of Oklahoma:
Professor Katerina Tsetsura and
Dr. Luis F. Vergara Arrieta

Leading Professional bodies

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)
(Established 1947)

Other professional bodies include: Institute for Public Relations; IABC; Public Relations Divisions of AEJMC, ICA, and NCA.

Size of practice population

Circa 333,000

Main findings

- All three stages of the research produced similar results
- Practitioners and academics identified *Analytical Thinking, Strategic Planning, and Communication Expertise* as being the three most important capabilities for the future of the profession
- Notably, practitioners alone identified a different capability, *to work within an ethical framework*, as one of the top three most important capabilities for the future of the profession.
- Practitioners and academics recognised the ability to create and tell stories as one of the most important capabilities for them as *individuals*
- Practitioners identified pressures on time as being the most significant obstacle to the realisation of capabilities
- Practitioners identified employer support as being the most significant factor that could help in the realisation of capabilities
- For academics, the most frequently identified obstacle to achieving higher capabilities was shortages of skills among teaching staff, and curriculum restrictions
- Academics identified institutional support, and training for teaching staff as the most significant factor that could assist.

Country-specific observations

The paradox of celebrating strategic and managerial roles of public relations as a profession, and yet pointing out to technical roles at the individual level, might require further investigation of the core capabilities of the profession in the USA.

Significant variations from standard research design

No focus groups; four interviews held instead.

Delphi panel

Practitioners: 3; Academics: 5;
Employers: 2. Three rounds.

Survey

Total responses: 401

Focus Group Discussions

No focus groups; four interviews held instead.

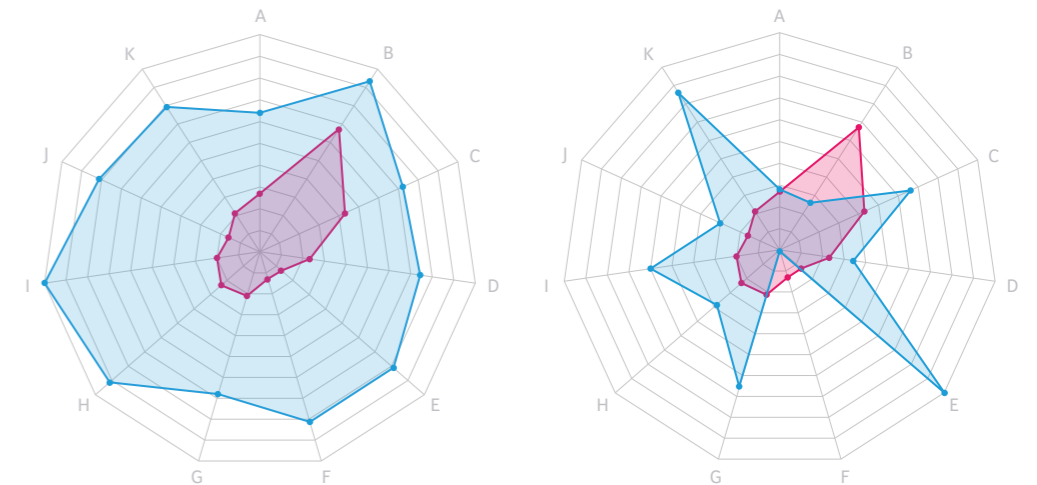
APPLICATIONS

The uses of the GCF are as follows:

SOFTWARE

An online assessment tool was developed for use by individual practitioners, team leaders and employers. It is designed to encourage professionals to identify the capabilities they would like to develop and access resources to assist in these goals.

The University of Huddersfield is developing this software and its use is being negotiated for GA - affiliated bodies and, if appropriate, with adaptations, by commissioning employers. See Applications below.



Key

- A** To align communication strategies with organisational purpose and values
- B** To identify and address communication problems proactively
- C** To conduct formative and evaluative research to underpin communication strategies and tactics
- D** To communicate effectively across a full range of platforms and technologies.
- E** To facilitate relationships and build trust with internal and external stakeholders and communities
- F** To build and enhance organisational reputation
- G** To provide contextual intelligence.
- H** To provide valued counsel and be a trusted advisor
- I** To offer organisational leadership
- J** To work within an ethical framework on behalf of the organisation, in line with professional and societal expectations
- K** To develop self and others, including continuing professional learning.

APPLICATIONS

INDIVIDUAL PRACTITIONERS

The framework is intended to assist individuals assess their own performance in the capabilities they deem important, to enable them to set goals and to provide them with access to resources (e.g. training, reading, webinars) which will enhance performance in selected capabilities. The assessment tool allows the individual to monitor their progress.

TEAM LEADERS/EMPLOYERS

The results from a group of individuals can be collated using the software to illustrate the distribution of capability-strengths across a team, department or workforce. A gap analysis of capabilities that are regarded as important can be undertaken and individual and group goals can be established and monitored.

EDUCATORS

The framework can be used as a tool for curriculum review and approvals. Academic and professional courses can map their content against the capabilities. They can also design content to enhance particular capabilities, such as addressing gaps between future importance and current performance of a capability.

In summary, the research project has produced a piece of work which offers new directions for defining and understanding the public relations and communication management profession and a valuable way forward for other professions to follow. The framework will be of value to practitioners for years to come.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the two-year, nine-country research suggests:

- There is a widely shared set of public relations and communication capabilities that helps define the profession globally
- There are minor, but significant, variations between countries' capability sets, particularly concerning the social role of public relations and in the use of terminology
- Professional bodies and large employers are enthusiastic about using the framework to manage membership training and education, individual and team management.

The development of the framework, together with the software, offers professionals in public relations and communication management a totally new way for understanding – and describing to others – their work. It encourages all practitioners to set goals and access suitable resources to enhance their capabilities in a planned and individual way. It is an important step in the process of building a global profession.

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The Global Capabilities Framework is one of the most significant projects that we have ever initiated. It is literally a game-changer for the profession. We are grateful to Professor Gregory, Dr Fawkes and the global team for making such a seminal contribution to the profession.

Jose Manuel Velasco Guardado
Chair of the Global Alliance



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Huddersfield Business School can
help your business, please contact:**

Huddersfield Business School
University of Huddersfield
Queensgate
Huddersfield
HD1 3DH

01484 473155
productivity@hud.ac.uk
www.hud.ac.uk/huddersfield-business