Doing the right things or doing things right? Paradoxes and Swedish communication professionals' roles and challenges

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Introduction

Communication practitioners in general contend with a low occupation status and debate how to prove the organizational value of communication efforts. As one of many responses to this, the international association The Global Alliance launched the concept *the communicative organization* in 2010 at the 6th World Public Relations Forum (Stockholm Accords, 2010). The concept has gained increasing attention during the last couple of years, but there is no common definition. A frequent understanding is that "organizations that communicate well with their environment, including their internal environments, will enjoy a sustained competitive advantage" (Nothhaft and von Platen, 2015: 1). Another perspective of the communicative organization, grounded in organizational communication research, is that it implies an overall knowledge and awareness of the importance of communication for continuous organizing processes that enact and reproduce an organization. Thus, communication is not reduced to a tool for the transmission of messages from senders to receivers, but the *transformative aspect of communication* is emphasized (Dewey, 1916/2004). Communication is consequently perceived as a prerequisite for the constitution of organizations (Weick, 1969; Taylor and Van Every, 2000; Putnam and Nicotera, 2010). The fundamental aspect of communication for the organization has quite recently been given more attention from the CCO-school – the communicative constitution of organizations. This school is based on a social constructionist ontology and is influenced by such scholars as Weick (1995) and

Luhmann (1995). Altogether, the communicative organization as a concept originates from both developments in research and in industry. From an industry approach the concept is an attempt to frame an ideal organization-state-of mind, or rationality, for communication professionals.

The purpose of this article is to examine and analyze the prevailing form of rationality that governs the challenges, goals and roles of communication professionals. We will also explore alternative forms of rationality and discuss what these would imply. By using theories on reflexivity and paradoxes for analysis, we aim to catch the complexity, diversity and ambiguity that characterizes modern organizational life (Cameron and Quinn, 1988).

This article is based on empirical material from two different studies: survey results from The European Communication Monitor 2014 and qualitative interviews with communication managers from nine different public and private organizations in Sweden. The qualitative interviews form an initial empirical study within a three-year project called *The communicative organization: The value of communication for successful organizations* at Lund University, Sweden. The research project is related to the Excellence Project (e.g. Grunig, 1992). However, while this project had a normative approach, i.e. explaining how communication professionals should organize and work in order to become excellent, *Communicative organizations* focus on how practitioners actually work and how managers and coworkers in private and public organizations regard communication. The aim of the research project is to deepen the knowledge about the *communicative organization* per se and generate a better understanding of how communication professionals handle the internal battle among different specializations that all contest for standing in the CEO's favor. This battle is particularly intensive for soft power disciplines like marketing, human resources and communication, which do not have a granted seat on the board (cf. Nye, 2004). Alvesson (2013) depicts this battle as a zero-sum (power) game, since there are a restricted number of seats, and if one discipline wins a seat, another one may loose. Thus, it becomes in this

context fundamentally important for communication professionals to prove the value of communications. One way to show the value of communication is to relate communication activities to overall organizational goals. This correlates well with the general understanding of corporate or strategic communication, which is essentially defined by its contribution to a company's business goals (Hallahan et al., 2007; Falkheimer and Heide, 2014). However, many communication professionals still seem to struggle with doing the right things rather than just doing things right (cf. Zerfass and Huck, 2007).

Doing the right things versus doing things right entails some parallels with the common distinction between leadership and management (e.g. Bryman, 1996). Leadership and doing the right things are about being proactive and future-oriented, promoting change, creating vision and strategy that support organizational success and legitimacy. Management and doing things right are rather about administering and focusing on current business, establishing processes and routines in order to enhance effective action. In comparison it seems easier to define what it means to do things right than doing the right things. While doing things right is about productivity and efficient work processes, the matter of doing the right things requires a judgement based on an underlying rationality including certain values and perspectives.

Theoretical framework: Organizational Rationality, Reflexivity and Paradoxes

There is a strong tendency in the management and organization studies literature to primarily focus on the rational side of organizational life and how organizations can become more efficient and effective (cf. Stohl and Cheney, 2001; Heide and Simonsson, 2015). There is an equivalent emphasis on rationality in organizations, where linear models and rational problem solving guide decision makers. This is somewhat remarkable since it has been known for decades that people cannot and are not rational decision makers that always choose the most optimal alternative; people can only live up to a bounded rationality (Simon, 1947). Furthermore, it is difficult and chal-

lenging, in practice, for organizational members to make rational decisions since reality is complex and changes are rapid and unpredictable. Hence, organizational life is complicated. Lewis (2000: 769) explains that: "the more complex, diverse, and dynamic organizations become, the more traditional either/or thinking oversimplifies management practices and demands." This way of thinking and acting is awkward and detrimental for the organization and can be interpreted as a way of escaping from the problematic (Lewis, 2000). The tendency among managers to rely on traditional, linear decision models is further nourished by the usual wish among managers to control and predict an organization and its surroundings, which, in turn, often tends to evolve into "stupidity management" and "functional stupidity," according to Alvesson and Spicer (2012: 1196).

However, it is also possible to identify a trend among scholars to focus on the irrational side of organizational life, and thus the understanding of paradoxes and tensions as fundamental characteristics of organizations (Benson, 1977; Ashcraft and Trethewey, 2004; Putnam et al., 2014). Paradoxes occur in all organizations and can be explained as tensions that contain two sides of the same coin. Lewis (2000: 761) explains: "Paradoxical tensions are perceptual—that is, cognitively or socially constructed polarities that mask the simultaneity of conflicting truths. Unlike continua, dilemmas, or either/or choices, paradoxical tensions signify two sides of the same coin." Paying attention to paradoxes in organizations is a way for scholars to leave behind the oversimplified explanations and to acknowledge the complexity, diversity and ambiguity that exist in every organization (Cameron and Quinn, 1988).

Managing paradoxical tensions are a balancing act between two poles. Lewis (2000: 764) concludes that organizational tensions can be handled with three interdepended methods: (1) acceptance, (2) confrontation, and (3) transcendence. The first method, acceptance, involves embracing and learning to live with paradoxes. The awareness of paradoxes is an important step

towards managing them. The second step, confrontation, entails discussion of the paradoxes and development of new practices. The third step, transcendence, implies developing better organizational capacity to think paradoxically. This requires what could be called a second-order thinking (i.e. self-referentiality and reflexive thinking – see Bateson, 1972), which involves the fundamental reexamination of assumptions that one pole of a paradox is the correct one. This is a method to unveil the naturalization that is "the treatment of socially produced as given in nature" (Deetz, 1992: 191). The third step could also be termed reflexivity, which Alvesson and Spicer (2012) describe as an ability and willingness in an organization to question rules, routines and norms rather than follow them unquestioningly.

Reflexivity as a concept has been used by several social scientists. Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) claim that late modern society is becoming increasingly reflexive as a response to uncertainty, ambiguity and risk that modern people encounter. The communication scholar Frederick Steier (1991) discerns two forms of reflexivity – first-order and second-order. In the first-order, reflexivity scholars pay attention to organizational accounts and how they form the reality of organizational members, and in the second-order reflexivity, or what often is labeled meta-reflexive theorizing, scholars reflect on their own notions and claims.

Communication theorists have also used reflexivity as a concept. One example is Holtzhausen (2002: 256) who claims: "[r]eflexivity is a postmodern process whereby scholars critique their own theories." Another example is Verčič, van Ruler, Bütschi and Flodin (2001) who maintain that European communication professionals are ideally "reflexive." They use the concept reflexive in relation to business intelligence and adaption to the current societal values, meaning that practitioners "analyze changing standards and values in society and discuss these with the members of the organization, in order to adjust the standards and values of the organization regarding social responsibility and legitimacy" (Verčič et al., 2001: 380).

In this article, we understand reflexivity as an ontological and epistemological concept and pose reflexivity as a method to query social realities that are taken for granted and naturalized (see also Falkheimer & Heide, in press). Hence, reflexivity is a meta-theory that can promote new and interesting knowledge for communication professionals. Alvesson and Kärreman (2013) emphasize that the reflexivity approach challenges different dominating perspectives and welcome alternative explanations. A problem with previous approaches to research in public relations/corporate communications is that they camouflage managerial and rationalistic perspectives, which cultivates a certain understanding and dismisses unconventional explanations.

Methods and Empirical Material

This article is primarily based on qualitative interviews with nine Swedish communication managers, but we have also used survey results from *The European Communication Monitor (ECM) 2014.* By using empirical material from two different studies, we aim to achieve a richer and more nuanced knowledge of the perceptions of communication professionals. The interviews help us to gain a deeper understanding of the broad picture given by the ECM survey (cf. Bryman, 2012).

As mentioned in the introduction, the qualitative interviews form an initial study within a three-year project called *The Communicative Organization.* The interviewees work as communication managers in the nine organizations that participate in the research project. Most of the interviewees are top communication managers, but a few are communication managers of a certain division or unit. The communication managers that have been interviewed represent organizations that most likely have high ambitions in the area of corporate communication – otherwise they would not have decided to contribute to this research project and give access to their organizations (not only communication professionals but also managers and co-workers are to be included in further studies). Hence, the interviewees do not represent a typical or average communication

manager, but rather a group of communication managers with a relatively high level of professional competence. In that respect, the selection of interviewees entails a positive bias. However, considering the purpose of the article, we think it is fruitful to select communication managers that can be expected to be particularly knowledgeable about corporate communication, i.e. so called information-rich cases (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Seven interviewees represent public organizations, while two represent private companies. The smallest organization has approximately 250 employees, and the biggest one has more than 50,000 employees. Most of the nine organizations are large organizations with more than 20,000 employees. Eight of the nine interviews were conducted by phone and one face-to-face. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. We used an interview guide with prepared questions organized into different themes, e.g. the main challenges, the rationale for goal setting, the work process of goal setting, the types of formulated communication goals, the evaluation of goals, and the role and mission of the communication function. The interviewees were still free to develop relevant sub-themes, and their own experiences and interests influenced what parts in the guide we focused on (cf. Alvesson, 2011). It should also be mentioned that we had the opportunity to present a preliminary analysis of the interviews for a group of communication professionals from the nine organizations. The reactions and the following discussions were interesting and enhanced our understanding even further (cf. Heide and Simonsson, 2014b).

The European Communication Monitor, ECM, is a longitudinal survey conducted annually since 2007 by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (Euprera), the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and Communication Director Magazine. The aim of the survey is to explore "[…] current practices and future developments of strategic communication in corporations, non-profits, and other organizations including communication agencies" (ECM 2014: 8). Over 30,000 respondents were invited through e-mails to answer

the online survey in 2014, and 2,777 respondents in 42 countries answered all the questions. Forty percent of the respondents are communication managers in different organizations, 94 percent have academic degrees and most respondents are based in Western and Northern Europe. Considering that the sample is somewhat a convenience sample and that the response rate is around 10 percent, conclusions must be made with caution. Therefore, comparisons have been made with another survey that only focuses on communication professionals in Sweden; the web survey *Kommunikatören,* conducted for the last ten years by the recruitment corporation Hammer & Hanborg. Three thousand and eighty-four communication professionals answered the 2014 survey, and the findings concerning the issues and trends we focus on in this article were confirmed.

The ECM results are, in some cases, broken down by national levels, however, in this article we use the data focusing on Sweden whenever possible. The survey is organized around five key factors: personal characteristics, features of the organization, attributes of the communication function, current situation and perceptions of developments, such as job satisfaction, gender issues and mobile communication. Altogether, the survey provides insight into the professional discourse and how communication professionals view their situation, role, impact, organizational constraints and tools, as well as their conceptions of future development.

Findings and Discussion

Below we will present findings from both the ECM survey and the qualitative interviews. We will not present all the results from the ECM survey but instead focus on the same areas as we have done in the interviews, i.e. challenges, goals and roles of communication professionals.

Challenges, Goals and Evaluations

Each year the ECM monitor asks for the most important issues for communication management. The answers have been rather consistent since the first survey in 2007. Except for the years 2010–2012, when "coping with the digital evolution and the social web" was considered to be the main challenge, the main issue according to the respondents is and has been "linking business strategy and communication." This answer reflects the ambition among communication professionals to become members of the dominant coalition (the top management group that makes key decisions) in order to become part of the strategic management of the organization. The answer also mirrors one of the main topics in the research literature about public relations, and corporate and strategic communications (e.g. Dozier, 1992). However, earlier research shows that communication managers are seldom members of the dominant coalition (Kanihan et al., 2013) but are called in as experts on some occasions - especially in terms of crisis and change (cf. Heide and Simonsson, 2014a).

Frank Kanihan et al. (2013) conducted a large survey of communication managers in US S&P 500 companies. The results identify four dimensions of informal power of high importance: expertise, trust, involvement in strategic decisions and likeability. "To be in the dominant coalition, a communication manager must like, and be liked by the top group of executives, and must have close 'organizational-chart' proximity to the top leader" (Kanihan et al., 2013: 153). The survey does not investigate whether the backgrounds of the communication managers that are part of the dominant coalitions are different from other members. A hypothesis for future research is that there are close similarities and that the communication managers that are part of the dominant coalitions have a broad understanding of their business sector. Kanihan et al.'s study confirms the importance of linking communication to business strategy in order to become part of the dominant coalition. At the same time, the study also evokes questions of the implications of homophi-

ly – people's tendency to associate with others like themselves (Murphy, 2015). What happens if the communication manager adopts the same managerial logic as the rest of the dominant coalition? The communication manager's job is often perceived as taking a multi-stakeholder perspective of the organization:

> They are the ones who challenge decisions, asking whether consideration has been
>
> given to the possible reactions of certain stakeholder groups and whether all factors
>
> have been taken into account (Gregory and Willis, 2013: 11).

 Thus, we see a value in communication managers not being too similar to other members of the dominant coalition but advocating various forms of perspectives.

When broken down by national level, it is clear that "linking business strategy to communication" is considered to be a main issue also in Sweden. However, the Swedish respondents consider "building and maintaining trust" as about important as "linking business strategy." Communication professionals in the Netherlands, Austria and Slovenia show the same pattern. One possible explanation is that Sweden has experienced a fast liberalization and de-regulation of the public welfare society in recent years. The corporatism welfare system in Sweden has, in several aspects, been replaced with a deregulated pluralist liberal system, and this societal change has created increased relational uncertainty between organizations, their stakeholders, and the broad public.[1]

The qualitative interviews confirm the challenge of linking business strategy and communication. Our impression is that the communications managers being interviewed work fairly systematically and try to relate the goals of their communication departments to overall business/public sector goals. They use different forms of management systems to set goals, sub-goals,

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[1] http://www.svd.se/naringsliv/sverige-varldens-snabbast-liberaliserade-land_6949421.svd

activities and actions. These systems help the managers to obtain an overview of goals, responsible coworkers and how far different projects have progressed. One system that organizations use is the balanced scorecard, which is a strategy performance management tool that helps managers follow and control the execution of activities. We can clearly see that diagrams, measures and Excel spreadsheets are common, which we see as a result of a predominant management logic that rules in organizations.

According to the communication managers that we interviewed, goal setting is a way to "manage what we as a department should do". The goals also function as a tool for prioritization, follow-up, evaluation and revision. The explanations for why the communication managers work can be interpreted as "rational," and equivalency can be found in almost every basic textbook on strategic communication/public relations/corporate communication. Alvesson (2011) explains that interviewees in organizations often use different strategies to portray themselves as rational and well-read practitioners. Interviewees, in general, tend to give answers that they think the interviewer is looking for and they follow different scripts. One technique that Alvesson and Deetz (2000) propose for getting answers other than the official is "drilling." It includes different tactics such as building a good relationship with the interviewees, getting to know their organization, asking more critical questions and conducting follow-up interviews that will, in best cases, lead to alternative answers rather than scripted ones. This does not necessarily mean that the scholar will come closer to an objective "reality" or to true feelings, but by drilling, the interviewer can derive informal, hidden and less pleasant perceptions and understandings of organizational life. By "drilling" we also found alternative answers to why it is important for a communication department to work with goals:

Working with goals is a way of producing legitimacy for our professions in the or-

ganization. We must talk the same language as the rest of the organization [manag-

ers]. It is an important step towards receiving legitimacy for what we do.

Another premise within the traditional rational way of working strategically is to evaluate com-

munication activities to see whether or not goals have been achieved. These evaluations will

hence provide information for adjustments and changes to future actions in order to constantly

improve. Vast differences exist between the different Swedish organizations when it comes to

conducting evaluations. Some organizations do hardly even any evaluations, while others regular-

ly perform different result oriented assessments on users/customers to check issues such as trust,

loyalty and brand value, as well as on coworkers to measure their identification with the organiza-

tion. Organizations that regularly conduct these studies tend to measure both perceptions and

different forms of results.

Evaluations and measurements are part and parcel of the prevailing understanding of stra-

tegic communication management. However, an alternative perspective is presented by organiza-

tional scholars like Czarniawska (2008) who that we have entered a measurement society and

question the value of never-ending evaluations. Czarniawska further reflects on the real value of

evaluation for assessing goal fulfillment, since meeting goals and measuring them against reality

is never stable. Goals tend to be changed or adjusted over the course of time, and current reality

and conditions will definitely not be the same as when the goals were set. A study of Swedish

public organizations shows that evaluations are seldom used as intended, i.e. for improvement of

the organizational activities (Vedung, 1995). According to this study, evaluations are most often

used for educational or legitimacy purposes. Czarniawska (2008) draws the conclusion that the

most common use of evaluations is ritual. In other words, the result of evaluations is not used, but

the ritual is done and that seems to be the most important aspect. Rituals per se are not harmful to

an organization – they are important. However, evaluations can become harmful, as Czarniawska underscores, when they are interpreted literally, since the original goal in itself tends to be a holy cow that cannot be questioned or criticized. Consequently, adjustments or changes will be difficult to make.

As mentioned above the ECM study showed that Swedish respondents consider "building and maintaining trust" as a main challenge. The Swedish communication managers that we interviewed also emphasized that an important mission is to strengthen the trust of the organization. They underscored that an important way to build trust is by creating a good dialog between the organization and its stakeholder. According to the interviewees this can be accomplished through establishing well-functioning channels and digital platforms, but also through co-workers' reception of customers and citizens.. While there is a tendency in the ECM findings to primarily focus on "external" communication, the Swedish communication managers also emphasized internal communication aspects. Our impression is that a strong mission of the communication departments is to contribute in engaging coworkers in their work and in identifying with the organization, i.e. to strengthen the organization's identity. According to the communication managers, this could be achieved by creating understanding, trust and legitimacy. This isn't something that communication department can produce or cause by themselves. As in many other cases, middle managers are the most important communicators for their coworkers. However, an important mission of the communication professional, according to the interviewees, is to "make it possible for others to communicate." This means that the mission of coaching and education has become even more important and provides the potential to improve the understanding of the value of communication among managers. This perception also implies an alternative and broader way of perceiving the challenge of communication management – corporate communication it is not only

about what the communication professionals communicate, but what all organization members say and do.

Transition in Roles

The roles of communication professionals are a topic that has been widely discussed among both scholars and practitioners. Interestingly enough, one reaction from some interviewees was that less energy should be spent on this kind of navel-gazing and more focus should instead be placed on delivering actual results. However, roles say something about the expectations organizations have of their employees (Tindall and Holtzhausen, 2011), and they are linked to a differentiation of work tasks and expected patterns of actions (Heide and Simonsson, 2014a). In this respect, roles are closely related to the possibilities of doing the right things rather than just doing things right.

ECM has defined four different roles in a 2*2 matrix (see Figure 1 below):

- Strategic facilitators (helping to define business strategies, supporting business goals by managing communication)

- Business advisors (helping to define business strategies, not supporting business goals by managing communication)

- Operational supporters (supporting business goals by managing communication, not helping to define business strategies)

- Isolated experts (not supporting business goals by managing communication, not helping to define business strategies).

Figure 1: Four professional roles
Source: ECM (2014)

The identification of "linking business strategy to communication," as a main issue, is also evident in the enactment of professional roles. Most respondents (approx. 60 percent) aim to be or become strategic facilitators while 26 percent try to define themselves as operational supporters, and a small minority see themselves as business advisors or isolated experts. The ECM 2014 clearly shows that communication professionals want to be part of the dominant coalition in their organizations and that most of them consider their role to be a strategic facilitator. This does not mean that they, in fact, are members of the dominant coalition or act as strategic facilitators in their organization, and it does not mean that other parts of the organizations' management view them in this way.

The interviews with Swedish communication managers are in line with the ECM results. The interviews clearly indicate that the studied communication professionals act as operational supporters, while the role as business advisors does not seem to be especially salient. Thus, it seems to be common that the communication departments break down overall business goals to communication goals and activities, but not that communication managers are playing an active or strong role in setting overall business goals. A possible implication of this limited role is that communication is not an integral part of business goals, but rather subordinate to a traditional management rationality.

A clear pattern in the interviews is the idea that a professional journey has been undertaken: the role of communication professionals has developed from being executors to consultants and from being producers to business supporters. When asked what these new roles mean, the interviewees use words and phrases such as "enablers," "clarifying structures and processes," "connecting different parts into a common brand," "facilitating," "educators," "business developer," "meeting manager," "interlocutor," and "set an example." The new roles also imply contributing to a process rather than delivering products:

We should be part of the process all the time. People should not only come to us for a press release. Our role is to become more educational and consultative and to work with formulating goals. (Communication manager, public organization)

Of course, the shift in roles does not exclude the more traditional roles of communication technicians (cf. Dozier, 1992; Dozier and Broom, 2006). However, the interviews show that new strategic roles as business supporters and consultants are considered more prestigious than a writer or a graphic designer.

The CIPR 2015 survey of communication professionals in the UK shows that as many as 96 percent think that it is important "being considered a professional." The shift in roles could be interpreted as a development towards increased professionalization and closer links to management. However, one important condition for gaining legitimacy and the status of a clear profession is to hold some kind of unique, special knowledge (Brante, 2014). The emphasis on being enablers, business supporters, facilitators, etc., includes rather generic management skills, which can therefore be seen as counterproductive in the quest for professionalization. Thus, the increased emphasis on broader roles and generic knowledge raises the crucial question of whether it is possible to define a unique core competence of communication professionals.

As mentioned above Gregory and Willis (2013) argue that the uniqueness of public relations lies in its ability to take a multi-stakeholder perspective of the organization. The communication/PR manager's job is to "see the organization as a whole, with a helicopter view, seeing it in context and, more specifically, seeing it as stakeholders see it" (p. 11). Gregory and Willis (2013) further argue that contrary to other professions, public relations is functionally neutral. For example, while financial directors perceive the organization in terms of resources, the communication professional does not use any specialist business discipline.

While we agree that it is highly relevant to define a multi-stakeholder perspective as part of the core knowledge and competence of communication professionals, we question the idea that communication professionals do not use any specialist business discipline perspective. We would rather argue that the role and competence of communication professionals is to see organizations through a specific communication lens (cf. Deetz and Putnam, 2001). For example, when making decisions in a top management team, the communication manager should always be the one who questions and clarifies how the decision will be transformed into a comprehensible and meaning-ful message, what possible reactions it might create, etc.

In sum, we see a need to clarify and demonstrate the unique contribution of corporate communication roles. In a similar vein, one of the interviewed communication managers under-lined that other functions and professions in the organization are not fully aware of the new roles of communication professionals:

We need to make what we actually contribute more visible. We, as communicators,

have evolved, but have those around us noticed this change?"

It is a bit surprising that communication related words and phrases, such as language, message, images, sensemaking, influence on attitudes and behaviors, presentation skills, rhetoric, dialogue, etc., are not emphasized when the interviewees explain their new communication roles. In order to maintain and further increase legitimacy, it is important not to lose the communicative perspec-tive when introducing new roles for communication professionals. Future research should aim to further clarify the communicative aspects of being a business supporter and other strategic roles.

Conclusions

The main aim of corporate communication is to contribute to the core drivers of success, preparing for an uncertain future, in contrast to communication efforts that support daily business (Zerfass and Huck, 2007). In this article, we have focused on this primary aim, i.e. the ambitions of communication professionals *to do the right things* rather than just doing things right. In reality, this is not really a dichotomy since communication professionals must deal with both strategic and tactical or operative work. Communicators just doing the right things (e.g. facilitating strategy work), without the ability to do things right (e.g. producing convincing texts) might be viewed as fluffy strategists.

The focus on doing the rights things is still more interesting to analyze since this dimension is more complex and its meaning is not entirely clear. Several of the interviewees in this initial study seem to do their work according to the traditional management agenda – i.e. they break down overall business goals and translate these to measurable communication goals. There is a strong belief in communication as a management function, and the communication professionals seem to do everything they can to integrate communication as a natural dimension of management rationality. However, on the basis of a reflexivity perspective, there is a need for further reflection on roles and practices. The search for working strategically, doing the rights thing, is often imbued with one-dimensional rationalistic ideals (e.g. cause-effect-thinking), but we think there is a need for a more multi-dimensional approach – looking for paradoxes.

As described in the theoretical framework, in tune with increasing organizational complexity and ambiguity, scholars have shown an increasing interest in exploring paradoxes in organizations (Lewis, 2000; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Paradoxes can be used to enhance the understanding of conflicting demands and opposing perspectives – i.e. paradoxes capture a multi-

dimensional reality. We have identified two main paradoxes in this study, one related to the ideals of organizational rationality and one to the transition in roles.

The first paradox may be described as a conflict between two logics – *managerialism and professionalism*. ECM clearly shows that communication professionals think that "linking business strategy and communication" is the main challenge, and the interviews provide examples of how this is done. The actions described follow traditional management logic: organizational strategic goals are broken down to communication goals and the effects of communication efforts are measured. Sometimes, depending on the organizational type, the communication managers influence the development of the overall strategic goals, but most times they do not. The strong focus on goal setting and the measurement of effects may be effective – our study does not measure the outcomes – and communication becomes an integrated dimension of management. But one may question whether the integration of communication in traditional management also has disadvantages (cf. Deetz, 1992). Is it possible to measure all communication efforts? If communication is about shared meaning and dialogue, is there a problem with totally aligning communication as a professional dimension with strategic goals? Is there a communicative rationality, e.g. focusing on good relationships and the satisfaction of social and symbolic needs, which is lost in translation to the management rationality? One may make a comparison to another closely related organizational professional arena: Human Resources Management (HRM). HR professionals also want to be part of the dominant coalition in organizations and have, step by step, increased their focus on management and strategic goals. However, the focus on managerial effectiveness may endanger their professional legitimacy connected to employee welfare. Sheehan, De Cieri, Greenwood and Van Buren (2014) argue that:

As the imperative to contribute to economic value in the firm has increased, HRM has concentrated almost exclusively on linking employment management to organi-

zational performance. Many have argued that this concern is not necessarily compat-

ible – indeed it is antithetical – to concern for people (p. 118).

Along similar lines, Alvesson and Spicer (2012) argue that the quest for being part of the domi-

nant coalition and the traditional management focus on control and order give rise to functional

stupidity – a reasoning that also may be of relevance for communication professionals:

Functional stupidity is organizationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive

reasoning, and justification. It entails a refusal to use intellectual resources outside a

narrow and 'safe' terrain. It can provide a sense of certainty that allows organiza-

tions to function smoothly. This can save the organization and its members from the

frictions provoked by doubt and reflection. Functional stupidity contributes to main-

taining and strengthening organizational order. It can also motivate people, help

them to cultivate their careers, and subordinate them to socially acceptable forms of

management and leadership. (p. 1196)

While functional stupidity can generate positive outcomes, such as certainty about which one is

and contributes with, it can also have negative consequences. Functional stupidity may generate

problematic patterns of thinking, leading to dissonance at both an individual level (e.g. doubt on

the meaning of one's work) and organizational level (e.g. avoidance or misrecognition of prob-

lems) (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012). Further, there is a risk with an exaggerated belief in the man-

agement logic among communication professional, namely that communication is understood as

something that easy can be controlled and managed. In other words, the management logic can

easily steer into a simplistic transmission view of communication, depreciating communication

professionals to information officers (cf. Varey, 2000). Popular management books praise mana-

gerialism, i.e. prioritizing management and believing that managers have best prerequisites to

anticipate, plan, control and thereby providing order and rationality in ambiguous situations (Mintzberg, 1999). However, reality is complex and ever changing, and organizational scholars have for long questioned the ideal of control and order. Organizational scholars emphasize that ambiguity and uncertainty are key features of organizational life (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2011). That line of reasoning would open for alternative rationalities to managerialism, where the professionalism of different professions guides strategic decision-making. While organizational life is characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty that demands interpretation, sensemaking and communication to be managed, the professionalism of communication professionals ought to have a great potential. It is here important to emphasize that we refer to *enacted professionalism*, that is "professional practice as observed, perceived and interpreted (by any observer – from out-side or within the relevant professional group, and including those doing the 'enacting')" (Evans, 2008: 29). This form of professionalism stands in contrast to demanded and prescribed profes-sionalism. Hence, professionalism is a socially constructed and contextually variable and not an absolute or an ideal (Troman, 1996).

The second paradox may be described as a conflict between *strategic generalists and oper-ational specialists*. The interviews are similar to the results in the ECM, showing the transition in roles in the communication field. Communication professionals want to be viewed as and work as strategic facilitators, not specialists or producers. This result is, obviously, closely related to the other paradox. In doing everything that is possible to do the right things, instead of focusing on doing things right, the communication professionals transition themselves into strategic manag-ers. A driving force behind this process is the aim for increased organizational legitimacy. The backside of this transition is that the communication professionals may be viewed as a diffuse and diluted part of the organization (mainly talking about the importance of communication and strat-egies, not "doing" communication). In a similar vein, (Nothhaft and Schölzel, 2015: 22) argue

that "communication strategies do not communicate, do not convince – people, products, services and messages do. The new and ideal, but rather abstract, role as a strategic facilitator has an unclear relationship to other managerial roles and may be questioned in the organization. The transition of roles may also stand in conflict with developing a position where the communication professionals are linked to a body of core competence. The discussion about core competence is also of relevance in research, where there is a need for developing concepts, ideas and a language that is distinguishable from other fields:

> Important questions to ask are as follows: What knowledge do we produce that can legitimately promise to retain its force in any longer historical assessment? Which of our theoretical insights provide guidance for coping with social forces, conditions, or processes that pose enduring problems for practical social action and which are only expressive ends in themselves? (Dühring, 2015)

To summarize, based on the empirical findings in the ECM, the interviews and the theoretical framework, we conclude that if the idea of the communicative organization is to be fruitfully realized, it is necessary to depart from a multi-dimensional rationality and question ideas that are taken for granted. We found two paradoxes – managerialism and professionalism and strategic generalists and operational specialists, and we encourage additional research that further could explore paradoxes in order to spark dialogue, which may undermine one-dimensional thinking and functional stupidity.

The title of this article is the question "Doing the right things or doing things right?" As we have reasoned above there is dominating management logic that rules organizational life and prevailing values. In other words, the dominating logic has a clear power dimension and tends to suppress alternative understandings of the reality. The management logic is found in strategic

plans and documents, and is enacted by the organizational culture. Since the management logic undermine alternative logics and while the management logic often is taken for granted, it makes it difficult for communication professionals to introduce or work under a different logic that celebrate alternative values. The question in the title boils down to managerialism versus professionalism. We firmly believe that communication professionals ought to focus more on professionalism and not solely try to comply with the managerial values of effective yield. Communications is a soft power discipline and communication professionals must develop alternative values that rhetorical convinces management. Our experience is that communication professionals in general have difficulties in describing the values of strategic communication. They are urged to describe this value in economic terms, but they often have problems to describe qualitative values of communication. With a traditional managerial logic communication tends to be reduced to a question of information distribution and media content, where communication professionals mainly have a technician role and focus on "doing things right". We believe that communication professionalism will arise when communication practitioners takes and work according to the principles of strategic communication. This means that they are communication advocates and takes a communicative perspective on important organizational decisions, and also "doing the right things".

Limitations and future implications

This article is based on a large survey and a small empirical interview material. The results point out important tendencies, but more research is needed. Interviews produce rich empirical material and interviewees can contribute with many interesting ideas and perspectives on different issues. However, the interview material has limitations. Alvesson and Sveningsson emphasize (2011: 358f) that "[…] the strong norm of being knowledgeable penetrates a lot of talk and action. We think we know, or we want to give the impression that we know. But often we do not." Interviews

must be combined with observations of practice. The results of the initial interview study indicate that we need to focus more on close observations and shadowing of communication professionals to understand how they materialize strategic communication (cf. Zerfass et al., 2014). Further, the study shows that there is a great need to understand more of what constitutes professionalism for communication professionals. Which logic constitutes communication professionalism? Which is the core competence of communication professionals? Nowadays competence in dialog is pointed out as a central part of the competence that communication professional should have in order to fulfill the role as internal communication consultants (Heide and Simonsson, 2011). At the same time, researchers such as Taylor and Kent (2014) claim that many communication professionals lack training in dialog even if it is as important as media relations and strategic management. Finally, this study denotes a need of more research on value creation and corporate communication. If communication professionals shall be perceived as important key actors in the organization, they need to know how they can prove and declare the value of communication, such as engaged coworkers that daily realize strategic communication in their meeting with customers and other stakeholders, and hopefully establish and improve the reputation of the organization. This is in line with the latest research in strategy, where researchers pinpoint that we need to focus on the realization of strategy by coworkers in the organization to get more knowledge of this phenomenon (Balogun et al., 2015). Up to now, researchers have mainly been interested in the formulation process of a strategy by managers, but that does not give us any information of how strategy is carried out in practice.

This article has also some practical implications for communication professionals. We understand good scholarship not primarily as normative advices how things should be carried out in organizations. Inspired by Schütz (1967) we rather believe that the ideal of good scholarship is to uncover and analyze taken-for-granted aspects of the mundane world. Communication profes-

sionals interpretations, understandings, and interactions becomes over time habitualized and ob-jectified, and thereby taken-for granted (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Our ambition with this article is to put the dominating rationality of organizations in the limelight and to discuss which consequences it can entail. Hopefully, this reflection can produce our larger awareness among communication professionals and start a discussion how to develop a communicative rationality that is accepted by key stakeholders.

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