Chief Communications Officer Leadership

Vision for 2022

3 Strategic Actions for Success
In 2022, we continue to feel the human toll of the global pandemic, but we already know that 2021 has been a watershed period in which attitudes and norms have permanently shifted — in our everyday lives and at work.

Living through COVID-19 has increased social awareness — as have growing demands for equity for those who are underrepresented.

Businesses have also changed. For many organizations, the pandemic has catalyzed digital business initiatives as we adapt to the demands of employees, customers and other stakeholders, who were forced into new digital options that they have now come to favor.

B2B purchasers are happy to buy digitally, without a sales representative; B2C consumers are buying off social media platforms; employees are physically distributed and communicating asynchronously — and IT infrastructures must secure the organization despite this “anytime, anyway, anywhere” way in which we’re operating.

You and your team may be burning out, and it’s never been more important to prioritize your time and energy.

In your role as a leader, you’ve now spent months adapting to change and delivering new solutions at speed. You and your team may be burning out, and it’s never been more important to prioritize your time and energy. To help with that, Gartner Leadership Vision provides top-level guidance to leaders and their teams on where to focus — based on our data-driven research.

We’re providing detailed insights to our clients across dozens of roles, and we’re now excited to share excerpts with the business community beyond our clients. We hope this will help you to focus discussions with your teams, peers and other leaders, so you can more quickly and effectively diagnose priorities and actions, especially as you solidify your strategic plans for 2022.
A Perfect Storm

Sources of Challenges for Chief Communications Officers (CCOs)

COVID-19 Pandemic and Aftershocks → CCO → Rise of ESG and Social Justice Expectations + Social Turbulence

ESG = environmental, social and governance
## Trends, Challenges, Actions for the Communications Leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend No. 1</th>
<th>Trend No. 2</th>
<th>Trend No. 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demand for communications support is increasing faster than resources are being allocated.</strong> CCOs have been asked to expand their support to the business but haven’t received commensurate budget increases.</td>
<td><strong>The pace of change is overwhelming employees.</strong> Our volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment creates confusion for employees, hindering their ability to perform and achieve business outcomes.</td>
<td><strong>Both internal and external audiences demand greater transparency and engagement with ESG issues.</strong> CCOs must tell a story about how ESG performance intertwines with corporate identity and direction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Challenges for the communications leader

- **For CCOs to act as strategic partners to the business, they must balance short-term execution needs with long-term strategic planning to avoid a slip back into “order-taker” mode.**
- **CCOs must support and engage employees through upheaval to maintain the talent outcomes that are necessary for strong business performance.**
- **CCOs must effectively meet internal and external expectations for social impact goals by selecting the most optimal impact agendas and driving effective communications on ESG and social initiatives.**

### Action for the communications leader

- **Enable goal focus by creating a strategic plan that cascades from business priorities — designing roles to enable people to focus on strategy and introducing processes to help prioritize work.**
- **Evaluate and evolve communications approaches to engaging employees in new ways of working by listening to employees, segmenting audiences and evaluating the optimal channel mix.**
- **Prioritize which social issues your organization will support, using predetermined engagement criteria. Then optimize your social impact messaging by aligning it to your corporate narrative and emphasizing personal benefits.**

Source: Gartner
# Create Structure and Processes to Enable Goal Focus

## Tactics to Improve Goal Focus

### Strategic Planning

Ensure that strategies are cascaded from top business priorities and that they include SMART business objectives and KPIs.

### Role Design

Redesign team roles to separate execution and strategy, assigning execution to junior and midlevel staff, and strategy to senior staff.

### Processes

Introduce processes and governance (for example, service statements and prioritization exercises) that enable communications to push back on nonstrategic work.

## Process Opportunity: Communications Activity Prioritization Matrix to Help Identify Priority Areas for CCOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consideration No. 1: Business Value (i.e., alignment to organization’s strategic priorities)</th>
<th>High Value</th>
<th>Medium Value</th>
<th>Low Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Procedures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential for communications to add value is limited.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardize or enable self-service.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Big Wins</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Communications is key to driving the business outcome.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain or invest more in these areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question Marks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business value and communications opportunity are limited.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce or eliminate this type of work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red Herrings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work is enticing but has limited business value.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce or eliminate this type of work.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consideration No. 2: **Opportunity for Communications to Add Value** (i.e., the need to influence behavior)

SMART = specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

Source: Gartner Communications Activity Value Assessment
Evolve Communication Approaches to Engage Employees in New Ways of Working

### New Ways of Working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colocated</th>
<th>Distributed</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Working Together, Together</strong></td>
<td><strong>Working Alone, Together</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colocated</td>
<td>Distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Together, Apart</strong></td>
<td><strong>Working Alone, Apart</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Colocated**:
  - Working Together, Together
  - Working Alone, Together
- **Distributed**:
  - Working Together, Apart
  - Working Alone, Apart

### Tactics to Engage Employees

1. **Listen to employees** to enhance understanding of employee needs, as well as barriers to engagement and performance.
2. **Segment audiences and develop personas** to ensure targeted communications that best reach, engage and drive behavioral change.
3. **Determine which channels are most suitable** for engaging employees — including digital enablement, peer-to-peer connections, and optimizing leaders and managers when appropriate.

Source: Gartner
Follow 3 Principles to Ensure YouPrioritize the Right Social Issues and Communicate Effectively

Tactics to Improve Social Issue Communication

**Align With the Corporate Narrative**
CCOs must update and use their corporate identity and direction to guide their selection and communication of social impact commitments.

**Use Predetermined Engagement Criteria**
CCOs must help create consistent decision criteria to reach a consensus and defend social issue selection.

**Communicate Personal Fulfillment**
CCOs must communicate how social impact commitments fulfill the personal needs of stakeholders.

Source: Gartner
Recommended Actions

**Enable goal focus** by creating a strategic plan that cascades from business priorities — designing roles to enable people to focus on strategy and introducing processes to help prioritize work.

**Evaluate and evolve communications approaches** to engaging employees in new ways of working by listening to employees, segmenting audiences and evaluating the optimal channel mix.

**Prioritize which social issues your organization will support**, using predetermined engagement criteria. Then **optimize your social impact messaging** by aligning it to your corporate narrative and emphasizing personal benefits.
Actionable, objective insight

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for communications and marketing leaders:

**Research**
- **Communications' Role in Managing the Future of Work**
  The shift to remote work is an opportunity for communications leaders to make an impact. Learn how to evolve remote worker experiences.
  - [Download Research](#)

**Research**
- **Build a Better Strategic Plan for Your Function**
  Turn your strategy into action with our tools and templates.
  - [Download Templates](#)

**Resource Hub**
- **Future of Work Reinvented**
  Reinvent where, when and how we work to maximize employees’ engagement and productivity.
  - [Learn More](#)

**Journal**
- **Gartner Business Quarterly**
  Stay up to date with the most compelling research on organizational issues that cut across the C-suite.
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