

**CORNELISSEN, J.P. (2014), CORPORATE  
COMMUNICATION: A GUIDE TO THEORY AND  
PRACTICE. LONDON: SAGE, FOURTH EDITION**

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As they discuss the admitted existence of a ‘journey of progressive affirmation’ (Ruão, 2004), the Editors of this volume should be congratulated on the study of organizational communication for several reasons. Firstly, due to the openness to new perspectives and approaches that are essential to the establishment of organizational communication as a scientific area, highlighting its strategic role in organizations. Secondly, because the relationship between organizational communication and other scientific fields – including sociology, anthropology, or other more recent scientific areas, such as organizational psychosociology or marketing remain tense.

These are also the assumptions underlying the starting point proposed by Joep Cornelissen in this work, which builds upon the assumption that communication and the impact of globalization on organizations are inseparable processes. This is perhaps the main pillar of this fourth edition, which revisits the theoretical advances conducted by the academy and updates the case studies discussed. In addition to this update, this edition features a new chapter on social media, new up-to-date material on CSR standards, transnational governance and corporate citizenship. In comparison to earlier editions, there is an extended focus on media relations, internal communication and leadership.

Besides its scientific objectives, this book was designed to help students understand the design of communication strategies, as well as the processes underlying their development processes, which are aimed at improving management practices in organizations.

Assuming that organizations are essential places where knowledge of communication studies is produced and emphasising the need for companies strategically manage communication, the professor and researcher from the University of Amsterdam sees communication as a field of management. The author focuses on the word ‘corporate’ to raise the status of communicative practice within organizations to the level of awareness and relevance attached to the rationale conveyed to communication actions, arguing that its effectiveness depends on the creation of a favourable relationship basis between the groups on which the organization depends. This need to attach the strategic role of communication associated with the operational nature of the work stands out from the beginning also as a result of the author backgrounding the contribution of other areas, which he classifies as secondary. However, this is not sufficient to see ‘*Corporate*

*Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*' as less challenging to the most sceptical of this perspective; rather on the contrary, Cornelissen seeks to critically review the literature, in summary, across the main theoretical, conceptual and empirical foci arising from the diverse contributions and points of view that encompass the study of communication in the organizational context. In this regard, the author states that '*Corporate Communication*' benefits from direct access to the research and ideas that derive from areas such as strategy, organizational theory, etc., which are emphasised in the curricula of journalism and communication schools, and made evident in the further readings recommended, available at the book *website*<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, this is where the author begins his journey, by addressing issues that are particularly relevant to the study of organizational communication, such as identity and reputation – topics that involve a sharp perspective of related areas, of which public relations stands out. Otherwise, the seriousness of the work might legitimately be challenged; undoubtedly, as these are regarded as the benchmark of success of communication field experts, being widely studied by other areas, they are a key asset of business sustainability. These topics, with which Cornelissen associates the establishment of relationships between an organization and its stakeholders as a core tenet of his approach, and which coherently link the five structural parts of the book, are not elected accidentally.

However, what is innovative about this approach is the paradigm shift resulting from how society – disentangled in a web of stakeholders – intersects companies and organizations. In other words, the power of organizations in building a positive reputation lies more with minimizing risks than 'setting' messages that communicate a certain positioning. In this regard, the apogee of new technologies is highlighted. This is the essential support of a globalized world, which introduced a new benchmark in communication platforms, incrementing the space of publics and individuals, increasingly fragmented and active. The implications are that communication professionals need to maintain the coherence of the alignment between '*think like*' and '*perform like*' sustained in identity as a key element of the corporate reputational capital.

In this inherently academic publication, Joep Cornelissen first contextualises the subject matter, in the introductory chapter, framing it historically to explain its roots, stemming from professional practice. As he assumes that communication acts over the organizational dynamics, the author details the characteristics of a wider context of analysis. He does so by resorting to a holistic perspective of the organization that is rooted in more or less typified phenomena, arising from globalization, by means of which organizations are considered to be more or less contemporaneous, depending on their permeability.

The reader is then convinced of the author's need to introduce, in the second part of the book, the key concepts that guide the academic research agenda (e.g. *stakeholders*, *engagement*, etc.), which are associated with communication models supported by the *stakeholder theory* of Edward Freeman (1984). Cornelissen therefore alerts the reader to normative aspects in the relationship between the company and the different groups,

<sup>1</sup> <https://study.sagepub.com/cornelissen4e>

since these can be reconciled with instrumental interests, just as the social and economic goals are not mutually exclusive. Notwithstanding his focus on the organizational reputation gains, the author considers that the normative considerations strengthen the legitimacy of the organization, as they are shared by most, if not all the groups to which the organization relates. As far as the study of the elements that contribute to the reputational effect – image and identity – are concerned, the degree of contemporaneity expressed in these aspects observes the new settings that affect corporate competitiveness patterns. The importance attached to understanding these phenomena is explained in the last chapter of the book, '*New Developments in Corporate Communication*'. These phenomena are allocated to specific areas of intervention – CSR and community relations, among others – that had been approached in previous editions as *challenges* or drivers, if we like, of the organizational *modus operandi*.

The three chapters that make up the third part of the book, '*Communication Strategy*', '*Strategic Planning and Campaign Management*' and '*Research and Measurement*', focus on providing an understanding of the techniques and procedures used, based on the premise that communication professionals are not involved in strategic decision processes, unless they have the required skills. Although, on the one hand, this is already current practice in many companies, whose communication department directors play a role in strategic decision – or, as the author calls it, at *corporate level* –, on the other hand this involvement remains an aspiration for a large number of professionals. The author breaks down the strategy process into five steps: strategic analysis, strategic intent, strategic action, and evaluation. These do not necessarily follow a logical and formal planning, but rather a consideration of aspects arising from the sensitivity and experience of communication professionals to contextualize the organization in its operating environment.

The fourth part of the book, named areas of expertise, explores the classical professional areas: media relations, employee communication, issues management and crisis communication, respectively. This discussion is widely supported by case studies, whose contemporaneity outlines the profile and characteristics of its actors. If, on the one hand, it is a truism to say that organizations have to pay attention to changes in their operating environment, on the other hand the need is increasingly highlighted for these professionals to appropriately interpret the environment, in its socio-economic and technological dimensions, not only by contextualizing the company's activity, but mainly by anticipating and adjusting the impact of environmental changes to the specifics of their areas of intervention.

The fifth part of the book comprises leadership, CSR and community relations as emerging areas of corporate communication. Regardless of the perspective adopted to analyse the set of current problems (re)formulated from globalization, communication must not cede, in this regard, to that which has long revealed a civic sign and prestige marketing – and not so much, as would be desirable, a well internalized attitude of organizations as neuralgic points of contemporary societies. The author also highlights the relevance of social media to organizations, depending on the adaptation of the corporate

environment and on the development of communication skills associated with a state of affairs that is seen by many as volatile, but which is unsurpassable when considering a set of digitally-based business opportunities, in addition to awareness benefits.

Joep Cornelissen's work ends with a rich glossary of key terms that are helpful when searching for references to the concepts covered, adding to the practical examples and case studies discussed throughout the book.

Indeed, '*Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*' calls upon the synergies between communication practice knowledge deployed in companies and research conducted in the academia, where the issues are discussed and guided by two objectives: a theoretical and a practical one. The aim is that these are a valuable contribution to the acquis of organizational and strategic communication studies, both for all the reasons associated with the multidisciplinary nature of the discipline, and the emotions associated with human phenomena. //

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