

A model to measure strategic communications quality

Draft for discussion

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Background

The model can be used to plan investment or improvements in strategic communications quality.

There are some assumptions underpinning this model

- the stakeholders defined in the various sections are key to any organisation
- that there is a hierarchy of communications from no communications (poor) to two-way symmetric communications (good)
- that, when prioritising improvements, some stakeholder groups are more important than others and to the degree that I have built in to the model

These assumptions largely stem from my professional experience rather than an academic or empirical background.

How to use the model

The model consists of 5 sections. Within each section there are up to 5 statements or groups of statements with an associated score. If the statement can be said, with evidence, to fairly describe the organisation in question then the associated score should be allocated to the organisation. In each section only one Statement should be used to deliver the score.

The scores for each section can then be added. The total score gives a measure of strategic communications quality relative to a theoretical ideal. An organisation meeting the highest quality statement in each section would score 39.

Record the findings here

Section 1:	Statement	_____	Score	___ / 15
Section 2:	Statement	_____	Score	___ / 5
Section 3:	Statement	_____	Score	___ / 4
Section 4:	Statement	_____	Score	___ / 5
Section 5:	Statement	_____	Score	___ / 10
Total		_____	Score	___/39

There is a worked example towards the back.

Section 1 : Customers / Service users

(A maximum of 15 points)

Statement 1a

We make no attempt to inform customers about what the organisation is seeking to achieve (0)

Statement 1b

We provide some information about what we are seeking to achieve but we do not know whether customers understand this. Our customers can't explain how they influence our decisions. (3)

Statement 1c

We provide information to our customers about what we are seeking to achieve and we measure this so that we can be sure we are using the most effective media.

We provide some ways for customers to influence our decisions and at least some of our customers understand this.(6)

Statement 1d

Our customers understand what we are seeking to achieve and they can explain how we keep them informed/ Our customers also understand how to influence our decisions and they can explain how their views influence our decisions. (10)

Statement 1e

Our customers understand what we are seeking to achieve, they agree with what we are seeking to achieve and they agree that it is founded in an understanding of their views. Our customers are advocates for our services and actively involve others in the wide range of mechanisms we provide to influence our decisions. (15)

Section 2: Partners and other stakeholders

(A maximum of 5 points)

Statement 2a

We make no attempt to inform partners about what the organisation is seeking to achieve (0)

Statement 2b

We provide some information about what we are seeking to achieve but we do not know whether partners understand this. (1)

Statement 2c

Our partners can't explain how they influence our decisions.

We provide information to our partners about what we are seeking to achieve and we measure this so that we can be sure we are using the most effective media.

We provide some ways for partners to influence our decisions and at least some of our partners understand this. (2)

Statement 2d

Our partners and I have a shared understanding of what needs to be done.

We are clear with them about what we are seeking to achieve and how this is founded in our shared understanding of what needs to be done.

Our partners are clear with us about what they are seeking to achieve and how this is founded in our shared understanding of what needs to be done (3)

Statement 2e

We have a relationship with our partners based on a shared understanding of what needs to be done.

They understand what we are seeking to achieve. They agree that it is appropriate and that we are best placed to undertake this.

We understand what they are seeking to achieve. We agree that it is appropriate and that they are best placed to undertake this.

We keep each other informed about or progress and review what needs to be done together. (5)

Section 3: Suppliers and potential suppliers

(A maximum of 4 points)

Statement 3a

We make no attempt to inform suppliers about what the organisation is seeking to achieve (0)

Statement 3b

We provide some information about what we are seeking to achieve but we do not know whether suppliers understand this.

Our suppliers can't explain how they influence our decisions. (1)

Statement 3c

We provide information to our suppliers about what we are seeking to achieve and we measure this so that we can be sure we are using the most effective media.

We provide some ways for suppliers to influence our decisions and at least some of our suppliers understand this. (2)

Statement 3d

Our suppliers understand what we are seeking to achieve and they can explain how we keep them informed. Our suppliers also understand how to influence our decisions and they can explain how their views influence our decisions. (4)

Section 4: Staff / volunteers

(Maximum 5)

Statement 4a

We make no attempt to inform staff about what the organisation is seeking to achieve (0)

Statement 4b

We provide some information about what we are seeking to achieve but we do not know whether employees understand this.

Our employees can't explain how they influence our decisions. (1)

Statement 4c

We provide information to our employees about what we are seeking to achieve and we measure this so that we can be sure we are using the most effective media.

We provide some ways for employees to influence our decisions and at least some of our employees understand this. (2)

Statement 4d

Our employees understand what we are seeking to achieve and they can explain how we keep them informed/ Our employees also understand how to influence our decisions and they can explain how their views influence our decisions. (3)

Statement 4e

Our employees understand what we are seeking to achieve, they agree with what we are seeking to achieve and they agree that it is founded in an understanding of their views. Our employees are advocates for our services and actively involve others in the wide range of mechanisms we provide to influence our decisions. (5)

Section 5: Senior decision makers

(Maximum 10)

Statement 5a

Our senior decision makers make decisions in isolation and without a clear understanding of stakeholder views or the political and social environment.

The link between decisions taken at a senior level and the impact on stakeholders is not widely understood. (0)

Statement 5b

Our senior decision makers explain their decisions and how they expect them to impact on other stakeholders.

They do not have a clear understanding of stakeholder views and the political and social environment. (2)

Statement 5c

Our senior decision makers explain their decisions and how they expect them to impact on other stakeholders.

They do have a clear understanding of stakeholder views and the political and social environment when taking decisions. (4)

Statement 5d

Our senior decision makers have built a consensus within the organisation about what the organisation is seeking to achieve.

Our senior decision makers can demonstrate that they have a sophisticated understanding of the political and social environment in which they take their decisions. (7)

Statement 5e

Our senior decision makers are seen by stakeholders to be taking sensible strategic decisions based on a consensus about what the organisation is seeking to achieve and how the political and social landscape is likely to evolve. Stakeholders understand the decisions, the reasons for them and can explain how they influenced those decisions. (10)

A worked example

IT Support a small (and fictitious) IT company uses the model.

Section 1: Customers.

IT Support customers seem happy with their services but do they understand where the company is going, what it is seeking to achieve? The company's account managers feel that they are very active with the customers but actually when they asked the question directly customers weren't able to explain how they influence decisions.

They match statement 1b: 3points

Section 2: Partners and other stakeholders

IT Support work with a range of freelancers and larger companies and they have long recognised how important it is to keep them informed about the company. They don't really ask them for their views about the future.

They match statement 2c: 2points

Section 3: Suppliers

IT Support purchase a lot of computer equipment but the computer market being so competitive they don't see the need to build a relationship with any suppliers.

They match statement 3a: 0points.

Section 4: Staff/volunteers

IT Support rely on having a bunch of highly motivated and talented staff. They invest in them and they listen to their suggestions.

They match statement 4d: 3points

Section 5: Senior Decision makers

In this case the decision makers are the members of the Board of IT Support. The company is well run and the Board brings in a wide range of expertise. They take strategic decisions based on pretty good understanding of the market and other pressures. They also explain to their staff and others how the decisions will work out in

practice.

They match statement 5c: 4points

So the summary of their position based on the model is

Section 1:	Statement	<i>1b</i>	Score	3 / 15
Section 2:	Statement	<i>2c</i>	Score	2 / 5
Section 3:	Statement	<i>3a</i>	Score	0 / 4
Section 4:	Statement	<i>4d</i>	Score	3 / 5
Section 5:	Statement	<i>5c</i>	Score	4 / 10
Total			Score	12/39

There is room for improvement. They can use the model to decide where to prioritise improvements.

If they were to be able to meet the next statement up on only one section, what impact would this have?

Meeting section 1c instead of 1b would bring their score to 15
Meeting section 2d instead of 2c would bring their score to 13
Meeting section 3b instead of 3a would bring their score to 13
Meeting section 4e instead of 4d would bring their score to 14
Meeting section 5d instead of 5c would bring their score to 15

So their choice is between investing in improving customer relations or in working harder to build a consensus within the organisation. Either of these courses would be rational and appropriate.

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