



**CHIEF COMMUNICATION OFFICERS IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

***New Survey Finds 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of CCOs Dissatisfied with  
Training and Development Options***

1 September 2016 -- While agreeing that training and development of core and emerging skills are vital to today's Communication professionals, 76% of top Chief Communication Officers (CCOs) feel that most external courses fall short of what is needed to optimally develop their talent.

In a survey of 31 leading companies, including Coca Cola, AmEx, GM, IBM, Hallmark, PwC and Vodafone, CCOs said that university graduates with degrees in Communication or Marketing, and younger to mid-level staff, frequently lacked an understanding of the broader financial, accounting and operational issues associated with running a business. A lack of business acumen and hands-on experience was seen as a big gap in the skill set of many corporate relations executives, and a barrier to their wider progression as tomorrow's business leaders. Knowing how to interpret a company's balance sheet, as well as how to exploit the latest social and digital engagement trends, are skills increasingly demanded of today's Communication professionals.

The CCOs surveyed said that they are seeking to improve their team's business awareness with professional development courses, with seven out of ten using external industry programmes as part of the training mix. While these were believed to save management time, give executives useful networking opportunities and bring an external perspective to in-house practices, they said that training courses were often too simplistic or simply not relevant, and that they generally failed to challenge their people.

A further complaint was that external courses frequently were not aligned to the needs, culture or bottom line imperatives of the company, and were often more about vendors looking for business opportunities rather than delivering valuable insights.

When asked about the attributes of the ideal professional development program, one-third of CCOs said that highly experienced Communication professionals who could bring greater depth of knowledge as well as "out-of-the-box" thinking should run them. A focus on strategic thinking, brand and reputation management, business acumen and leadership skills, as well

as knowledge of the latest social media marketing and digital practices were seen as must-haves.

Sandra Macleod, CEO of Mindful Reputation, the London-based firm that conducted the survey, and co-founder of The Academy for Communication Excellence, said firms were seeking the convenience and perspective of external training courses, but with a content, relevance and focus only available with a customised approach to professional development. “Our research shows that Communication leaders are dissatisfied with a “one-size-fits-all” approach to training and are looking instead for professional development that is customized to the company’s needs and issues, and which considers its corporate structure, culture and distinct communication challenges,” Macleod said.

Macleod said that through the survey, CCOs identified four critical training and development imperatives:

- **Imperative #1:** Communication training must focus on building and demonstrating research-based strategies that link to business / organization objectives
- **Imperative #2:** Bespoke programs are needed; communication training must be tailored to the specific needs of the organization
- **Imperative #3:** CCOs distinguish between PD and Competencies Training, with needs in PD including leadership, brand and reputation and thought leadership
- **Imperative #4:** Business acumen is critical, bridging both PD and competencies

“As CCOs believe that they should be accountable to develop the next generation of Communication leaders, programmes that can deliver on each of these four imperatives, not just any one or two of them, will be the ones that are most highly valued by CCOs and business partners, helping elevate the function of Communication inside any organisation,” she added.

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