Chapter 11
Corporate Communication

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ABSTRACT

In September 2015, it appeared that the Volkswagen Group had circumvented the rules for testing diesel car exhaust gases. Although the organization presents itself as eco-friendly, it used a "default device" for diesel cars to produce less CO_2 during test situations. Due to this kind of scandal, corporate communication is often associated with greenwashing and the manipulation of minds. Using the normative practice approach, the authors introduce some basic distinctions that may help to come to a better understanding of what the specific duty and responsibility of communication professionals is. They argue that corporate communication stands or falls with public trust. Building confidence and public legitimation is the main task of communication professionals. Although communication is about the construction of a communal world, that does not mean that framing and strategic reasoning are not important. In order to bring in a legitimate point of view, one has to present this point of view in an impactful way. Communication professionals have to balance between the interests of the organization and the requirements of public legitimation. They also have to make convincingly clear how their personal biography and the narrative of the organization are interrelated.

INTRODUCTION

In its corporate sustainability report of 2014, the Volkswagen Group claimed that aims to be 'the world's most environmentally compatible automaker.' This was not just an isolated statement, but part of a broader communication strategy in which the Volkswagen Group presented itself as an eco-friendly company (Siano, Vollero, Conte and Amabile, 2017). On September 8, 2015, however, it appeared that Volkswagen had circumvented the rules. To ensure that Diesel cars produce less CO_2 emission during tests, the company made use of a 'default device', specialized software that detects test situations. On the road the Diesel cars were far more polluting. This obviously caused serious damage to Volkswagen's reputation. It was difficult to maintain that the Volkswagen company really cared about the environment. The image of the organization as a reliable partner became a topic of discussion. In the USA newspapers journalists spoke about 'fraud', 'scandal' and 'cheating' (Siano et al., 2017, p. 31). From that moment on, a lot of effort has been put in restoring the reputation of the Volkswagen Group (Painter and Martins, 2017).

The Volkswagen case is not unique. Similar stories can be told for example about BP, ExxonMobil or Enron. It is not uncommon that organizations present themselves better than that they actually are, causing a discrepancy between 'talk' and 'action'. Due to scandals like this communication often has a bad name. People associate public relations and corporate communication with propaganda, the deliberate manipulation of the minds of people by means of mass psychology. At the same time organizations expect that communication professionals will position the organization as powerful as possible. The identification of communication with propaganda puts the profession under pressure. It faces a double crisis of trust (Hoffjann and Seidenglanz, 2018). On the one hand the public doubts the trustworthiness of corporate communication. On the other hand communication professionals who ask critical questions are easily framed by organizations as trouble makers.

Stories about greenwashing and misleading reporting raise the question what exactly the role of communication professionals should be. Are they just there to serve the interests of the company or do they have their own professional autonomy and responsibility? What is good communication in the case of the Volkswagen group and in the other cases mentioned? Is communication just a technical skill, or is it a practice that serves a higher public goal? In this chapter we will argue that corporate communication can best be understood as a normative practice, a practice with its own codes of conduct and its own teleological structure. The relevance and credibility of the profession stands or falls with public trust. Therefore, communication professionals have to be sensitive to the concerns of the public and have to tell a story that is credible. If they damage the confidence of the public, they also damage the company for which they are working.

In order to clarify the specific role and duty of communication professionals we use the Normative Practice Approach as it is developed by Jochemsen (2006), Verkerk, Hoogland, Van der Stoep & De Vries (2016) and others. First of all, we ask what the foundational function of communication is. What is a communication professional doing, what exactly is his specific skill? Secondly, the question is raised what the qualifying function of communication is. What is the purpose of communication? What is the ultimate goal? Why is it so important to influence the minds of people? Thirdly we will show that corporate communication has a layered structure. Communication professionals give voice to organizations in the public sphere and at the same time their activities are embedded within these organizations. Although they have their own code of conduct, they also have to serve the interests of the organization. Finally, we ask whether or not communication professionals should take a neutral stance towards the company that they are serving. We will argue that the usual distinction between form and content does not hold. Instead of this we introduce another distinction, the distinction between the constitutive and the regulative side of communication practices.

FOUNDATIONAL FUNCTION: GENERATION OF IMPACT

Communication professionals operate at the interface of organizations and the public sphere. They support companies, governmental organizations and NGOs in telling their story to a wider audience or to specific target groups. Corporate communication is a powerful tool to promote the interests of organizations and companies. It gives legitimation to what organizations are doing, without it being necessary to fall back on the use of force or violence (Castells, 2009, p. 11). It is therefore in the interest of organizations that they succeed in putting their message into the spotlight. They also have to tell their story in such a way that it has an effect in the long run. In terms of the Normative Practice Approach, one may call this the foundational function of corporate communication. More than others, communication professionals know how framing, agenda setting and public legitimation are working. Their authority is based on the fact that they have access to knowledge and skills that are helpful to create shared meaning. The reason why they are hired by organizations is that they are sensitive to what is going on in society and that they know how to deal with issues of public legitimation.

A quite common understanding of communication is that it has to be a matter of free exchange of arguments and ideas. This of course is an idealistic idea of communication. Nobody would seriously hold that in the public sphere power, money and rhetoric play not a single role. The point, however, is that a focus on the effect of words should not have a place in public discourse. What only should

count is the force of the better argument. Famous is the distinction made by Jürgen Habermas between strategic and communicative action. In communicative action the other is treated not as an instrument to reach one's goals, but as a dialogue partner. Conversation partners must strive to reach mutual understanding (Habermas, 1996, p. 18). That first of all implies the possibility to disagree with one another. Nobody should be forced to accept an argument that does not convince him. In order to get acceptance for one's point of view, participants have to make validity claims. They have to refer to propositional truth, normative righteousness or personal sincerity (Habermas, 1996, p. 5).

James E. Grunig, the grandfather of contemporary public relations, takes a quite similar position. According to Grunig two-way symmetrical communication is better than other forms of communication. Two-way symmetrical communication is dialogical. It presumes an interaction between conversation partners, and it balances the interests of the organization and its public. As a result, it 'produces better long-term relationships with publics than do the other models of public relations' (J.E. Grunig, L.A. Grunig, Dozier, 2006, p. 47). By arguing that two-way symmetrical communication is the most excellent form of communication, Grunig makes a sharp distinction between propaganda and public relations (Moloney, 2006). Propaganda is about the manipulation of human minds. Public relations on the other hand is about dialogue and balancing of interests. It does not use force or manipulation. It is dialogical in nature and more ethical than other forms of communication.

According to Habermas, public relations work, propaganda and advertising contaminate the public sphere by strategic reasoning. They use money and power to get influence (Habermas, 1996, pp. 367, 376-377). That certainly would not be the position of Grunig. According to him, public relations is not wrong in itself. It has to be done, however, in the proper way, according to the rules of two-way symmetrical communication. Most codes of conduct for communication professionals are based on this idea. The approaches of Habermas and Grunig provide us with important insights of what communication actually should be. What they expect from good communication, however, puts a heavy burden upon the shoulders of communication professionals (Fawkes, 2015, p. 95). Whichever way you look at it, persuasion plays an important role in the activity of communication professionals. Clients expect from communication professionals that they serve the interests of the organization and influence public opinion. Simone Chambers (1996) makes a distinction between persuasion and coercion that may be helpful in this regard. According to her persuasion is not wrong; it is coercion that is problematic. The question, however, is where persuasion ends and coercion begins. Is persuasion just about the force of the best argument, or may it also involve an appeal to emotions or the use of communication tactics and psychological insights?

Both Habermas and Grunig hold that dialogue and mutual understanding are the starting point of a good communication practice. One may question, however, if agonistic models of communication do not give a more workable and realistic account of what is going on when it comes to public legitimation. According to Moloney (2006, p. 75), for example, the public sphere is an arena where political parties, governments and other participants sell their opinion to voters and mobilize sufficient support for their ideas. It is not the search for mutual understanding that drives the public debate, but the competition for the most convincing view in the eyes of the public. This also explains the omnipresence of communication professionals in our media-saturated society. Political parties, NGOs and corporations have to make themselves visible and have to position themselves in relation to their competitors, in order to get public awareness and public recognition.

Moloney's understanding of the public sphere closely resembles the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu about the political field and political representation. Bourdieu (1991) describes the public debate as a struggle for recognition. Status, skills, money and social position are indispensable in order to make oneself heard. Not every citizen has the opportunity and means to get a recognized position in the public debate. At the same time, however, the public sphere is organized in such a way that spokesmen and opinion makers have to justify their position by referring to the general interest. Only those voices that represent a common good are counted as legitimate voices. This means that actors in the political field or public sphere have to speak on behalf of the people. They have to present themselves as the voice of a specific group or interest in order to get recognition. This only works, however, if people give them credit and credence. People have to allow them to act as representative of their concerns.

Bourdieu's theory of political representation can easily be interpreted in a cynical way. In serving the common good or the general interest journalists, politicians and opinion makers first of all serve their own interest. It gives them status, authority or just a source of income. Bourdieu would not deny that this is part of the game. At the same time, however, he holds that such a behavior does not necessarily leads to a situation in which everything is possible. The other side of the coin is that actors in the public sphere have an interest in presenting themselves as advocates of the common good. That stimulates them to appeal to universal values like truth, justice and equality and to put into question the good intentions of themselves or others (Bourdieu, 2000). Only those voices are legitimized that can stand the test of criticism. It is exactly the interest in disinterestedness, the particular interest in the universal, which leads to a further autonomization of the public field. Thus, according to Bourdieu, an agonistic point of view does not necessary imply a relativist position. Precisely because the public discourse is a struggle for the most disinterested point of view, people are stimulated to take the general interest as serious as possible.

Moloney and Bourdieu show us that strategic reasoning in public opinion making is not necessarily wrong. It is an integral part of public communication. In many situations, and also in the public sphere, one has to compete with others in order to make oneself heard. One must communicate as effectively as possible, using the resources and insights that are available. In order to promote a point of view that deserves public attention, one has to position oneself. One has to make one's story as attractive and convincing as possible. And one must gather allies and engage ambassadors to reach one's goal. It is not without reason that ratings, circulation figures and page views are so important in the communication business. Communication that has no impact, that does not reach an audience or does not mobilize people, cannot count as good communication.

Strategic reasoning is unavoidable in communication. Sometimes, especially in situations in which a certain truth is not so self-evident for people as it should be, a lot of effort and strength is needed in order to make one's point clear. That does not mean, however, that Habermas and Grunig are wrong when they emphasize the importance of voluntary consent or the balancing of interests. Corporate communication or public relations turns out to become propagandistic if the control of the minds of people is the main purpose. Cheating, spinning and covering up troublesome facts may work for a time, but on the long run they often will turn out to be counterproductive. If they come to light, they undermine the credibility of the participants. The viewpoints that are brought in must be suitable to receive general approval. Also, the use of instruments must be appropriate, in accordance with the situation and the goal that is pursued. It is truth, trustworthiness and credibility that count in the public sphere and nothing else. Communication skills and impact are important, but they do not have the last word. That brings us to the qualifying function of corporate communication, the reason why people communicate and what they want to achieve with it.

QUALIFYING FUNCTION: ARTICULATION OF MEANING

Communication, as we have seen, is more than just the shaping of minds. It is founded on the use of technical skills, but it is not qualified by it. The creation of shared meaning, the exchange of ideas that deserve public consent, is what qualifies corporate communication. In order to get a more precise understanding of what communication is, it is helpful to refer to a distinction made by Carey (2009, pp. 11-18) between a transmission view on communication and a ritual view. In the transmission view communication is understood as informing others, the sending and receiving of messages. The ritual view of communication, on the other hand, has to do with the building of a community, the representation of shared beliefs, the

negotiation and exchange of meaning. Think about what is happening in an organization when employees celebrate an important anniversary, when representatives of an organization sign a contract with a client or when a supervisor is asking a supervisee to complete a specific task (Cooren, 2015, p. 1). People celebrate events, commit themselves to others and give directions. They exchange meaning and try to make sense of what is going on. In this way they constitute a new reality, they build up a communal world.

Communication as creation of a shared meaning does not necessarily exclude a transmission way of thinking. It is still useful, sometimes, to think in terms of sender and receiver, or of communication as conveying messages to others (Carey, 1999, p. 127). But that is not the main purpose of communication. Communication has to do with how people orientate themselves in the world, with how people are doing things together and how they participate in a larger whole (Aula & Mantere, 2008, p. 169). When people make sense of the world they not just give an interpretation or representation of a current state of affairs, but also construct together a new reality, a meaningful perspective that creates a common purpose and gives direction to their actions (Weick, 1995). Following Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor speaks in this respect about social imaginaries. The idea of social imaginaries is related to what Lakoff calls 'frames'. Frames may function on a surface level, as slogans, images and metaphors, but also on a deep level, the level of convictions, moral orientations and worldviews (Lakoff, 2006, p. 28). According to Taylor a social imaginary is a common understanding of how the world looks like, a shared sense of legitimacy. A social imaginary incorporates 'a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice' (Taylor, 2007, p. 172). Mostly social imaginaries are not expressed in theoretical terms, but are carried in images, stories, legends etc. (Taylor, 2007, p. 172).

In order to give direction to organizational behavior, it is helpful to pay attention to the 'why' of the organization, its telos or ultimate goal. The book 'Start with why' of Simon Sinek (2011) has been a milestone in this regard. The attention for the why of the organization is indeed important. By articulating the reason of existence of an organization, one defines a common purpose and gives the organization a license to operate. An organization has to tell a coherent and consistent story about itself, a story that both strengthens the bonds that bind employees to the company and positions the company in relation to rivals (Van Riel, 2012, p. 160). What communication professionals are doing is shaping the social imaginary of organizations. They make sense of what an organization is doing. By articulating the essence of the organization or company they explain why an organization is acting in a certain way. They strive to obtain sympathy for its behavior. This may also imply that sometimes communication professionals have to admit that an organization does not behave as it should do. Putting public legitimation at the center of the attention helps us to

develop a perspective that surpasses the opposition between agonistic models of communication and models that are more dialogical (Van Ruler and Verĉiĉ, 2005). It acknowledges the importance of framing and strategic reasoning and at the same time holds on that credibility and trustworthiness are the central concern.

Generally speaking it is not easy to give an unequivocal answer to the question why an organization exists. Interpretations may differ and often organizations change over time. Dependent upon the circumstances the meaning or essence of an organization may be articulated in a different way. There is not one definite definition about its essential core that meets the expectations once and for all. That does not mean, however, that the core identity of an organization is just a matter of contingence. Very helpful in this regard is the distinction that Nicholas H. Smith (1997) makes between the weak hermeneutics of Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Rorty and Postmodernism and the strong hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor. According to weak hermeneutics every interpretation of reality is just a social construction. There is no single statement that may claim to be in accordance with a reality beyond interpretation. Strong hermeneutics in this regard is different. It acknowledges the existence of competing ideas about how the world should look like, but at the same time it holds that human beings are able to differentiate between more or less convincing points of view. According to strong hermeneutics we learn to know reality through experience and interpretation. That is part of our human condition, our being in the world. Articulations of meaning, however, make more or less sense to the extent that they make our world more intelligible and deepen our understanding of reality.

Social imaginaries, the stories, images and metaphors people use to give meaning to the world are intrinsically moral in nature. They not only describe how the world looks like, but also how the world should be. That is an important insight that strong hermeneutics brings. It is an insight that is also very relevant for the business of corporate communication. Following Balmer & Greyser (2003) communication professionals often make a distinction between actual identity, communicated identity, conceived identity, ideal identity and desired identity. How useful such a distinction may be, what disappears from the eye is the moral nature of organizational identity. More helpful in this regard is it to differentiate between two types of evaluations. Weak evaluations are evaluations based on desire, on the longing for certain material or immaterial goods. Strong evaluations, on the other hand, have to be articulated in terms of value: good or wrong, just or unjust, profound or superficial, etc. (Taylor, 1985). They do not depend upon contingent situations, but have to do with the kind of person we want to be, our core identity. The identity of an organization, the answer to the question why an organization exists, is not just a matter of weak evaluations or preferences. It is a matter of moral agency. What that means can nicely be illustrated on the basis of the Volkswagen case. The Volkswagen Group wants

to present itself as an ecofriendly automaker and is known by the general public as a reliable partner ("Made in Germany"). Those are moral qualifications. The emissions scandal, however, raises the question whether the Volkswagen company is not primarily a cunning merchant or a cynical manipulator. The company is blamed for a lack of character.

Moral character is important. But that is not enough. In order to convince people NGO's governmental organizations and companies also have to tell a story about themselves that both is in accordance with their past history and opens up new horizons for future action. That is a second lesson we may learn from strong hermeneutics. The narrative that an organization tells about itself has to be coherent and reliable (Fisher, 1989). Without a certain level of predictability there will be no trust. At the same time, however, organizations must also have openness to the future. They have to develop a sense of direction and must show that they are future-proof. By bringing in a novel perspective one may change the game and attract the attention of the public (Barry and Elmer, 1997). An innovative story makes new challenges visible and helps to distinguish oneself from competitors. Instructive in this regard is Ricoeur's notion of emplotment. Emplotment, according to Ricoeur (1984), is the way in which a narrative brings together dispersed facts and events into a new meaningful whole. Such a reconfiguration of the world invites us to see the world with different eyes. We see things and discover things that we did not see before. Emplotment is based, however, on a delicate balance. If the story of an organization is not innovative enough it will not surprise us and will only be considered as a repetition of what we already knew. If it is insufficiently in line with what we experienced in the past, however, it lacks plausibility and will be rejected as unrealistic or too bold.

Corporate communication is a matter of articulating the why of the organization and making sense about what an organization is doing. In this way it contributes to the development of a communal world. The close connection between corporate identity and the articulation of meaning encourages us to characterize communication as a lingual practice. Communication first of all has to do with collective sense-making and the exchange of meaning (Jansen, Van der Stoep and Jochemsen 2017). What lingual practices are, however, should not be taken too narrowly. It is important to say this expressly because people quite often are not aware of the full potential of the lingual capacity of human beings. They assume that language is just a means to describe reality in an accurate way. Although it is important that human beings express themselves in a clear and distinct way, that is not the only way that language works. The words, images and metaphors that people are using also have an evocative character. They open up new perspectives for action and help us to approach the world in a new way (Rorty, 1999). In the case of corporate communication, the use of words and the articulation of meaning are especially meant to constitute

contexts in which people organize things together and participate into a larger whole. This building of common realities and a shared meaning, however, may fail. Communication is intrinsically normative in nature. It can be done in a more or less convincing way. Coherence, plausibility and accurateness are not just standards imposed on communication from a distant ethical framework. These criteria help us to differentiate between good and bad communication, communication that deserves public attention and communication that does not deserve it (Van der Stoep, 2018).

A LAYERED STRUCTURE: SERVING TWO MASTERS

Communication is about the articulation of meaning, the creation of social imaginaries that are plausible and generate public support (qualifying function). Also, effectiveness is important. Organizations want to communicate in an impactful way (foundational function). In this section we will bring in a new complexity in order to better understand the specific task and duty of communication professionals. We will put the issue on the table what the adjective 'corporate' means, when people speak about corporate communication. Usually communication professionals work for companies or other organizations. Even if communication professionals are not employed by an organization, they are at least paid by it. They have to relate to the concerns and interests of the organization that they serve. In the case of companies like the Volkswagen Group these interests are primarily economic in nature. At the same time, however, communication professionals have their own rules of conduct. They know how public legitimation works and how to obey the rules of good communication. The moment they construct fake stories or distort facts, it will backfire upon their credibility and also upon the faith people put into the company for which they are working. They have to serve two masters: the demands of the organization with its interests on the one hand and the rules of public legitimation on the other. These two interests do not necessarily have to be at odds with each other, but usually there is a tension between them.

The complexity and tension we are talking about here, arise because corporate communication is a practice with a layered structure. Communication professionals have to balance in a proper way the interest of public legitimation and the interest of the organization. Helpful in this regard is the notion of enkaptic interlacements as introduced by Herman Dooyeweerd (1969). In an enkaptic interlacement two practices are intertwined, without losing their own functionality. The communication practice, integrally interwoven with the public sphere, becomes part of another practice, the practice of the organization, be it a company, a government organization, or an NGO (Jansen, Van der Stoep and Jochemsen, 2017). Communication professionals should highlight the central purpose of the organization as sharply as possible, if they want

to ensure that organizations get the attention they deserve. In this way they make true what their profession stands for. Vice versa, organizations have to respect the intrinsic nature of the communication practice, in order to make proper use of it. If companies want to sell enough products, not only today but also in the long run, they do well to build a good reputation, based upon a solid communication strategy.

As a communication professional, one serves the interests of organizations the best, if one sticks to the primary task of one's profession: the articulation of meaning. That implies that one must have a sharp focus on the added value that an organization or company delivers. A communication professional has to be committed to the central purpose of the organization and must make every effort to express this purpose as sharply and convincingly as possible. He must be very conscious, however, that he has just a supporting role. He facilitates organizations in formulating their reason for existence. Communication professionals do not control the story of the organization. They have to focus on what management and employees want to communicate to others. As a supporting practice, however, communication also has a critical role. Communication professionals have to keep organizations focused on their primary goal and on what is publicly acceptable. They must not restrict themselves to the presentation afterwards of the strategy formulated by the organization, but also have to be supportive in defining and redefining what this strategy is (Van Ruler, 2018). That requires an independent attitude. If it goes as it should, communication professionals function as the moral compass of organizations. Directors and managers must take care that they give communication professionals enough room to fulfill their critical role and that they do not override them.

The practice of communication has a layered structure. That may be interpreted as a weakness, but it may also be seen as a force. Communication professionals know what is going on in society and may hold a mirror to organizations. First of all, communication professionals are especially sensitive to issues that have to do with aspiration and the degree to which organizations fulfill their pretensions. If communication professionals can handle the forces in the boardroom, they can be good allies in giving direction to the future of the organization. As we have noticed in the introduction, there is often a discrepancy between 'talk' and 'action', between what organizations say that they are doing and what they actually do. If the gap between what the organization promises and what it actually does is too big, it puts the credibility of the organization at risk. An organization must do what it promises. If you want to be trusted, you should be trustworthy (Meijboom, Visak and Brom, 2006). A good reputation depends upon the deeds of the organization (Aula and Mantere, 2008, p. 18). Corporate communication, however, is also aspirational in nature. The social imaginaries produced by the organization not only describe what the organization actually is, but also how it would look like (Christensen, Morsing, Thyssen, 2013). By imagining a desired future, this future may be brought closer.

But caution is in order here. If ambitions are not anchored in reality, they easily put too much pressure upon people, which ultimately leads to window dressing and deceptive behavior (Siano et al., 2017).

Secondly, the layered structure of corporate communication may help to bridge the gap between the board room and the shop floor and between the organization and external parties. Because of their intermediary role, communication professionals hear things from people that the management does not hear. They are trained to switch between different circuits and to speak different languages. Listening is important for organizations because the official story is just one of the stories that are told (Boje, 2008). On the shop floor other stories about the organization are circulating. And clients also have their own communication circuits. Most of the time, the stories that are told are incomplete, fragmented and fluid. They are narratives without a beginning, middle and end, that are meant to bring new meanings into the game (Boje, 2001, pp. 1-2). Many organizations have a culture in which 'telling' and 'doing' are more appreciated than 'listing' and taking time to talk with each other. Especially in messy and complex situations this may be problematic because executives depend in their decision making on the information they get from others (Schein, 2013, pp. 53-67). If employees and other stakeholders do not trust the management, they will not tell them when something is going wrong. Or they will tell it to them, when it is already too late. Communication professionals may bring to the attention of the board the concerns of others, thereby supporting organizations to become more responsive. They only are effective in listening, however, if they have a sharp focus on the goal of the organization. Listing itself is not enough. Only with a clear sense of direction one may differentiate between what is important and what is not (Van Woerkum and Aarts, 2011, p. 177).

CONSTITUTIVE AND REGULATIVE SIDE: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Corporate communication is intrinsically normative in nature. Organizations may communicate in a good way, sincerely building public trust, but they may also behave as 'cheaters' or as 'cunning merchants'. That raises the question what the own responsibility of communication professionals is in relation to the organizations that they are serving. An answer that seems obvious at first sight is that one has to make a distinction between form and content. Communication professionals are specialists in the form. They know how to convey messages and how to change the perceptions of people. What exactly the content of the message is, does not have to be their concern. It is the responsibility of the organizations that they are serving.

What we have discovered so far, however, shows that this argument is not correct. Communication is more than just a transmission of messages; it has to do with the constructing of communal worlds, the building of a shared meaning. The framing of collective narratives is in itself already a matter of content. A communication professional cannot ignore the need for 'narrative engagement' (Goodall 2010, 27). He is accountable for the way he deals with misleading stories, incorrect claims and lies for good. That is more particularly the case because, more than others, he is an expert in how the framing of narratives works.

More helpful in this regard is a distinction made in the Normative Practice Approach between the constitutive and regulative side of professional practices. That distinction is based on Searle (2010), who differentiates between different types of rules. Constitutive rules, according to Searle, are rules that make a certain practice possible. In order to play chess, for example, certain rules are required. Without these rules the chess game as such cannot exist. Regulative rules, on the other hand, are rules that relate to the style or way of life of the players. Even if you master the rules of the game, you can play the game in different ways. You can choose an aggressive game mode or, for example, go for 'fair play'. If we apply the distinction, introduced by Searle, on the practice of corporate communication, it makes sense to argue that communication professionals know better than others how the rules that constituted the game work and what the pitfalls are. They know how to improve public trust and how to cope with objections and counter-narratives. The constitutive side of communication, however, cannot be disconnected from the regulative side. They are two sides of the same coin. One cannot separate the playing of the game, according to its rules, from the particular way the game is actualized. One may communicate for example in a more or less compelling way, take more or less risks, or choose a defensive or just an offensive style. That depends on how one assesses the situation and on the preferences and convictions that one has.

Because people differ in worldview, they also have a different understanding of the rules that constitute communication. At the same time, however, there is a common sense about what counts as good communication. People often refer to the same intuitions and share a common ground. Without that, a dialogue about what is right or wrong would be rather meaningless. Almost everyone will agree that coherence, plausibility and reliability count when it comes to public legitimation. How these values are articulated and actualized by people, however, may differ. What counts as good communication inescapably is a subject of struggle between competing convictions and worldviews, no matter how much consensus sometimes there may be. It is important to realize that the communication profession itself is a site of cultural production (Edwards, 2011). Professionals are often trained in an environment in which especially technical skills are highly valued. Besides that, working for a large multinational is often better valued than working for a small

company, government agency or an NGO. These kinds of mechanisms easily contribute to a situation in which a neoliberalist ideology is promoted. What is forgotten is that neoliberalism itself is a story that is highly debatable, no matter how many people consider it to be inevitable and convincing (Michaels, 2011; Raworth, 2017). For the good of society we are in need of professionals who understand this situation, who take their responsibility, make choices that are not obvious at first sight and are capable of developing counter-narratives.

That, of course, is a huge task. In order not to make expectations too high, and to overcharge individual agency, we must be aware of the fact that professional responsibility is always embedded within a network of relations. The contribution that communication professionals bring, cannot be isolated from the contribution of other relevant players in the organization. In ambiguous domains like corporate communication, 'pure' professionalism does not exist. One has to establish meaningful relationships in dialogue with others (Noordegraaf, 2007). The communication professional is not an autonomous actor, who can take the world by himself alone. He participates in a complex network of relationships in which he constrains and is constrained by others, and in which he enables and is enabled by others (Stacey, 2009, p. 299). An appeal to professional distance does not work in such situations (Schein, 2016, p. 15). One has to build relationships of trust in order to become effective. Communication professionals must not overestimate themselves. When it comes to the influence and responsibility that communication professionals can have, much depends upon the room of maneuver that is granted to them. Experienced professionals with a lot of seniority get more things done than others. Newcomers, on the other hand, have to fight for a position.

Communication professionals have to deal with conflicting styles of behavior and conflicting views of what good communication is. A communication professional does not need to endorse the views and convictions of their employers or clients in detail, in order to be able to deliver good work. But there must at least be a plausible connection between the biography of the professional and how the organization behaves and presents itself. If you work for the Volkswagen Group, or for another organization, you have to tell at least a coherent narrative about why this appointment fits with your personal story and beliefs. The gap between the personal narrative and the organizational narrative cannot be stretched too far. Sometimes, it may be appropriate to point to mitigating circumstances or to compromises that have to be made. If communication professionals do not agree with their employer or client, they still may have good reasons to continue to do their job, and to seek for themselves a margin of freedom. That does not relieve communication professionals from their own specific responsibility, however. They can be held responsible if they do not do the right thing. There is a thin line between participating in a questionable organization in order to perform a corrective function on the one hand

and collaborating in activities that cannot stand the light of day on the other. It is a delicate balance that requires much of the personality of the people involved. Time and again, one has to ask the question what permissible behavior is and what is not. The goal does not always sanctify the means and also one cannot just hide behind the limited influence that one has.

CONCLUSION

Rightly or wrongly, communication professionals are often blamed for greenwashing or for spreading misleading messages. They are portrayed as lackeys that just serve the interests of organizations. Even communication professionals themselves sometimes adopt such a view and behave accordingly. In this chapter we have argued that these images are based on a limited account of what communication actually is. Corporate communication stands or falls with public trust. In order to come to a better understanding of what good communication is, we introduced some important distinctions based on the Normative Practice Approach. First of all, we introduced the distinction between the foundational function and the qualifying function of corporate communication. Good communication, it is true, has to be effective and impactful (foundational function). But primarily, it has to do with reliability and the creation of a communal world (qualifying function). The purpose of communication is to win confidence and public recognition. Secondly, we differentiated between organizational goals and the requirements of public legitimation. Communication professionals have to deal with tensions between ambition and reality. They also have to be sensitive of what is going on in society, without losing out if sight the purpose of the organization. Lastly, a distinction is made between the constitutive and the regulative side of communication. That helps us to better deal with the discrepancies between personal and organizational narratives. With the introduction of this framework, based on the Normative Practice Approach, not all questions and problems encountered by communication professionals in their daily work are solved. However, the framework does help to identify tensions and dilemmas and to find a common language. Above all, it shows that communication is more than just a technical skill. It is a profession with its own intrinsic normativity that requires practical wisdom.

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