There are few concrete ideas about what exactly represents quality in the communication disciplines of corporate communications (public relations, public affairs, advertising); however there are numerous, sometimes rather elaborate, measures for gauging various aspects of success (e.g. media content analysis, media tests etc.). Conversely, in journalism there is a wealth of thought about quality dimensions as they relate to journalism, but few intricate tools to measure said quality.

There is agreement in corporate communications on the utmost importance of goals and their definition for specific communication mandates. The formulation of goals is therefore usually required very early on in the conceptual cycle. In actual communication practice, though, goals are not always defined with enough clarity or detail. In this paper, goals represent the basis for establishing dimensions of quality.

The disciplines of corporate communications have rarely been accessed via the “goal” phenomenon; however, this practice highlights the core objectives of corporate communications.

The communication disciplines of public relations, public affairs and advertising are classed together as “corporate communications” for the purpose of this paper. Despite the obvious differences between those disciplines, certain features are shared, making it possible and even expedient to observe them in conjunction with each other. Those fundamental common features emerge most strongly when the study of the corporate communication phenomenon takes into account the underlying “goals”.

Goals have to do with change and are therefore often associated with effects. When, or before, one formulates goals it is necessary to fundamentally think through the potentially possible and actually conceivable effects of specific activities, which in turn gives rise to the nomination of concrete goals. It is thus the possible effects that establish the widest limits for goals, dictating which goals are even possible or feasible in terms of communication activities.

Evaluation is a comparatively recent area within corporate communications. There are many current in-depth debates on diverse questions of evaluation both in scholarly contexts as well as in communicative practice, and the importance of evaluation is invariably emphasised. An initial connection between goals and evaluation can already be seen by the fact that it is only possible to verify whether a given goal has been reached if the goals have been clearly defined and sufficiently substantiated.

Below, the fundamental goal levels are introduced, from which the goal categories for corporate communications are derived. This is subsequently built on to elucidate the relationship between these goal categories and the quality or the dimensions of quality of corporate communications. Finally, the phenomenon of evaluation, which assumes a central role in multiple ways within this context, will be discussed.

Results / Discussion – Goals in corporate communications

The following can be established as fundamental goal levels occurring and carrying importance within corporate communications:

- Persuasion or influence
- Goals of corporate communications – service spectrum
- Goals of organisations, businesses, institutions, individuals
- Individual and concrete goals dependent on the assignment or client
Hence they shall be designated the “fundamental goals of corporate communications”.

This paper will expand on the individual goal levels, discuss the term “persuasion”, introduce the service spectrum of each discipline as well as general organisational objectives, and furthermore list the requirements for formulating concrete goals. After that, some special cases of goals will be examined. This is followed by a new development and process to make corporate communications more systematic. Finally, the new goal categorisation is used as a basis for establishing dimensions of quality.

**Persuasion**

Persuasive intent is intrinsic to corporate communications, since all disciplines aim to exert an intentional influence on their target audience (to persuade and convince). This is accomplished through various tools and with varying degrees of openness. As the most general and fundamental common goal of corporate communications, persuasion embodies the asserting of the client’s interest through the means of professional communication, and, essentially, it exerts influence on the target audience. This assertion of interests is not seen as or aspired to as an objective in itself, but always on behalf of a client (i.e. an organisation, company, individual) pursuing specific aims. Corporate communications can thus be identified as communication steered by interests or intentions. (cf. Besson, 2008: 28; Watson/Noble, 2007: 167; Zerfass, 2004: 209.)

The persuasive intent of corporate communications is legitimate, especially while it is exerted in a transparent and non-coercive manner. Coercion, however, is largely not an option in any case due to the nature of the tools involved. It is important to note explicitly that influence is not to be equated to coercion (cf. Behrens, 1998: 10ff.; Koeppler, 2000: 3; Merten, 1999: 261ff., Miller, 1980: 12; Schenk et al., 1990: 99.)

Persuasive intent additionally results in increased societal responsibility of communicators towards the target audiences they are trying to influence.

**Persuasion in PR**

The field of public relations shows a certain reticence when it comes to admitting the persuasive intent inherent in their work, instead focusing on dialogue and mutual communication, as well as on credibility and trust. This only initially appears to contravene the goal of persuasion. Thus, desirable goals such as trust and the communicative styles of understanding and dialogue may be regarded as necessary intermediate steps and beneficial and appropriate vehicles towards (successful) persuasion. Successful persuasion in the sense of being convinced through argument almost makes this approach inevitable in order to avoid the charge of one-sided persuasion. Despite the importance of attempts at dialogue and mutual communication, Grunig’s four public relations models (cf. Grunig / Hunt, 1984.) and all dialogue-oriented forms of PR communication as well as Burkart’s mutual understanding-oriented PR model (cf. Burkart, 1995: 72ff.) are simply to be taken as “communicative styles towards persuasion”, i.e. intermediate steps or strategies to fulfil the persuasive intent.

**Persuasion in public affairs**

Public Affairs cites as one of its primary goals the intent to bring about an improvement in the general economic climate by influencing governments, opinion leaders and the wider public. Here, the communicative discipline’s intent to influence is stated clearly, leaving no room for doubt, and this does not appear to trouble public affairs experts’ self-image, as attested by numerous references (cf. Harris/Fleisher, 2005; McGrath, 2005a; van Schendelen, 1993; van Schendelen, 2002; Doig, 1991: 149ff.). Persuasive intent frequently materialises in definitions and descriptions of activities: “Lobbyists work to influence government decisions to the benefit of their group or client, usually through direct contact with politicians and civil servants.” (McGrath, 2005a: S. XVII.)

Agents of public affairs take an open approach regarding their wish to achieve the results desired by their employer and to influence certain events. Thus, influencing others is an open and legitimate goal of public affairs. The dialogue groups of public affairs usually realise this intent, since they are confronted with the public affairs managers’ candid and explicit arguments and requests.

**Persuasion in advertising**

It seems indisputable that advertising is a form of persuasive communication: communication that aims to influence people. Research on advertising is furthermore often delimited as part of the research on persuasion (cf. Zurstiege/Schmidt, 2003: 492.). Also, publications on how to best reach persuasive goals in advertising are numerous.

Advertising arguably has the most “honest” approach in its goal to persuade. It admits openly to its ambition to persuade/convince people to make a purchase, and it represents an intentional and non-coercive form of exerting influence. The goal of persuasion seems completely obvious: advertising is trying to convince people about the qualities of the product it is advocating and to encourage, convince or even persuade them to make a purchase.

The target audience is sufficiently aware of the intent of advertising, and a thorough awareness of the fundamental goal of advertising, i.e. the desire to persuade and convince, can be assumed. Hence advertising is accorded less credibility than editorial content (cf. Chestnut, 1980: 267; Siegert/Brecheis, 2005: 22; Behrens, 1970: 4.)
Manifestations of persuasive intent

All attempts at persuasion through corporate communications entail influencing the psychological dependent variables of knowledge, opinions/attitudes as well as behaviour in different manifestations. This results in a tripartition of the goal categories into cognitively oriented goals (changing and particularly increasing knowledge, expertise and information, arousing or augmenting interest), affectively oriented goals (influencing the emotions and feelings of the target audiences; increasing interest or appeal, image improvement, changing attitudes, establishing credibility, increasing trust and enhancing acceptance), and behavioural oriented goals (different behaviours in different target audiences in the shape of changing, reinforcing or eliciting a behaviour). (Cf. Bruhn, 2007: 172; Chaffee, 1980: 78; Miller, 1980: 16ff.; Petty/Cacioppo, 1986: 5; Ronneberger/Rühl, 1992: 148; Watson/Noble, 2007: 15.)

The psychological goals enumerated are frequently viewed as a hierarchical and chronological sequence, and it is assumed that any cognitively controlled behaviour is based on awareness of a product, brand or service, or on its prominence. It is however inadvisable to view this in too causative a manner, automatically assuming these spheres to be linked by a causal relationship. (Cf. Behrens, 1998: 10; Watson/Noble, 2007: 14.) Such a clear-cut (chronological and causal) sequence of changes on a cognitive, affective and conative level does not always exist. Additionally, intervening variables may prevent or favour the implementation of interests: “However, we humans don’t think and act in a mechanistic manner.” (Watson/ Noble, 2007: S. 14.)

Service spectrum

The service spectrum of a communication discipline constitutes the entire potential of the discipline; this refers to what a discipline can essentially accomplish and achieve. The service spectrum can also be identified as the fundamental goal of a communication sector, but is not yet a concrete formulated goal. It constitutes the fundamental potential of what the sector in question is capable of achieving, both in principle and overall, i.e. what it is fundamentally striving for. It is thus a catalogue of what a discipline can achieve at its best.

Service spectrum public relations

It is widely accepted that the general (societal) goals of PR are the shaping and cultivation of the relationship with the public as well as the establishment of social trust and reinforcement of public interest or the common good. A further task of PR is to create a balance of interests and to promote integration, since disputes between divergent interests may be carried out in the exchange of public opinion. Its focus is always the fostering of relationships, image, trust and credibility.

One can distil and summarise typical goals of PR as follows: creation of publicity; establishing prominence; public positioning; establishing, fostering and optimising relationships with different environments; profiling and articulation of interests; building and improving image, standing and reputation; establishing and reinforcing trust and credibility; increasing the company value, as well as feedback to management and integrating experiences gained through PR into management.

Service spectrum public affairs

It is the central concern of public affairs to assert the interests or wishes of a company or organisation vis-à-vis international, national or regional governments, a local political administration, public authorities, politicians or civil servants. Public relations thus attempts to actively influence the environments of the company or organisation to that company or organisation’s advantage, to profit from chances, to minimise risks, and to effect a widening of the client’s scope.

The two primary goals of public relations are to improve the general economic climate by influencing governments, opinion leaders and the wider public, and to limit the negative impact of a government’s activities on economic and social matters affecting the company. (Cf. Harris/Fleisher, 2005: XXXII; Köppl/Kovar, 2001: 174ff.; Köppl, 2003: 17ff.)

The following can be listed in more detail as the primary tasks of public affairs (cf. Bowen/Heath, 2005; Fleisher, 2002; Harris/Moss, 2001: 103; Köppl, 2003: 28ff.; McGrath, 2005a: 51ff.; Mitchell, 1991: 5.): intelligence & monitoring; identifying and prioritising of socio-political topics relating to a company; analysing and fostering a company’s relationships with the public and with public institutions on a national and international level; exercising the rights and fulfilling the obligations of a company or organisation as a “good citizen” of its country; representing a company or organisation’s interests before legislative bodies through appropriate means on an international, national, regional and local level; fostering relationships with authorities or other public institutions that might influence or impair company activities of a corporation or organisation; communicating a company’s interests before governments, authorities and institutions on all levels; observing developments in a company’s environments and formulating reactions and responses accordingly, as well as analysing the developmental process of the EU and other supranational organisations.

Service spectrum advertising

The core goal of advertising is to increase turnover and boost sales figures. Thus, advertising can be described as
any form of conceptualisation or facilitation through others of ideas, goods or services, for a uniquely identifiable employer using paid media. (cf. Kotler, 1995: 960.) Despite trying to elicit a positive attitude in the recipient, constituting a basic readiness to turn towards a product or away from it, advertising nevertheless pursues the very specific, pre-defined goal of deliberately influencing a clearly defined group of people. This group is characterised by economic motivations and socio- and psychographic features, and does not necessarily (at all times) relish these commercial communication activities and may therefore encounter the advertising content with varying degrees of attentiveness. (cf. Schierl, 2003: 16; Zurstiege, 2007: 153.)

One can detail goals relating to the consumer and goals relating to the market. Those market and consumer goals must be in concordance with each other. Goals referring to consumers are stated as information, motivation, socialisation, reinforcement and entertainment. Market-oriented goals take into account the current market situation and what goals a company is pursuing with its advertising. Hence, goals of advertising relating to the market can be differentiated as introduction, establishment, displacement and expansion. (cf. Felser, 2001: 10ff; Schierl, 2003: 107.)

Organisational goals

Although an organisation’s general objectives are not typical communication goals, they are particularly relevant for corporate communications. After all, any communication goals always have to correspond to a company’s goals. Corporate communication goals and activities are obviously not ends in themselves, but exist to serve the client’s interests.

Company goals (“destinations of desire”) represent general measures for orientation and action for corporate activities (“Where do we want to go?”). They are concrete propositions about desired states or events that are to be achieved through corporate undertakings. Traditional corporate theories state that, according to the goal of commercial orientation, the ultimate goal of a company is to maximise profits. Modern approaches show however that it is not possible to continue to exclusively orient company goals towards profit maximisation, since companies are usually pursuing several different goals simultaneously. But even allowing for balance, complexity, multiple dimensions and expansion of company objectives, one must not overlook the fact that companies are still governed by the necessity to make a profit. The multiple dimensions of corporate goal systems, which also necessitate a hierarchy of goals, have generated a multitude of catalogues of goals, none of which are comprehensive, let alone complete. Corporate goals can usually be displayed as a hierarchy of goals; however, it is difficult to create a consistent hierarchy of all the company’s goals because this involves extremely complex connections between a company’s higher value system, a description of the company’s mission and the respective company goals. (cf. Becker, 2006: 14ff; Felser, 2001: 6; Haedrich, 1992: 263.)

It is now recognised that information and communication management as well as strategic communication can be crucial to economic and political success on various levels. Different disciplines of corporate communications are in a position to contribute to this in different ways.

Communication is not an independent company goal but serves to achieve the genuine company goals. Communication goals are invariably derived from company goals, and orient themselves on the company’s mission and its higher value system. Once a company’s communicative goals have been defined, it should use whichever discipline of corporate communications is the most appropriate or the most capable of fulfilling them.

This is not intended as a positioning and subsequent distribution of each discipline’s tasks; the conviction voiced here is that each organisation has many tasks and goals that need to be fulfilled, each of which can be satisfied particularly well by one discipline over another, and in some cases, best satisfied by one particular discipline. As a consequence, no discipline is to be given precedence or supremacy, or to be seen as dominant over another discipline. The disciplines of corporate communications interact and determine, influence and mutually advance each other in their success and potency. They all operate on different goal levels, but jointly serve to maintain the organisation.

Detailed goals

Concrete communicative goals can be derived from the multitude of organisational objectives and can be accomplished through the service spectrum of each discipline.

These formulated goals are, again, not ends in themselves, but perform specific functions: On one hand, they serve as parameters for realising goals (decision-making, coordination and steering function), and on the other they are a standard for the subsequent evaluation and control (control function). (cf. Becker, 2006: 23f; Bruhn, 2007: 167f; Schweiger/Schrattenacker, 2005: 144; Steffenhagen, 2008: 75, Watson/Noble, 2007: 165.) Due to the functions listed, the formulated goals clearly exceed the pure textual content of these propositions.

The formulation of each goal should be as concrete as possible. For example, the S M A R T formula sees widespread practical use. (e.g. Watson/Noble, 2007: 174.):

S - Specific
M - Measurable
A - Achievable / Attainable / Accountable
R - Relevant / Realistic
T - Time-based / Time-framed
Special cases: attention and media presence

When dealing with goals of corporate communications, two special cases of goals emerge which do not fit into most patterns: attention and media presence. Those phenomena have an idiosyncratic status and can be viewed as necessary preliminary stages for communicative opportunities and contacts, required for achieving broader goals.

The status of attention as a fundamentally important, indispensable goal is obvious: without achieving attention, it is impossible to establish contact with the (editorial or advertising) message, and in the absence of contact with the message, the desired effect or goal cannot be achieved. Achieving attention is therefore the prerequisite for any chance of fulfilling the individual communicative goals; without attention, it is inconceivable and impossible to achieve any further goals.

Media coverage holds varying degrees of interest as a goal dimension for the individual disciplines of corporate communications. In PR, media presence and its study are of utmost importance, as it is hoped that what has appeared in the media will then have the desired effect on the dialogue groups.

In advertising, however, media coverage is rarely taken heed of, because media space is of course bought. It depends on the individual situation whether media coverage is welcome or not in public affairs, and only limited generalisations can be made. Here, the professed goal may be precisely to avoid media presence.

Goal categories

Based on the three fundamentally important types of goals in corporate communications (persuasion, service spectrum and organisational objectives), a new categorisation of goals in corporate communications is put forward. Each of the eleven categories of goals can be traced back to the fundamental goal levels; sometimes to a single one, but sometimes to several.

These goal categories will be relevant when establishing the dimensions of quality for corporate communications. Also, they are significant for the evaluative options, as each category of goals can be appraised with its own methods of evaluation.

The suggested new categories of goals are:

- preliminary stages:
  - category 1 – communicative chances/communicative contacts
  - persuasion-oriented goals:
    - category 2 – altering of psychological variables
  - economically oriented goals:
    - category 3 – contribution to the revenue
  - assuming social responsibility:
    - category 4 – legality
  - category 5 – professional ethics
- performing the service spectrum:
  - category 6 – agency or departmental structure
  - category 7 – strategic planning and communication services (conception)
  - category 8 – explicit formulation of detailed goals
  - category 9 – composition of communication products
  - category 10 – communication style
- evaluation:
  - category 11 – evaluation

On one hand, this categorisation consists of “typical” selective goals which can also be described as results or even successes; on the other hand it integrates worthwhile norms and processes whose ongoing observance should also be a goal when carrying out corporate communications. Moreover, the frequently cited differentiation of goals relating to the audience and the media, and specifications for processes and norms to be adhered to, are complemented by the mention of goals specifically referring to the communicative services that are supposed to create a particular response in the media and audience.

The categories listed are intertwined, determine and support one another, and are in part dependent on each other.

Below, the new categories are introduced and described individually, and a discussion of some of their interdependencies broached.

- category 1 – communicative chances/communicative contacts
  Communicative chances and contacts are the necessary realisation of communicative effects. This goal comprises the attraction of attention (both journalists’ and the audience’s) and achieving media response.

  This goal is made special by its status as a prerequisite for most other goals, due to the fact that without attention and, if applicable, media presence, it is impossible to create any contact with the target audience of corporate communications. This would in turn prevent any alteration of cognitive variables or revenue. These concepts can thus be regarded as the “preliminary stages” for other goal categories.

- category 2 – altering psychological variables (persuasion-oriented goals)
  This category contains goals that are directed at psychological variables of target audiences: attempted changes in the psychological variables of knowledge, opinions/attitudes and behaviour/actions in the target population.

  This goal is made special by its status as a prerequisite for most other goals, due to the fact that without attention and, if applicable, media presence, it is impossible to create any contact with the target audience of corporate communications. This would in turn prevent any alteration of cognitive variables or revenue. These concepts can thus be regarded as the “preliminary stages” for other goal categories.

- category 3 – contribution to revenue (economically oriented goals)
  Corporate communications does not exist for its own sake but always aligns itself with the (organisational) objec-
tives of an employer, and must contribute to the achievement of company goals. Thus, a contribution to the revenue through corporate communications also constitutes a goal category. Over recent years, this goal has gained importance, particularly in the PR debate. The backdrop is formed by the fact that communication experts are increasingly called on to justify and prove (and, ideally, to quantify), that and to what extent their communicative activities have achieved the desired effect, whether the expended costs were justified, and whether they have thus contributed to the fundamental company objective of boosting revenue.

The revenue aspired to manifests itself on various levels and with various dimensions of time. Thus, the sub-goals of this goal category are:

- aspiring to a reasonable cost-benefit relationship and to the efficiency of communication activities
- an increase in the company’s value through communication within the framework of the company strategy in accordance with company objectives
- development, expansion and preservation of enduring potentials for success such as stakeholder management and reputation management

**category 4 – legality (assuming social responsibility)**

Since corporate communications always operates with the intent to influence (the fundamental goal of persuasion), this results in a considerable burden of responsibility for corporate communications regarding how it asserts its client’s interests in society.

This responsibility of corporate communications is partly regulated by the laws applicable to each communication discipline. For example, numerous regulations exist for advertising – which is obviously accorded an enormous potential to influence people – in order to protect its targets from its influence.

Compliance with these laws is important and necessary, and contributes to the transparency of the communication disciplines. This compliance with regulations relating to the law or professional ethics thus also serves the legitimisation and reputation of the entire sector.

**category 5 – professional ethics (assuming social responsibility)**

Numerous standards of professional ethics prevail within the communication disciplines, which go beyond compliance with laws relevant to the profession. One of the goals in the execution of corporate communications is to adhere to these standards. In effect, a communications discipline’s responsibility is not regulated entirely by laws but is also left to the relevant actors.

Just like the goal of legality, this goal is rooted in the fundamental goal of persuasion, which carries with it a strong responsibility of corporate communications towards society. It is not enough to comply with legal standards in order to preserve this social responsibility. After all, legal does not necessarily mean legitimate or ethical. Just because something happens to be permitted by law, it does not follow that this is also ethically justified. When in doubt, ethical principles are to be given precedence over legal rules. (cf. Bowen/Heath, 2005: 95.) Standards for an ethical framework can be primarily constructed from instances of self-regulation in communication disciplines and their codes of ethics.

**category 6 – agency or departmental structure**

This category deals with “good” and “clean” agency or department management, as well as the assessment of whether it is even possible and feasible for the agency/department to carry out the communicative activities in question, and whether the required know-how is available. It covers the efficient appraisal and apportioning of resources, market potential analysis etc. Efficiency is thus given primary consideration. Beneficial interaction with customers also belongs in this category, i.e. the governing of the relationship between the agency and its customers, as well as dealings with other departments within the organisation that are not affiliated with the communications department.

This category particularly serves to ensure a smooth performance of the service spectrum and of the underlying implementation. To this end, it is necessary to take into account and follow sensible agency or departmental procedures and processes that support the specific communication task. Specific communication services are however not an issue here.

**category 7 – strategic planning of communication services (conception)**

Category 7 also deals with work procedures, but is concerned with qualified procedures of developing communication services, especially conceptualisation and implementation of communicative activities “by every trick in the book”.

This already encompasses the (mere and) explicit existence of a strategic concept on the assumption that this is prepared using qualified staff members’ knowledge and diligence. It is expected that conceptual stages and indispensable conceptual components (intensive situation analysis, setting targets, target groups, strategy, actions to take, suggestions for evaluation) will be taken into consideration.

This category also contains the observation of effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation and realisation of the concept (choosing the appropriate strategy and tactics; effective allocation of resources). It is also crucial to address the right audiences (target groups, dialogue groups, stake-
category 8 – explicit formulation of detailed goals

One goal within planning and execution of corporate communications is the clear, appropriate and explicit formulation of detailed goals that are derived from the company objectives and are always adjusted to the particular communication challenge.

Although the formulation of goals is an intrinsic component of concepts and would thus fall into category 7 (conception), this goal must be drafted as a category of its own, given that it represents a central criterion for corporate communications due to the eminently beneficial function of goals and their necessity to communication work. Additionally, in common practice, this explicit formulation of goals often does not happen, so this needs to be pushed and highlighted.

category 9 – communication products

This category primarily concerns the development of those communication products that corporate communications can use directly when addressing their target audiences, without a detour via the mass media; for example, homepages, advertising materials, brochures, events, and similar.

Communication products for media relations could form their own subcategory here and are aimed at a specific target audience, that is to say, journalists.

Fundamentally, the composition and preparation of communicative content (messages) is to be taken into account here, as well as the structure and representation of messages, the comprehensibility of the message (content, treatment) etc. This category is further concerned with attention-getting design of communication products (layout) and the potential these resources have to excite interest and attention in the target audiences. Where appropriate, usability is also of interest.

category 10 – communication style

The focus of this category is the choice of the most appropriate communication style. It thus applies to the decision which communication style to utilise when carrying out communication tasks.

All corporate communications disciplines can be said to have the goal of approximating a dialogue-oriented communication style, arguably the most fruitful style from a persuasive perspective. It is of course possible to conceive of exceptions to the assumption that dialogue, consideration of the target audience and, consequently, persuasion, are the best tools for achieving influence.

Creativity is of course a particularly important factor in advertising, especially bearing in mind that advertising aims to entertain, which can generate a favourable atmosphere for the absorption of advertising messages.

category 11 – evaluation

The arrangement and execution of evaluative measures are the goals of this category. No communication concept should be without clear statements for measuring its success.

The category of evaluation is genuinely special: on one hand, evaluation is a desirable goal category in itself, and all individual elements or entire conceptions of corporate communications are supposed to be subject to evaluation. On the other hand, evaluation also acts as the “prescribed measurement” for other goals and, as a consequence, is already part of assessing goal achievement. Its results serve to improve the methods used to reach those goals. Results therefore have to be incorporated into subsequent communication work, thus making evaluation, among other things, a strategic steering tool. Evaluation forms the response mechanism in a feedback cycle for communication.

Due to this multiple significance for corporate communication processes, evaluation would actually require its own goal categories (and with it, dimensions of quality).

Relationship between dimensions of quality and goal categories

Quality by itself is an “empty term”, which has to be filled with desirable and worthwhile dimensions. Those dimensions have to be relevant, appropriate and as comprehensive as possible for the respective matter whose quality is to be defined. The scant attempts at defining quality in corporate communications are insufficient. There is however a range of approaches taking into account individual areas of corporate communications; these mostly concern the client – agency relationship, or the workflow division within agencies (ISO 9000ff or CMS II). Advertising occasionally cites the aspect of creativity. Not much heed is paid to the specific communication task or the communication product, i.e. the campaign or conception, although achieving a success is often judged to be good quality in itself. Nevertheless there is a distinctive lack of a systematic approach to capture the quality of corporate communications.

This paper is an attempt to develop dimensions of quality from goal categories, based on the fundamental goals of corporate communications. One needs to recognise and take into consideration that this conception is not limited to a restricted group of immediately obvious, virtually inevitable goals (for example, individual communication goals), and that it is especially necessary to incorporate the fundamental goals (e.g. persuasion, which has many an effect).
The goal categories that have been developed from the basic goals of persuasion, the service spectrum and organisational objectives now form the foundation for the dimensions of quality in corporate communications. The dimensions of the empty term of “quality in corporate communications” are being “filled” with goal categories, so that each dimension of quality corresponds to a goal category. These dimensions of quality apply to all communication disciplines, but appear in different manifestations and to varying degrees in each corporate communications discipline.

The purpose of these goal categories is to help draw up criteria for effective, socially responsible, state-of-the-art corporate communications.

The goal categories thus circumscribe the aspects of “good corporate communications”. At the same time, they serve as dimensions of quality for individual campaigns within corporate communications disciplines; after all, quality can only be measured along dimensions that occur in usual activities.

Also, with simultaneous efforts from all communicative agents, the goal categories would not only lead to high quality performance in individual communication assignments, but also give rise to dimensions of quality for entire sectors, contributing to quality assurance and quality improvement across the whole sector.

Hence, the maxim applies: “The pursuit of goals leads to quality.”

High quality corporate communications obtains if those dimensions of quality (or goal categories) are aspired to and reached as thoroughly as possible. They are to be regarded as an ideal, which cannot, or not in every case, be fulfilled entirely, but which nevertheless functions as an ideal to strive for. In corporate communications, the answer to whether dimensions of quality have been achieved is very rarely a dichotomous “yes” or “no”; frequently it will be a question of gradual achievement. But the attempts alone to achieve the dimensions of quality, or to achieve them more completely, serve to improve and secure quality.

The eleven dimensions of quality operate within the framework of two important conditions which enable the expression of the sectors (in the first place), or promote their further development: professionalisation and social acceptance.

The constraint of professionalisation constitutes a meta-level that deals with the development of industry sectors from an academic and practice-oriented perspective. Independently of the question whether corporate communications disciplines are strictly “professions”, a sector’s development depends on various vital principles. These are reflective knowledge, an institutionalised research community and academic specialist literature, as well as the founding of professional associations. An institutionalised and professional education is generally accepted to be a quintessential element of professionalisation, imparting the qualifications and skills of serious professional training. Professionalisation and an academic approach are almost crucial for the advancement and observation of trends and requirements, with evaluation being a further example of this. The tasks of academia in this context are systematisation, standardisation of terminology and methods, critical commentary, and review and further development of existing methods. (Cf. Bentele, 1997: 18; Hainsworth, 1993: 311; McGrath, 2005b: 128ff.; Ronneberger / Rühl, 1992: 10; Ruß-Mohl, 1992: 317ff.) As a consequence, experts from academia and industry are constantly required to grapple particularly with questions of quality assurance and quality improvement, and from this, derive dimensions of quality, and to test the relevance of dimensions derived earlier.

Moreover, the entire corporate communications sector requires social acceptance in order to advance profitably and fruitfully. Without social acceptance, none of the communications sectors can exist or develop further, since a climate of suspicion, reproach (implicit or explicit) or even hostility precludes development. Transparency of communication disciplines is thus an important and sound way to increase social acceptance and to ease the constant pressure for justification. To this end it is necessary to build up and then maintain trust in each respective profession in its entirety. It is particularly helpful and valuable for improving the climate of social acceptance to comply with those dimensions of quality that are concerned with the communicative agents’ assumption of social responsibility towards the target audiences.

**Evaluation in corporate communications**

The term evaluation is complex and has been defined in many different ways. A detailed discussion of this term shall not be entered into here; rather, the aim is to establish what evaluation means within corporate communications.


“Evaluation is the systematic investigation of the merit or worth of an object (program) for the purpose of reducing uncertainty in decision making.” (Mertens, 1998: 219.)
Most authors agree that, ideally, depending on goals, point of departure etc., evaluation should take place before, during and after communicative activities. Suitable methods comprise ex-ante analysis, formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation refers to processes in their preparation or implementation phase, or that are in progress at the time of evaluation, and it entertains a future-oriented perspective. Another commonly used term is process monitoring. The term monitoring is most appropriate because this embraces the entire operating procedure and thus denotes a continuous appraisal at all stages.

Summative evaluation aims to assess the impact of projects which have already been carried out, and is also referred to as success, result or impact checking. (Cf. Cook/Matt, 1990: 17; Fuhrberg, 1995: 54ff.; Fuhrberg, 1997: 52ff.; Watson/Noble, 2007: 29; Wottawa/Thierau, 2003: 35, 63.)

Evaluation is possible, meaningful and even necessary in all corporate communications disciplines. Without some form of measurement or evaluation, communications work remains self-referential. Like any other systematic system amenable to planning and in consequence executed professionally, corporate communications is also accessible to evaluation, despite any difficulties arising from the specifics of communication work: “Now, however, it is clear that evaluation research is more than the application of methods. It is also a political and managerial activity.” (Rossi/Freeman, 1982: 27.)

The nature of evaluation can be described using three of its aspects:

- analysis: measurement and observation
- assessment of results
- steering and feedback

Evaluation includes constant monitoring as well as a final aspect of checking, which are both valuable and necessary at different stages, and are oriented towards the goals formulated above. This process of measurement and observation is then, as already implied by the term, followed by an evaluation and assessment of the collected data or the observed circumstances. Here, a decision is made whether performed or intended activities were successful or promise success, and the degree of approximation to the goal is decided or estimated. One has to take into account that it is entirely possible for goals to turn out to be unrealistic; in that case, the failure to achieve a goal must be judged in a different way. This shows the crucial difference between mere documentation and a comprehensive evaluation of communicative activity.

The aspect of steering shall be added to the other constitutional elements of evaluation, namely goal orientation, action orientation, empirical basis and assessment (cf. Bank, 2000: 50.), as I deem it to be inherent to evaluation: The assessment process virtually automatically gives rise to the steering or feedback function of evaluation. Whilst the steering function is primarily described for the business-management oriented context of controlling, the demand for a further utilisation of evaluation results arises from a characteristic goal of evaluation. This is the goal to optimise and improve any ongoing or future activities, or to continue such activities. Evaluation, like corporate communications, is of course not an end in itself, but is supposed to serve the organisation’s goals and contribute to the achievement of genuine organisational objectives. Evaluation results can assume a two-fold steering function: on one hand, they are meant to steer further communication activities, while on the other hand they can also support the management. This is the only way to also justify the claim that communication activities count as managerial tasks.

Finally, three major reasons to carry out evaluation can be crystallised: legitimising one’s own activities, feedback for the purpose of steering future activities, and quality assurance for corporate communications.

**Evaluation as a means of legitimising corporate communications**

Evaluation does not only document services, but also offers the chance to legitimise services. A common reason for undertaking evaluation is the attempt to legitimise communication work, especially to justify the costs involved in communication activities. After all, no other business division with comparable investment levels offers such uncertain returns. It is moreover of interest whether the communication activities have also brought about an increase in the company’s value. The calculation of revenue also serves to legitimise the investment of means into communication work, which is completely legitimate, given that the costs of communication measures are sometimes rather high, and it is thus only fair to check that the expended resources achieve the goals in question: “Proof is needed!” (IPRA, 1994.)

**Evaluation as a feedback mechanism**

A central function of evaluation is indisputably its future-oriented feedback mechanism. The results of evaluation should always be incorporated into any subsequent design and plan of action, and should certainly not “gather dust in a drawer”, but be utilised for improvements, etc. Feedback thus clearly serves the optimisation process and further steering of communication activities. Accordingly, evaluation always relates to future decision making, whose rationality it aims to increase.

It seems obvious that “the result achieved interacts with the current situation and thus leads to the establishment of a continuous “control loop” regarding the achievement of the intended goal, via a reduction of any is/should discrepancy”
(Wottawa, 1995: 32.). Combined with an evaluation of actions and an assessment of their success, this makes it possible to optimise one’s own actions in the future.

Here, the future-oriented nature of evaluation is particularly apparent.

Evaluation always contains feedback that refers to the initial situation, and is meant to improve communication activities and enable meaningful steering of subsequent communicative measures. (cf. Ahrens/Behrent, 1995: 85; Bentele/Nothhaft, 2008: 64.) It has to be stressed yet again that evaluation (alongside measurement and observation, as well as the assessment of results) is ascribed a steering function. It tests on one hand whether the result corresponds to the set goal or at least comes close to it; on the other hand it demonstrates which adaptive and corrective measures must be taken in order to better reach the set goals. Pure research can operate without direct applications in mind; however, evaluation (especially that of corporate communications) only holds meaning and validity as applied research if decisions and practical measures such as action optimisation originate from it. (cf. Stockmann, 2004: 15, 22; Vedung, 2004.)

Conclusion

Finally, the relationship between goals, dimensions of quality and evaluation is demonstrated: The new goal categories constitute criteria for effective, socially responsible state-of-the-art corporate communications.

These categories do not contradict existing classifications and academic endeavours of public relations, public affairs and advertising, but simply approach these disciplines from a different perspective, i.e. that of goals. The goal categories thus circumscribe the aspects of “good corporate communications”, and to keep or aspire to these guidelines is the basis of “good, high quality corporate communications”. The goal categories simultaneously serve as dimensions of quality for individual campaigns within communication disciplines. With simultaneous efforts from all communicative agents, the goal categories also contribute to quality assurance and quality improvement across the entire sector.

Striving for these goal categories unites two aspects. Firstly, to carry out corporate communications “well” and in line with the client’s wishes, and secondly, to strive for and ensure good quality in corporate communications, in individual assignments as well as the sector as a whole. The emphasis on striving for the goal categories means that in corporate communications, success does not demand that a goal be reached 100%, but rather that even a gradual approximation to the goal categories or dimensions of quality supports quality assurance and quality improvement.

It can after all be assumed that not every goal in every conception is reached completely, or can even be reached, but that these goals/dimensions of quality serve as an ideal which one should meet as closely as possible. Hence, to strive for and, ideally, reach, the goals or dimensions of quality in question promotes quality improvement and quality assurance.

Evaluation plays a special role in these processes: Evaluation (in all manifestations, with all tools at all times) measures goal achievement and compliance with standards when carrying out a communications assignment. At the same time it acts as a principle for quality assurance. Evaluation ensures “good practice” of corporate communications as well as quality assurance by linking results back to either the implementation process, or to the goals and standards. Additionally, evaluation itself is a dimension of quality.

It is possible to appraise concrete detailed goals taken from the goal categories, or quality, through any of the known tools of evaluation and (advertising) impact research. For example, commonly used tools are: media content analysis, advertising pre-tests, tests measuring attention, comprehensibility, usability etc., tools to assess value creation (reputation management, stakeholder management, BSC-based models).

A continued close examination of evaluation tools would be highly desirable, especially of those that are (or should be) employed to measure value creation for a company through corporate communications. These frequently try to translate communicative successes into monetary units, which seems exceedingly problematic.

Remark: This article is a pre-printed and condensed version of my habilitation thesis.

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Abstract

This paper introduces a new systematic relationship between goals, evaluation and quality in corporate communications (public relations, public affairs and advertising). Eleven goal categories for corporate communications are developed, building on fundamental goal levels (persuasion, organisational objectives and service spectrum).

These goal categories do not only constitute the standard for "good corporate communications", but also function as dimensions of quality for corporate communications, as those categories are used to “fill” the “empty notion” of quality with dimensions.

Evaluation assumes a special role in this context, as on one hand it serves to regulate “good public relations”, particularly target achievement, and on the other hand becomes a tool for quality assurance and quality control.
Keywords
Corporate communications, quality, evaluation.

Abstract German/Deutsch

Die Evaluation nimmt in diesem Zusammenhang eine besondere Rolle ein: Einerseits dient sie zur Überprüfung der „guten Kommunikationsarbeit“, insbesondere der Zielerreichung, andererseits ist sie ein Instrument der Qualitätssicherung und Qualitätsüberprüfung.

Keywords
Unternehmenskommunikation, Qualität, Evaluation.

Bibliography


