

Communications - is it a nice-to-have?



By [Bongani Mahlangu](#)

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A few weeks back I had a very interesting conversation with a former classmate, Themba. Our discussion was about the recognition, or lack thereof, accorded the communications function in the organisation.

"Generally, communications is a support department and it is the least supported department. If companies were to downsize, I tell you the communications department will be first to be ticked off the list," he said

Themba, who is also a communications professional, confesses that he had more than once thought of a career change since his job appeared to be deemed to have minimal value to the organisation and that was not good for his esteem.

This can't be true, I said to him. "This can only be a perception, we as communications professionals know the role our department, and we know the value of our contribution. To change this, we must ensure that the CEO, CFO and all other executives have an understanding of what we do".

"Instead of being told what to do, we need to clarify what communications does and how our deliverables assist the organisation meet its strategic objectives," I said.

Communications is more than pictures taken at a braai

We are sometimes told, "Operations Department is having a braai got to take pictures so we can send the story to the press." I mean really now, wouldn't that discredit you a source of newsworthy information for journalists.

In his study, PR Metrics: How to Measure Public Relations and Corporate Communication, Jim Macnamara states that communication is an outcome - not an output or series of outputs.

Communication is achieved when an audience receives, understands, retains and acts on information in some way. News releases, newsletters, brochures and other information materials put out are a means to an end. A simple definition of communication is "what arrives and causes an effect, not what you send out,"

I fully agree with the sentiments above, sending seven press releases each week to meet *your target* will be a futile exercise if it does not get people talking about it or at least get the journalists to write about it.

It is clear that the communications role is not clearly understood or perhaps not well-defined. It is high time we as Communications Practitioners take our profession where it belongs - strategic level or it will forever be considered a *nice-*

to-have.

ABOUT BONGANI MAHLANGU

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