Communication Management in the Netherlands: 
Trends, Developments, and Benchmark with US Study

ABSTRACT

Purpose
In this study we present current trends and developments in the field of communication management in the Netherlands. With the use of data obtained in 1999, we were able to identify trends and developments in the field and to compare these findings with studies conducted in the United States (US; Goodman, 2008).

Design/methodology/approach
A total of 556 communication managers working in different parts of the industry responded and completed a questionnaire in 2005. Respondents were mainly heads of communication departments and were chosen by taking a random selection of 25% of all Dutch organizations with more than 50 employees. Members of the Dutch professional society, Logeion, also completed the survey.

Findings
The study’s main areas of focus are: the size of communication departments, the glass ceiling for female professionals, and encroachment on communication positions. Findings show that the number of female professionals increased and balanced male professionals. Encroachment decreased compared with 1999.

Originality/value
Many studies report on trends and developments in the communication management or corporate communication profession. Our study is unique because we compare its findings with those found in the Netherlands in 1999, enabling us to analyze developments over time. We also compare the Dutch situation with that in the United States.

Research paper
INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing interest in studying the state of communication management in specific countries and regions. For instance, Corporate Communication International (CCI) at Baruch College, City University of New York has presented the findings of their corporate communication practices and trends studies in the United States conducted in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2007 (www.corporatecomm.org/studies.html); in China (Wang and Goodman, 2006 and 2008); and in South Africa (de Wet, Meintjes, Niemann-Struweg, and Goodman, 2008). The newly formed European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) conducted the first study on the state of the profession in Europe (Meckel, 2007). Another European study (Zerfass, van Ruler, Rogojinaru, Verčič, and Hamrefors, 2007) was recently published.

The goals of these studies are diverse. First, by presenting state of the profession studies, communication professionals from other regions learn how the profession is practiced in that specific region or country. Another goal is to analyze the state of the profession in a specific country or region itself. A third goal is to align academic and non-academic courses to the practices in the field. It is evident that communication management is an emerging field in societies and in organizations globally.

In this study we present communication management trends and results in the Netherlands. It is the third study of its kind in the Netherlands (Van Ruler, 1995; Van Ruler and de Lange, 2003) enabling us to make comparisons with previous studies. Furthermore, we compare these findings with CCI’s US study (Goodman, 2008). The main questions addressed are: the size of communication management in Dutch organizations and agencies; the representation of male and female communication managers in the profession; and developments in the field over the past 10 years. We also present an analysis of the extent of encroachment on the profession by examining the educational backgrounds of communication managers, and we identify the main tasks for the field in the future. The comparison of the Dutch and US studies offers a picture of how the Dutch communication profession is performing when benchmarked internationally.
Theoretical background: Communication Management

In the practice and research of communication related to organizations a great variety of terms and definitions are used. These include communication management, organizational communication, strategic communication, business communication and corporate communication, all of which are linked to each other and to public relations and even with integrated marketing communication. Strategic communication is defined as communication serving as communication that serves a long-range “strategic” goal of an organization (Botan, 1997). Business Communication is defined as the (often vocational) discipline of writing, presenting and communicating in a professional context (Cornelissen, 2008, p 251).

Organizational communication is defined by van Riel and Hemels (2000) as all communication aimed at increasing the reputation of and satisfaction with the organization. This definition excludes sales, which is seen as part of marketing communication. Within Dutch, as well as German communication science, organizational communication is seen as a broader field; the definition includes all communication in and from organizations (Kleinnijenhuis and Saes, 1999; Theis, 1994). The US tradition uses the term organizational communication for what in some European countries is defined as internal communication, i.e. all communication within the organization with the objective to inform organizational members on what their tasks are and what changes in tasks are at hand. It also includes communication whose objective is to establish and foster the social capital in the organization, i.e. the community and the care for the wellbeing of the employees (de Ridder, 2005).

Communication management is the systematic planning, implementing, monitoring, and revision of all the channels of communication within an organization; it also includes the organization and dissemination of new communication directives connected with an organization, network, or communications technology. Aspects of communication management include developing corporate communication strategies, designing internal and external communications directives, and managing the flow of information, including online communication (van Ruler, 2005).

In some countries communication management is labeled corporate communication, defined by Van Riel (1995, p 141) as: ‘an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonized as effectively and efficiently as possible’, with the overall objective of creating ‘a favorable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent’ (van Riel 1995). Cornelissen defines corporate communication not as an instrument, but as a management function: ‘Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework and vocabulary for the effective coordination of all means of communications with the overall purpose of establishing
and maintaining favorable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent’ (Cornelissen 2008, p 5). In the Netherlands communication management or strategic communication is more commonly used (van Ruler et al., 2005), although we are clearly witnessing a trend in the more frequent use of corporate communication, comparable to the Anglo-Saxon world (Elving, 2010).

Communication science is empirical, which means that theories about communication are developed and tested. Communication management is an emerging field and scholars working in the field of communication management or corporate communication cannot ignore trends and developments in its practice. Trends in professional practice are sometimes prompted by scientific research, but more often are based on the needs of society, or trends among stakeholders. For instance, the increased attention given to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in recent years, as a result of stakeholder demand and new government regulations has influenced organizations to change their communications with stakeholders. In annual reports, sections are now dedicated to organizational responsibilities describing how firms deal with environmental issues, how profits are being generated, and how they approach matters such as child labor. In corporate marketing campaigns organizations now present themselves as responsible corporate citizens, especially on environmental issues. Communication professionals must gain knowledge about current CSR issues and practices, and must be judicious about how the organization presents its CSR initiatives to its stakeholders. Important questions such as whether to include CSR activities in the marketing mix, and how to present the company as a good corporate citizen, are additional responsibilities that now must be addressed by communication management (Cornelissen, 2008).

Another example is the introduction and pervasive presence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the workplace. Organizational communication scholars began to study the impact of various kinds of ICT’s after their adoption in organizations. Science follows practice when the impact of community sites such as Hyves, Linkedin and Facebook and corporate blogs are studied as new tools for communicating with organizational stakeholders (Hearn, Foth and Gray, 2009). Corporate communicators need to incorporate these technological developments into their daily routines, and as communication scholars, we need to study these societal influences both theoretically and in studies about the practice in the field.

For some time the academic and professional literature has suggested that private as well as public organizations need a specific function at a policy making level whose responsibility is to initiate, direct, and coach communications within the context of the organization itself, its policy framework, and its functioning within the commercial, political, technical, and social environments (van Riel, 1995; van Ruler
Purposefully implemented and managed communication helps an organization achieve its goals. This makes communication management a strategic management activity. It assists in securing the long-term functioning of the organization in society, as opposed to being an operational activity that does no more than implement top management decisions. This strategic approach also supports the argument for hiring specialists at a managerial level, e.g., communication managers rather than communication technicians (Dozier, 1988). This can be seen as a shift from viewing the communication function as requiring mainly creative or technical talents to perceiving it as needing to be filled by communicators with management expertise who can direct all communications within the organization, and help others in the organization to communicate more effectively.

In this paper we compare key findings from current and past studies (van Ruler and de Lange, 2003; Elving and van Ruler, 2005; van Ruler and Elving, 2006). First, we present recent Dutch data compared to a 1999 study on the size of the communication management profession in the Netherlands. Then we present data on the function of communication management and on the position of female communication managers. Two issues are given special attention: the glass ceiling regarding female communication managers and encroachment. In the 1999 study (van Ruler and de Lange, 2003) it was concluded that there was a glass ceiling for female practitioners. This was in line with several US studies. Glass ceiling is used to describe the more or less invisible mechanisms that prevent women from climbing to the top of the organizational ladder. While women in US public relations practice are the majority, the glass ceiling was seen as a major factor preventing female public relations professionals from attaining top organizational positions (Dozier, 1990; van Ruler and de Lange, 2003). In recent years the position of female professionals has been studied and described in various contexts.

Encroachment refers to the assignment of top positions in communication management departments, or units, to individuals without training or experience in the field (van Ruler and de Lange, 2003). Alternatively encroachment also refers to other specialties taking over the tasks in a specific field, because no expertise is present in the organization, or the lack of competencies of specialists prevent them from performing these tasks. This might be the marketer who works as a public relations officer, or the HR department taking responsibility for internal communications. Most discussions of encroachment focus on the differences between Public Relations and Marketing functions (Grunig and Grunig, 1998), and the implications of one dominating the other. According to Lauzen and Dozier (1992), due to encroachment on the function, public relations was seen as becoming little more than a technical support function servicing other units of the organization, rather than being a central management function in itself (p. 61). Lauzen (1992) claimed that encroachment
occurs due to the weaknesses of public relations practitioners themselves, rather than as a result of outsiders occupying public relations’ turf. Lauzen and Dozier (1992) also found that encroachment is a major factor in communication management practice; although newer research by Laborde and Pompper (2006) did not find encroachment in a study among for profit PR practitioners. L.A. Grunig, Toth and Hon (2001) agree with Lauzen and Dozier, and suggest that encroachment is influenced by the fact that there are so many women in the field (van Ruler and de Lange, 2003).

In this paper we explore both encroachment and the glass ceiling as factors that may explain the maturing of communication management in the Netherlands. The Dutch data collected is compared to findings from a US study (Goodman, 2008) on the following issues: gender of communication managers, tasks and responsibilities, and budgets and anticipated budgetary changes. We also present Dutch respondents’ level of commitment to the profession, as an indicator of possible differences between those who earn a degree in communication and those who have a degree in a non communication field of study. Commitment to work has been a topic of interest for researchers for some time, as reflected by the many reviews of commitment theory and research (e.g., Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Strongly related to organizational commitment is commitment to the profession, or occupational commitment (Lee, Carswell and Allen, 2000). Commitment to one's occupation is conceptualized here as a psychological link between a person and his or her occupation based on an affective reaction to that occupation. A person with strong occupational commitment will more strongly identify with, and experience more positive feelings about it than will one with weak occupational commitment (Lee et al., 2000).

Finally we present upcoming issues facing Dutch communication managers. In the discussion we reflect on our findings as compared to previous studies, present limitations of our study, and insights for future research. Additionally, we list future opportunities and risks for Dutch communication management.

**METHOD**

The respondents for this study were selected in two different ways. First, we included all Dutch organizations with more than 50 employees. As in previous studies (van Ruler and De Lange, 1999; 2003), we assumed that some kind of communication management function or activity would exist in organizations larger than 50 persons. In total we found 8776 such organizations on the database of the Dutch Chamber of
Commerce, including governmental organizations. We sent a questionnaire randomly to 2194 organizations or 25% of the 8776. The questionnaire was addressed to the person responsible for communication at that particular organization. In addition, we included a 25% sample of all communication agencies in the Chamber of Commerce database labeled as PR agencies or as advertising agencies. In total there were 8588 agencies. We mailed the questionnaire to the owner(s) of the agency with a request to complete the questionnaire and return it to us. Respondents could fill in the questionnaire on paper or online.

The response rate for this first wave of research was very disappointing (less than 7%). We conducted a non-response study, first to try to increase our response rate, and second to test whether the organizations and agencies that responded, differed from the non-responding organizations and agencies. We contacted a large proportion of the original sample by phone in order to find out if they had responded to the questionnaire, the reasons for not responding, to learn the characteristics of the organizations or agencies, and to test whether the responding group was representative of the whole population.

Of the contacted organizations and agencies, 6.9% stated they did respond to the questionnaire, and another 20% were aware that the questionnaire was received. The other, 70% did not know that the questionnaire was received. The main reasons for not participating were a lack of time, and organization/agency policies prohibiting the release of the information requested in our questionnaire. We did not find a significant difference between the size of the organization and number of communication professionals in responding and non-responding organizations and agencies. In total, after the non-response study, there were still only 201 (9.8%) responses from communication managers of the organizations that replied, and 179 (8.5%) responses from the agencies.

To increase the number of responses to our questionnaire, we decided to add a second group of respondents, members of the Dutch Professional Communication Association, Logeion. All Logeion (at that time approximately 1800) members received an email inviting them to participate in the study. They could do so by clicking on a link to the questionnaire’s website. In this way we gained an additional 442 (355 from organizations and 87 from agencies) responses, which led to a total of 822 responses (556 from organizations, and 266 from agencies). In this paper we focus on the data from respondents from organizations (n = 556). We did test possible
differences in our analysis between the two subsets of responses (via Chamber of Commerce, or via the professional organization) and will report when significant differences between the two subsets were found.

RESULTS
The following discusses: the estimated size of the communication management profession in the Netherlands, the ‘glass ceiling’ effect, and ‘encroachment’ on communication positions. Data is then presented on gender in communication management, tasks and budgets benchmarked against aforementioned international studies, and communication managers’ professional commitment to the field. Finally, we present the key issues communication managers predict they will face in the future,

Size of the Dutch communication management profession
Our first finding was derived from studying the responses from organizations and agencies with Chamber of Commerce\textsuperscript{12} affiliation. We drew a sample of 25\% of all organizations (including governmental organizations like ministries, municipalities and the regional governing bodies in the Netherlands, called provinces). Respondents from these organizations reported a mean of 6.01 full time equivalent (FTE) communication professionals (varying from 1 – 70) in their department. In total there are 8,392 organizations in the Netherlands who have more than 50 employees, so we extrapolated that in these organizations there are a total of 52,000 communication managers or people involved in communication.

We also included a 25\% sample of the total population of agencies in our study. We split these into those agencies with only the owner as active consultant, and those agencies who had more than one employee. According to the Chamber of Commerce, this last group consists of a total of 4,440 agencies. As reported by the owners of these agencies, they had a mean of 8.75 communication professionals employed (2 – 85). In total this group of agencies employs 39,732 communication professionals. With almost 4,048 agencies with the owner as the only employee, we

\textsuperscript{1} All organizations in the Netherlands are required to be member of the Chamber of Commerce, because they manage the Commercial Register. Without a listing in the Commercial Register an organization is unable to make deals, open bank accounts, buy or sell products etcetera.

\textsuperscript{2} This result is obtained by studying only those responses we had from organizations from the Chamber of Commerce. The other responses via the professional organization were not included in this analysis.
came to a total of \((52,000 + 39,732 + 4,048)\) 95,780 communication professionals active for Dutch organizations exclusively employed in communications. In 1999 there was a similar calculation to the one conducted here that determined that 55,000 professionals worked in the field of communication management in the Netherlands. This implies that the profession increased 75% in less then 10 years. The size of the Dutch population in 1999 was 15.75 million, and in 2005, 16.3 million (increase of 3.5%).

**Background of respondents**

The mean age of the respondents working in organizations was 40.19 years, varying from 21 to 66 years. The respondents had been working on average for 3.5 years in their current position, 14.7% of them had a tenure below 1 year, 15.3% from 1 to 2 years, 33.7% had worked from 2 to 4 years, 25.7% 4 to 10 years, and 10.6% had worked for more than 10 years in their current position. In Figure 1 the sectors of the respondents are listed.

![Figure 1](image.png)

*Figure 1, sectors of the organizations the respondents work for in percentages.*

Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents work in commercial organizations, 32% indicated that they work in governmental organizations, and almost 12% indicated that they work in non-commercial organizations.
Figure 2: the size of the organizations respondents are working in, in percentages.

Figure 2 presents the size of the respondents’ organizations. The majority of respondents’ works in organizations who have between 51 and 250 employees, but larger organizations are part of our sample as well. We did not find differences between the sectors respondents work in.

Glass ceiling

In universities and colleges in the Netherlands, female students are a majority in communication studies. In 2003 van Ruler and de Lange concluded that ‘(w)e may well be witnessing the decline of the older male communication manager and the rise of younger females in this role’, (p 155). In table 1 we present the percentages of male and female communication managers in 1999 and 2006.

Table 1: Comparison of positions of male and female communication managers between 1999 and 2006 on the basis of self reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in hierarchy</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management team</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>50.4 %</td>
<td>56 %</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle management</td>
<td>12.7 %</td>
<td>17.0 %</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational level</td>
<td>5.8 %</td>
<td>7.7 %</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>486</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 1 we can conclude that there are fewer communication managers from management teams in our survey; that there is an increase in communication managers at the higher staff level, as well as a decrease in communication managers at the lower staff level. Furthermore, at high staff levels there are more or less as many female as there are male communication managers. The indication in 1999 that the glass ceiling for female communication managers might be disappearing in Dutch organizations might have become the reality when we choose the position of the communication manager as an indicator. This disappearing glass ceiling is further supported by the significant differences in age between the female and male respondents. Male respondents report an average age of 41.4 years whereas female respondents were 38.4 years (F(1, 299)= 8.67; p<.005). The fact that this lower age difference is statistically significant may imply that the differences found on gender might be disappearing as time goes by. An alternative explanation might be that female professionals may be reaching equivalent positions to men earlier (Simpson and Altman, 2000). Simpson and Altman (p. 195) argue that the glass ceiling might still be in intact, but it is taking a different form, and can be viewed as punctured, allowing some women to pass through. Age is, according to Simpson and Altman (2000), a problematic indicator of the (disappearing) glass ceiling effect, because young female professionals may want to make rapid career steps, with the goal of establishing a family when they have achieved a higher professional position. Another explanation of Simpson and Altman (2000) is that the ceiling is located at higher, senior management levels.

Another interesting finding from Table 1 is the disappearance of communication managers in the management teams. In 1999 van Ruler and De Lange (2003) found that approximately 25% of the respondents were part of the management team of their organization, whereas in 2005 only 4.3% of the respondents indicated that they were part of the management team of their organization. This might be due to the positioning of the communication department as a high staff department, rather than as a management function. An alternative explanation might be that van Ruler and De Lange had more respondents from these higher levels than we did.

**Gender benchmark with the US**

In the US study (Goodman, 2008) 62% of communication executives are male. In our study 49.9% of communication managers are female. The differences between the
Netherlands and the US may be the method of selecting organizations for their respective studies; the US study selected publicly traded companies in the Fortune 1000, whereas we selected all organizations with more than 50 employees, including governmental and non-profit organizations. This might lead to the conclusion that female professionals in the Netherlands are more frequently found working in the public sector, as was the case in our study (respectively 52.5% females in public organizations versus 47.3% female communicators in the private sector).

Encroachment

Van Ruler and de Lange (2003) stated that: ‘(c)learly, encroachment is a common phenomenon in communication management in the Netherlands’ (p 156). To assess the level of encroachment in 2005 we analyzed the educational background of the respondents and the previous profession respondents indicated. In the 2005 study, 42.3% of the respondents indicated that they had a Bachelor or Masters degree in communication, whereas 46.4% indicated that they had a Bachelor or Masters degree in another area, and 11.4% had an education lower than a Bachelor degree. Of the respondents who indicated that they did not have a professional education in communication, 46.7% indicated that they had a previous job in marketing, public relations or journalism. In Figure 3 the results of the current study are presented with the data from 1999.

Figure 3: educational background of respondents, comparison between 1999 and 2006
From Figure 3 we can clearly see that there is an increase in professionals with a Masters or Bachelors degree in communication. This is not surprising since there are today (2009) more than 25 different programs at Dutch universities and higher professional education institutes on (corporate) communication. Another evidence of disappearing encroachment is that the average age indicated by respondents is higher for those who do not have a professional education in communication compared with those who do. (F(1, 296) = 9.31; p<.005).

*Tasks of communication management; Benchmark with US*

Van Ruler, Vercic, Bütschi and Flodin (2004) created a list of 30 tasks for public relations managers within Europe. Based on this list, we asked the respondents which tasks are performed in their communication department. Figure 4 presents the results.
Figure 4: tasks performed by communication managers in organizations
There are a few differences between the tasks reported from respondents in governmental organizations as compared to those from commercial organizations. Respondents in governmental organizations frequently reported *dialogue with society* as a task, whereas respondents from commercial organizations frequently reported *sponsor activities* as a task. Furthermore, it seems that communication managers in public organizations are more frequently dealing with the media than their colleagues in private organizations; also they report that they use more crisis communication in public organizations than in private organization. Maybe crisis managers in public organizations are more frequently confronted with crisis than their counterparts in private organizations.

These findings presented in Figure 3 are comparable with the US study (Goodman, 2008). US respondents reported that more than 50% of communication departments are responsible for the annual report, brand strategy, communication policy and strategy, community relations, corporate identity, philanthropy (citizenship), crisis & emergency, employee relations, executive speeches, Internet site, Intranet site, issues management, media relations, public relations and reputation management (Goodman, 2008). Although the categories from our study differ slightly from the CCI study, we can conclude that there are large similarities in the tasks and responsibilities of communication departments in the two countries.

Besides these similarities, it is also clear that communication departments have greater responsibilities. This is a trend that has become apparent since 1995. Prior to that time, the communication function was not defined in organizations, and communication managers were often labeled as technicians (text writers for the in-house magazines). Text writing still is a major task for communication departments, but so are strategic policy-making issues and managerial tasks.

*Budgets in the Netherlands compared to the US*

When asked about the budget for communication management, many respondents were reluctant to give figures, because, as some stated, this was not in line with company policies. Of the respondents who reported budgets in our study (n = 187), the mean budget was 1.25 million Euros\(^3\), varying from 15,500 Euros to 20 million Euros. The respondents that were selected via the Chamber of Commerce reported

\(^3\) € 1 = $1.40 = £0.87, Oktober, 2010
slightly lower budgets than the respondents who were selected via the professional organization. Most of the budgets were reserved for marketing purposes. Also in our study we had two questions about expectations regarding the future communication budget in their organization. The first asked whether the respondents thought the budget would increase or decrease. The second question concerned the number of communication professionals in their department, again respondents had to indicate whether this would increase or decrease. Both results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 5: Budget and staff size expectations of Communication management in the Netherlands

Figure 5 show that most respondents expect that the budget and size of the communication department will stay the same in the future. More respondents think that both will increase, than those who think both will decrease. The US study (Goodman, 2008) showed that almost 40% of the respondents think the budget will not change, 37% think that the budget will increase, whereas almost 22% of the US respondents think the budget will decrease.

Commitment to the profession
An interesting question is how the communication manager views him or herself within the communication profession, and the degree to which he or she is committed
to the field of communication. This occupational commitment was established with 6 statements, developed for the purpose of this study. Table 2 presents the 6 statements.

| I feel committed to the developments in the profession of communication |
| I feel proud of working in the field of communication |
| I feel comfortable in the communication profession |
| I could easily work in another profession rather than in the communication profession* |
| As a communication professional I get much acknowledgement from others |
| I find that others outside the communication field have a negative image of the communication profession* |

*reverse scoring

Note: Original statements were in Dutch.

Table 2: the items of the occupational commitment variable

From confirmative factor analysis (CFA) we learned that all items, accept for item 4 (I could easily work in another profession than in the communication profession) loaded on one factor (all loadings above .49). Also from reliability analyses, we learned that the exclusion of this item 4 leads to a higher Cronbach’s alpha (.68). We decided to exclude item 4 from further analyses. The mean of occupational commitment (on a 5-point scale, with 1 indicating very low occupational commitment, and 5 as a very high commitment) was 3.68. This means an above average on organizational commitment. We did not find a difference between the two sub-samples. Respondents selected via the Chamber of Commerce did not significantly differ on occupational commitment when compared to the respondents selected through the professional communication association. This may be surprising, as you might anticipate higher occupational commitment from members of a professional association. We also did not find significant differences in gender, but did find a significant difference in education. The respondents who had a communication educational background (Bachelor or Masters degree) had a significantly higher occupational commitment than those respondents who did not have had a communication education in the field of communication (F (1, 561) = 3.22, p<.01; M_comm. = 3.76; M_not_comm. = 3.69).
Upcoming issues in the next 5 years

At the end of the questionnaire, we asked respondents to list the top 3 issues for communication management in the next 5 years. The main issues are listed in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positioning and shaping of the profession</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge development, exchange and use, professionalization</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer and environmental orientation (including the gap between</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government and society, issues management, interactive policy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New media as tool in the communication profession</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability in improving Return On Investment (proof of the added</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>value of communication)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: upcoming issues for communication management in The Netherlands

The mention of interactive policy making (the way governmental organizations try to develop public policy by communicating to members of society before definite policies are made) and bridging the gap between government and society clearly stems from respondents working in communication management in governmental organizations, such as ministries, municipalities and so on.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have presented the results of trends and developments in communication management in the Netherlands by benchmarking our findings with previous Dutch studies and the US study on corporate communication (Goodman, 2008). The study’s first conclusion is that the number of communication management professionals in the Netherlands is increasing. The number of professionals has almost doubled since 1999. This is understandable, since the profession has developed from a technical to a managerial role, due to the increasing importance of the role communication plays in many aspects of corporate life (Gregory, 2008). This does not mean that technical tasks, such as producing text, or design elements moved to other
departments. These ‘old’ tasks seem to be enriched with managerial and consultancy tasks, such as helping others to communicate better, and giving advice on the policies of the organization.

The second conclusion is that the glass ceiling for female communication managers seems to have disappeared. We found an almost perfect balance between female and male communication managers in Dutch organizations, particularly among heads of the departments, which was in the past predominantly male, but now appears to be no longer gender biased. In all probability, in the future, female professionals will be in the majority in the function and as heads of communication departments. This could be as a result of the large majority of female communication students in Dutch Master and Bachelors programs, and given the lower mean age the female respondents have in our study, compared to the mean age of male respondents. An alternative explanation for the changing nature of the glass ceiling might be that the ceiling has moved to higher senior management positions, although this cannot be deduced on the basis of our study, as it was outside of its scope. Progressing to higher senior levels may also include positions on the Executive Board, requiring those individuals to enact roles that may not include specific communication tasks. Another alternative explanation might be that, as Simpson and Altman (2000) indicated, females make more rapid progression at a younger age than male professionals do. Future research is needed to gain more insights about these glass ceiling processes.

Encroachment, defined as professionals with another educational background than communication, is still present in Dutch organizations, but it is clearly disappearing. Almost 45% of respondents indicated that they had a Bachelors or Masters degree in communication. Of the other 55% who did not have a formal education in communication, almost 50% reported a former job that had links with communication. Also this last group was significantly older than the first group, which might be an indication of less encroachment in the future. Another reason for the future disappearance of encroachment is the establishment in the 1990’s of Master and Bachelor programs in Communication in the Netherlands. Hence, older communication professionals were unable to enroll in communication as a field of study.

As can be seen from the lists of tasks, the responsibilities of communication departments are increasing. Communication is seen as vital in organizations, and is referred to as its ‘life line’, or ‘nervous system’. Comparison with the US (Goodman,
2008) shows a similar pattern; therefore this seems to be a global trend. This finding leads to the conclusion that universities and professional education institutes have to offer more courses on future trends within the profession, such as philanthropy, Web 2.0 etcetera. The results also clearly indicate the need for further developments in the field, such as training for communication professionals and more research into the field.

Communication managers in the Netherlands and in the US agreed that their budgets will stay the same or will increase. Of course, the 2009 financial crisis may have had a negative impact on budgets and size of communication departments. However, a recent study (Elving and Willems, 2009) indicated that half of the organizations participating in this small study did not experience decreases in their communication budgets in 2009, despite the financial crisis. A result of the crisis might be a greater need for greater organizational transparency and an increase in the importance of stakeholders (Elving, 2010; Elving and Willems, 2009). This may be an explanation for the stability of communication management budgets, as communication is being viewed as increasingly important to organizational sustainability.

It is also not surprising that professionals with an MA or BA degree in Communication, who have chosen a career in the profession, have a higher identification with it than those who entered the profession at a later stage in their lives. Probably professionals with an MA or BA in other fields than communication have dreamt of a different career then communication and for this, their commitment to the profession is lower. Another explanation might be that with an education and or training in Communication individuals realize the complex nature of communication in and from organizations and are better able to appreciate this complex nature.

Limitations
Our study suffered from a low response rate. Although we learned from non-response phone interviews that there were no differences between the responding and non-responding groups, for future research we would need higher response rates. For our current study we were able to include members of the professional communication association (Logeion), but for future research, we plan not to do so. Logeion only represents a small portion of all communication professionals, since they have only
approximately 3,000 members, where the community of communication professionals is at least 95,000, as our results show.

Perhaps the large scope of our study (communication management in Dutch organizations with a size of at least 50 employees; and communication agencies) was too broad. The US study (Goodman, 2008) was aimed at publicly traded organizations in the Fortune 1000. The inclusion of government organizations may be advantageous to our study. In Western society communication management in this sector is increasing rapidly (Vos, 2006).

Benchmarking with the US study (Goodman, 2008) was only possible on gender, budgets and tasks. Other results could not be compared because of the differences between the questions. This presents a dilemma for the future, as we would also want to compare the current results with previous studies on communication management in the Netherlands (van Ruler and de Lange, 2003). We did, however, extend the questionnaire with several new variables and questions as compared to the 1999 Dutch study. In order to compare Dutch communication management with other international studies in the future, we should adopt questions in these studies, and continue those we have previously asked in the 1999 Dutch studies. Another limitation might be that we didn’t ask which tasks were the most important for the communication department. It seems important for future research to have insights in which tasks take the most of the time of these professionals and which tasks are done less frequently.

Conclusions related to a glass ceiling for female professionals were made based on the positions that these professionals have within their organization, from which we concluded that there were no differences between men and women. We did not include differences in salary, which might be another indicator of the glass ceiling (Simpson and Altman, 2000). The members of the professional organization Logeion, who functioned as a sounding board in the construction phase of the questionnaire, thought it was unethical to ask Dutch respondents for salary information. In future research we should include this question.

The future of communication management in The Netherlands

Based on the results presented in this paper it becomes clear that the field of communication management in the Netherlands is emerging and growing. This is understandable since organizing is in itself communicating, or as Weick eloquently
wrote: “(s)ituations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence” (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409).

But we also see a high risk for the practice in communication departments in commercial and governmental organizations. Communication departments often have a role that can best be compared to the sergeant’s role in the army, which is a saying in the Netherlands. The sergeant’s role is the one who is blamed by others above him (or her) and by the people (s)he is leading. No matter what (s)he does, there is always critique. Top management and the workforce blame the communication department when things go wrong, or when they do not proceed in the way that had been expected. In our view communication managers should not seek to take responsibility for all organizational or corporate communication, but should emphasize the importance of the communication role of top management and managers lower in the hierarchy. In our view the communication department should more assertively facilitate organizational communication, emphasizing the shared responsibility for communication throughout the organization.

This study makes clear that the professional education of communication managers in the Netherlands should be further developed. The trends and developments characterized in our study underscore the need for training on specific themes. An important question for the future is whether Dutch universities and professional educational institutes are able to design appropriate courses, Bachelor – and Masters Programs, to fulfill the emerging requirements of Dutch organizations. The tasks and responsibilities of communication management are expanding and increasing. Clearly there is a need for specialists in various disciplines within communication management, which provides an excellent opportunity for Dutch universities and other institutions who offer courses in communication to link to the developments in the profession and extend their programs in Corporate Communication and PR. Also, while communication managers need to understand business (Cornelissen, 2008; Gregory, 2008), business also needs to learn more about communication. Surprisingly and contrary to for instance the UK, the US but also Denmark and Spain, only very few business schools in the Netherlands offer programs in corporate communication, communication management, public relations and/or strategic communication. Maybe communication as a profession could benefit when communication education and research are introduced at business schools in the Netherlands as well.
REFERENCES


Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L.A. (1992) Models of public relations and communications,


Ridder, J., de (2005). Doelen van Interne Communicatie (Goals of internal


Wang, J. (2008). Corporate Communication Practices and trend at the dawn of the

