



Leading Throughout

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Trends in Leadership

Avoiding the Leadership Vacuum



The Leadership Vacuum

“when a leader is not aware or does not recognize the leadership needs of employees”

- Leads to unnecessary stress
- Lack of motivation
- No trust

Trends in PR Leadership to Avoid the Vacuum



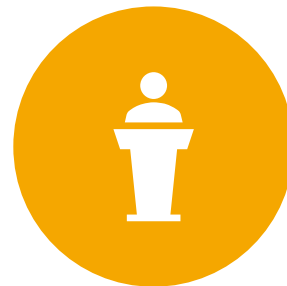
Balance ethical and effective communication



Guide teams and assist in achieving goals



Stay current on trends in field



Exercise transactional and transformational leadership attributes



Changes to the Chief Communication Officer Position

- No longer just “firefighters tampering out the flames”
- More all-encompassing
- Integrated strategic communication
- Four main roles:
 1. Vision setters
 2. Motivators
 3. Analyzers
 4. Taskmasters

Shift in Leadership of Chief Communication Officers

Executive positions predominantly held by men

- Traditionally transactional
- Managerial

Increase in women PR leaders

- Field becoming more people-focused
- Leadership becoming more transformational
- Focus on building relationships



Women in Leadership

Chief Communication Officers

Main Questions

1. How are women in this position meeting the demands of the profession?

2. How, if at all, are relationships with other leaders and lower-level employees influencing these women's leadership?

Specific Research Questions

RQ1: What leadership qualities do female CCOs believe are typical of CCOs?

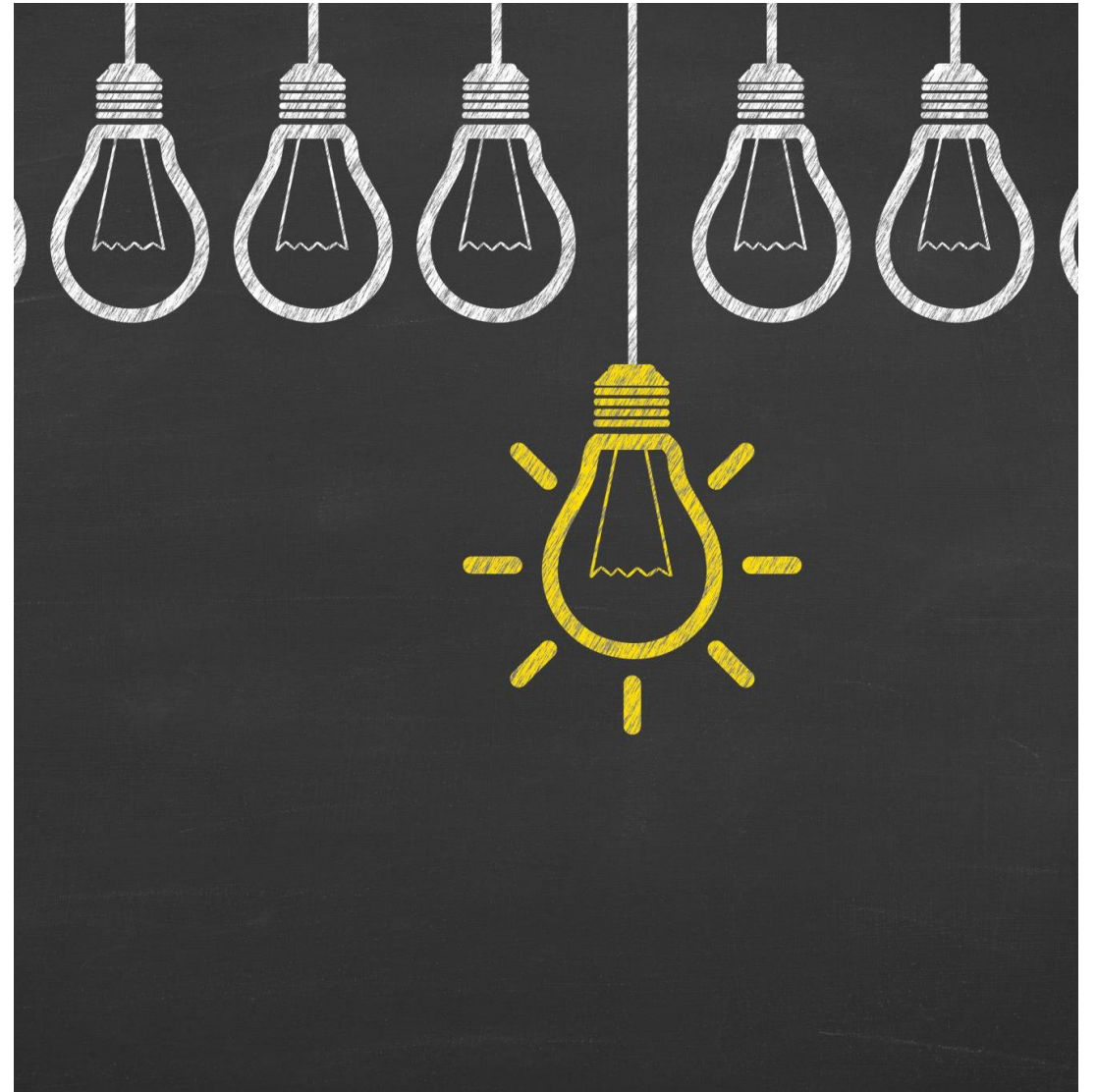
RQ2: What leadership qualities do female CCOs believe they exhibit?

RQ3: In what ways, if any, do female CCOs combine qualities of transactional and transformational leadership?

RQ4: In what ways, if any, are female CCOs influenced to conduct upward social comparisons?

RQ5: In what ways, if any, are female CCOs influenced to conduct downward social comparisons?

RQ6: In what ways, if any, do social comparisons influence the leadership of female CCOs?



Methodology

- **Theory-driven**
 - Leadership (styles) theory
 - Social comparison theory
- **In-depth interviews**
- **Participants**
 - 15 women who hold or previously held a CCO (or head of communication) position within the past 5 years
- **Data Analysis**
 - Participants given pseudonyms
 - Horizontalization (clustering by themes)
- **Reflexivity statement**
 - Rapport, experience, gender, age

Participant Demographics

Work environment

Corporation
Agency
Nonprofit
University

Industry

Consulting
Airlines
Technology
Retail
Education
Health care
Motor
Humanitarian
Insurance
Pharmaceuticals

Years on the job

One to 15 years

Education level

Bachelors
Masters
Degrees:
Public Relations
Public Administration
Public Affairs
Marketing

Years of work experience

10 to 40 years



Results



RQ1

Traits Women CCOs Believe are Typical of Good Leaders

Strive to develop ideal leadership qualities

Combination of transactional and transformational

- Leading with “the head and the heart”
- Treat others with a “velvet glove”

Empower followers

- “set direction so everyone knows where the North Star is”

Be empathetic

- “truly care about employee needs”

RQ1

Traits Women CCOs Believe are Typical of CCOs

Transactional traits

- Business acumen, reactive, intellectual agility
- Help with c-suite involvement, crisis response, understanding information

Transformational traits

- Collaboration, listening, relationship-building, proactive
- Help build trust, prepared action plans

Combined leadership traits

- Task-oriented and empathetic
- Help to simultaneously balance managing projects/output and have EQ to comprehend various perspectives

Other traits

- Storytelling, authenticity, continuous learner, and curiosity
- Help to represent facts, be honest, improve intellectual and mental agility

RQ2

Traits Women CCOs Believe They Exhibit

Transactional traits

Strengths: decisiveness, recognition of employee achievement and fault, reactive

Weaknesses: business acumen, ability to execute

Transformational traits

Strengths: collaboration, listening*, team-oriented, empowering, empathy*, proactive

Weaknesses: listening*, empathy*

- always seeking to be better at these two traits

Other traits

Strengths: constant learner, courage and humility, calm in the storm

Weaknesses: curiosity

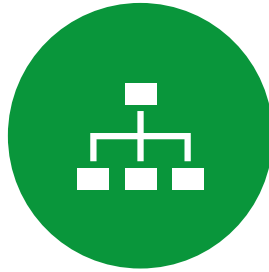
- always seeking to be more curious to be better at understanding

RQ3

How Women CCOs are Combining Transactional and Transformational Leadership Qualities



**PEOPLE
CHALLENGES**



**ORGANIZATIONAL
CHALLENGES**



**PARTNERSHIP
CHALLENGES**



**COMMUNICATION
CHALLENGES**

RQ3 (continued)

How Women CCOs are Combining Transactional and Transformational Leadership Qualities

People challenges

- Situations where CCOs help others grow professionally (75%)
- Layoffs, personality conflicts, "camp counselor"
- **Transactional:** resiliency, decisiveness
- **Transformational:** compassion, empathy, honesty

RQ3 (continued)

How Women CCOs are Combining Transactional and Transformational Leadership Qualities

Partnership challenges

- Situations where leaders have difficulty with collaboration
- Meet “organizational needs and behaviors”
- “Listen and share perspectives”
- **Transactional:** task completion
- **Transformational:** listening, vision- and goal-oriented, relationship-focused

RQ3 (continued)

How Women CCOs are Combining Transactional and Transformational Leadership Qualities

Organizational challenges

- Situations where many people within an organization are affected
- Leadership transitions, “setting a vision and maintaining it”
- **Transactional:** task completion, reactive
- **Transformational:** proactive, empathy, shared vision, collaboration, motivation

RQ3 (continued)

How Women CCOs are Combining Transactional and Transformational Leadership Qualities

Communication challenges

- Situations where communication teams must develop strategies to protect an organization's reputation
- Crisis scenarios, acting for the "greater good of organization"
- **Transactional:** task completion, reactive, decisive
- **Transformational:** proactive, collaborative, putting employees first

RQ4

How Women CCOs are Influenced by Upward Social Comparisons (senior-level positions)



Self-evaluations

Self-awareness

“Natural instinct” to learn about self

Seek out professional feedback

Determine “blind spot”



Self-improvements

Nature to be “life-long learner”

Improve leadership weaknesses



Self-enhancements

Determine appropriate leadership style

Gain reassurance of leader identity

RQ6

How Women CCOs are Improving Leadership from Upward Comparisons (senior-level positions)

Self-evaluations

- “strong communicator” and “intimidating”
- **Transactional:** “bottom-line driven”
- **Transformational:** “collaborative” and “relational”

Self-improvements

- **Transactional:** “assertiveness,” “willingness to accept challenges”
- **Transformational:** “thoughtfulness”
- Improve handling of organizational challenges

Self-enhancements

- Boosted self-esteem about CCO performance
- Gained support or positive feedback about leadership performance
- Strengthened identity as women leader (when compare to other women leaders)

RQ5

How Women CCOs are Influenced by Downward Comparisons (lower-level employees)



Self-evaluations

- Receive feedback
- Check interactions
- Understand vantage point of employees



Self-improvements

- Gain accurate understanding of how to adjust leadership
- Learn what areas of their leadership needs improvement



Self-enhancements

- Gain reassurance about their team
- Receive positive feedback on what they are doing right as a CCO

RQ6

How Women CCOs are Improving Leadership from Downward Comparisons (lower-level employees)

Self-evaluations

- “putting yourself in their shoes”
- “have to understand who you are working with and adjust your thinking”
- Find common ground, side conversations, professional feedback

Self-improvements

- “Oreo approach is not for everyone”
- Adjust leadership to match employee personality
- “understand what is happening”
- Improves tactical and digital media skills

Self-enhancements

- “want a good variety of employees to get different perspectives”
- Boosted self-esteem

A row of seven silhouettes of business professionals standing in a line against a light-to-dark gradient background. The central figure is a woman in a red suit, while the other six figures are men in dark suits. The silhouettes are stylized, showing outlines of heads, shoulders, and clothing.

Interpretation of Findings

What does this information mean about the current standing of Women CCOs?

Women CCOs are Leading Throughout (help avoid the vacuum)



Still learning and growing as leaders



**Actively moving towards a
combined transactional-
transformational leadership
approach**

Response to . . .

Evolving changes of profession

C-Suite expectations

Guidelines of organization

Needs of employees



Must adapt leadership approach to situation



**Stress importance of learning from other leaders and
employees**

Questions?

Let's Discuss!

