COMPETENCIES FOR SENIOR PR LEADERS

PREPARED BY:

Dr. Aerial Ellis,
Managing Principal,
Advisory 83
aerial@aerialellis.com
615.496.6826

PURPOSE

The goal of this field study was to identify the competencies that senior leaders in the public relations (PR) industry need to design, implement and execute diversity and inclusion practices. In addition, this study will make recommendations about training and education in diversity and inclusion for senior PR leaders and provide solutions for an established set of competencies based upon the findings.

Despite incremental efforts to increase training and education for PR leaders in the area of diversity and inclusion, there is little agreement across the industry about the core competencies needed by leaders to manage more diverse, globally astute organizations and communicate effectively with diverse publics (Turk 2006, Toth, 2009; Ni, Wang & De La Flor, 2015).

When practitioners attempt to reach culturally diverse consumers, having an understanding of cross-cultural differences is a crucial skill for success. Leaders in the PR industry can lessen the likelihood of crises and misunderstandings caused by communication through training and education. Moreover, leaders in the PR industry can increase the opportunity to meet business objectives for reaching multicultural audiences and defining brand identities. However, with no established set of competencies for the industry, senior leaders in public relations may remain uncertain about the types of culturally responsive communication that are needed to develop strategies that attract, retain and advise diverse talent to the workforce.

Most importantly, with an established set of diversity and inclusion competencies leaders in the PR industry can appeal, more effectively, to the wants and needs of diverse consumer audiences.

Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What knowledge, motivation, and organizational assets do senior PR leaders currently have for diversity/inclusion practices?

2. What training/education is needed to ensure competency?

Methodology

Stakeholders: 152 senior PR practitioners

The stakeholder population of focus for this study was practitioners who lead the public relations/communication function for multinational corporation with minimum of 10 to 15 years of experience.

The rationale for selecting senior public relations/communication leaders of multinational companies is that they establish organizational culture, often have the final say or are highly influential on strategic and budgetary decisions and support, sponsor and approve training, education, and development for employees.

Start Date: November 12

Length: 8 weeks

Online Survey:

10 Questions via Qualtrics

Online Video Interview:
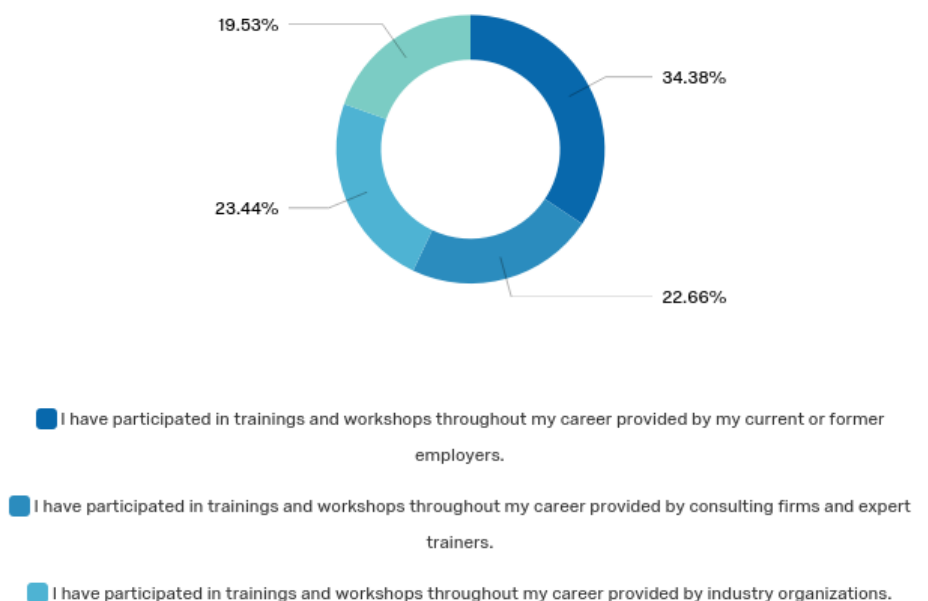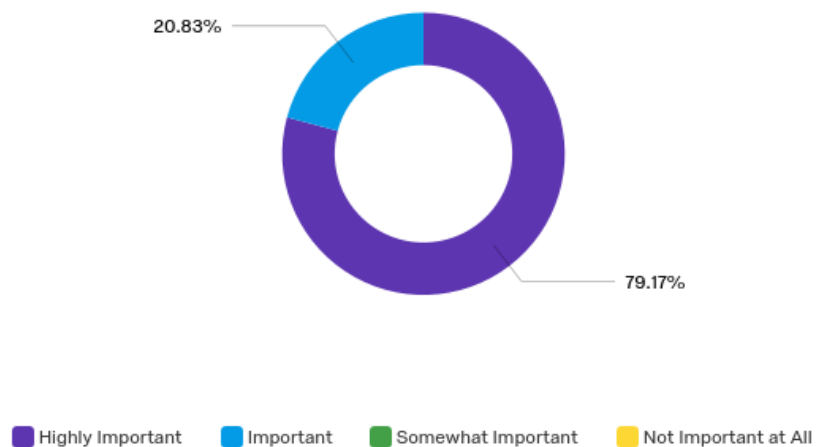
8 stakeholders via Zoom

Survey Distribution:

- Email from the Arthur W. Page Society
- Message to LinkedIn connections
- Post to online discussion board for leadership assembly members of PRSA

End Date: January 10

Key Findings

The findings of this study gaps are further synthesized as continuing needs and opportunities to reveal where and how a solution should be presented.

- 41% respondents have practiced diversity and inclusion in their PR roles for five years or less.

- All respondents ranked intercultural communication (80%) and intercultural sensitivity (80%) of highest importance with intercultural awareness (79%) following closely behind.

- In the category of general importance, intercultural research ranked the highest (56%).

- All respondents had participated in trainings and workshops throughout their career provided by a current or former employer, and more than half have been exposed to trainings and workshops through consulting firms and expert trainers.

20.83%

79.17%

■ Highly Important ■ Important ■ Somewhat Important ■ Not Important at All

19.53%

34.38%

23.44%

22.66%

■ I have participated in trainings and workshops throughout my career provided by my current or former employers.

■ I have participated in trainings and workshops throughout my career provided by consulting firms and expert trainers.

■ I have participated in trainings and workshops throughout my career provided by industry organizations.

Needs & Opportunities

Senior PR leaders need:

- More interpersonal experiences that inform their decision about diversity/inclusion practices.
- Improved competencies for the opportunity to influence teams/leadership.
- Consistent and accessible programs/processes to develop cultural knowledge.
- Direct connection to their organization's decision makers in order to leverage and apply knowledge of building a structure for D/I.
- Access to further data and insights to add to the D/I case and prioritize procedures.

- More D/I related opportunities to employ and apply their learnings.
- Further industry data and insights, and need recommended strategies, structures and procedures to add to the D/I practice.
- Greater education how to align competitive advantage with the business case for D/I.
- A space to learn the rules and norms of diverse populations.

- More experiences that educate them on how to create safe spaces with their organizations.
- Better learning opportunities that introduce the professional implications of cultural differences.
- A standard set of intercultural competencies across the industry.
- An evaluation method to measure the adequacy of D/I training.

Needs & Opportunities

Senior PR leaders will benefit from:

- Agreement on the intercultural competencies that are most critical for D/I.
- Commitment to increased focus and solutions to D/I in the industry; and financial and people resources to D/I efforts/initiatives.
- Organizations with strong infrastructure that can connect ROI to the D/I practice.
- More time getting training in the area of intercultural communication when motivated by the professional advancement it can lead to.
- Well-rounded cultural experiences and a value of their own cultural knowledge.
- A set of intercultural competencies when motivated by the professional advancement they can lead to when applied.

- An opportunity to inform and influence their organization's decision makers about negative implications for delaying or ignoring D/I.
- Agreement and adoption on D/I terms, definitions, and language used industry-wide.
- Market research and audience analysis supported by their metacognitive knowledge of cultural identities.
- An opportunity to leverage HR knowledge and access to HR departments for internal and external communication practices.
- Creating environments that encourage greater levels of open-mindedness and integrity.
- Encouraging their teams to think interculturally about the work they do.
- Framing D/I practices with global perspectives in mind; education/training is needed to support that.
- An opportunity to influence decision makers to highlight and celebrate differences inside the internal culture.
- An opportunity to measure and evaluate D/I within the PR workforce.

Needs & Opportunities:

The PR industry and its trade organizations must:

- Assemble a think tank with focus groups & committees to vote and review proposed set of intercultural competencies, and set deadlines.
- Pre/post-test on curriculum for members of a think tank.
- Offer curriculum to employees managed by think tank members.
- Survey of employees about interest and effectiveness of the curriculum.
- Secure commitment to take to/share curriculum with staff under their supervision.
- Require a final report/survey assessing confidence and commitment to the change.
- Host informational sessions/workshops at six industry conferences in one year to affect engagement.
- Host training sessions at six industry conferences in one year the following year; offer two webinars per year.Confirm internal trainings at 10-20 multinational organizations for all communication staff; report participations and outcomes through social media.
- Release impact study on new industry-wide competencies to affect adoptability; distribute among six industry associations.
- Open an industry-wide vote on a set of best practices for senior PR leaders to provide and prioritize formal spaces for employees to address issues of diversity and inclusion through programming and training; distribute to all participants from trainings and workshops as well.