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Integrated Strategic Communication in Romanian Organizations

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Abstract

The strategic communication goes beyond the area of public relations and focuses mainly on strategies that create, develop, and control the success of an organization.
Strategic communication also includes traditional practices of institutionalized organizational communication to use the messages much more easily when interacting with internal and external stakeholders. Wishing to find a better strategy to programme any internal or external communication, the organizations develop different kinds of strategic plans meant to support the management process, starting with the mission and vision statement and ending with the evaluation of achieved goals. The following example - Integrated Strategic Communication (ISC)- shows the ways the integrated strategic communication can be reached in Romanian organizations.

Keywords: *communication, integration, stakeholder, organization, strategy.*

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1. Introduction

The concept of communication has several meanings, which is the consequence of the fact that communication has been developed over the years by a series of disciplines with a sufficiently large scope: sociology, biology, political sciences, economic sciences, philosophy, cybernetics, linguistics, etiology etc. In this context, it is obvious why an economist approaches communication in a different manner compared to a computer scientist or a biologist (Bartels & Weiss, 2019).

Therefore, each field of knowledge involving a definition of communication emphasizes one side of this term or another: information, case, transfer, exchange, energy, transport etc.

The apparent confusion existing in relation to these different approaches of the concept of communication is only a consequence of each definition focusing on the specific perspective of the field concerned and relating to the system of such field (Grigoras-Ichim & Morosan-Danila, 2020).

Under these circumstances, communication may be the subject matter of all sciences that have generated an impact on it and which we have already mentioned. This explains why the research in the field of communication has been throughout time dominated by theories mainly pertaining to anthropology, linguistics, political sciences, economic sciences, sociology and politology.

Given the current economic and social context, in which globalization plays an important part and competition is increasingly harsh and enhanced, a major challenge for all organizations is to identify the most suitable ways to communicate in order to have a long-lasting competitive advantage. Such advantage should derive from the excellence proven by products manufactured and services provided in line with market demands and in compliance with high quality standards of the business process (Popescu, 2010).

The success in receiving and providing services or in executing the entire business process is clearly a direct result of the collaboration among all persons concerned: employees, managing staff, customers, suppliers, credit institutions etc. Each of these entities is an asset to the organization. They all invest individual capital (expertise and training) and use relational stock by making use of their capacity to interact and to build efficient relations for a longer period with other people or other organizations towards developing their own (Agabrian, 2008).

2. Integrated strategic communication

In the development of the entire business process or in the human capital management, a *model of integrated strategic communication* may represent a stimulus towards creating, developing, and stating an organizational excellence as far as production and service provision are concerned.

Strategic communication is based on a cause-effect relation between reaching goals set by the organization and communication activities carried out within such organization. They all involve use of *communication programs in conducting strategic activities of the organization* so that the results of such use may be quantifiable (Cabin & Dortier, 2012).

The integrated dimension of the strategic communication generates a higher level of involvement of the internal actors in the organization regarding their share of contribution to achieving the organizational objectives. Therefore, communication becomes a reliable solution to increase the employees' productivity whereas the developed interaction provides management with a higher degree of credibility among the employees.

The way this strategic communication is organized obviously influences the business process. Under these circumstances, all and any organization, which is successful in the implementation of this strategic communication, will also witness its positive effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the business process. Reversely, failure to implement an integrated communication system or inappropriate implementation of such system will certainly trigger negative effects on the entire business process (Popescu, 2010).

The experimental discoveries and the theoretical concepts may be integrated in a circular system of communication that combines any social, emotional, or cognitive dimension of the new role played by the communication management.

The organizations pursue to plan all internal and external communication process by whatever means are available. Therefore, they come up with various forms of strategic planning to support the management processes, starting from the vision of the organization and going as far as the assessment of the actual results (Arsith, 2008).

Over the past ten to fifteen years, we have seen extraordinary technological changes and extremely spectacular innovations that have led to a complete change in how businesses develop, how communication is transformed or how we choose to live our life.

All these changes have forced the organizations to develop and improve the relations with their customers and to try to find solutions in

order to convey coherent messages in their interactions with all parties concerned – the state and local authorities, their own employees, suppliers, financial institutions – by means of a large range of integrated communication instruments (Gronstedt, 2000).

As part of an integrated campaign, the traditional means of communication therefore join the modern media, and the message conveyed is much easier to identify and to outline, whereas the interest for what is communicated is constantly growing. Any feeling of insecurity relating to the message received fades as positive emotions and curiosity are highly enhanced. On the other hand, the question marks solve the mystery by adding further information collected from several sources (Stegăroiu, 2008).

As for the organizations, communication may be essential for them to exist on the market, irrespective of the field in which they operate. Although the organization does not initiate a communication process, the process represents a message, a form of communication. Consequently, it is recommendable to become involved in order to gain control over the existing situation in the sense of developing coherent messages. The complexity and the dynamics of the environment in which organizations carry out their activity make new relations rather difficult to start. The communication becomes therefore an essential component and the theoreticians and practitioners in the field acknowledge how important it is to achieve the general objectives of the organization (Widyanti et al., 2020).

3. Model of integrated strategic communication

In order to illustrate how the integrated strategic communication can be performed at the level of Romanian organizations, we propose a model of Integrated Strategic Communication.

As far as graphic representation is concerned, the basis of the model is the general systems theory. The general systems theory deals with systems, regardless of their nature and type (Arsith, 2008).

The model aims to facilitate the communication process on three levels:

- ✓ *At the macro level*, it may generate public debates on any new idea or technology and may thus enable discussions between the organization and any party concerned on the issue tackled as part of the debating process.
- ✓ *At the meso level,* the model is required to accurately generate and correct interactions between organizations and significant stakeholders.

- ✓ *At the micro level*, any manager in the organization contributes to the process to the extent to which they are able to mediate their work and research in an appropriate manner to the benefit of their customers and partners. At this level, an important dimension is the leadership-type communication with the employees.

Beyond the desire to improve socially or to make profit, the model provides support for the *communication process of the organization underlined by principles and values* in which the organization believes. According to the model, the integrated strategic communication mainly focuses *on the practices generating and controlling the organizational process.*

There are two principles underlying this ISC (Stegăroiu et al., 2020):

- ✓ strategic intention of the organization leads to integrated strategic communication.
- ✓ continuous organizational development constantly repositions the organization.

In addition to these two principles, the model considers **three domains of integration** in relation to which **communication must become unitary**.

The model is also representative in terms of structure of the general systems theory as it brings forth an approach of the open systems. By using the dotted lines to delineate the borders between the three domains of integration, i.e., environment, parties concerned and organization, the model indicates that there is recognition of the constant inflow and the flow of energy and information among the various parts of the systems (Tăbîrcă et al., 2019).

Organizational integration is the first domain of integration into the model**.** This concept of organizational integration relies on horizontal and vertical integration. It is worth mentioning that, in line with the three-dimensional approach, Romanian organizations rarely integrate communication at horizontal or vertical level. In most cases, communication is integrated at external level instead. On a long term, the model suggests horizontal and vertical integration in organizational integration.

Firstly, horizontal integration means integration and alignment among business units, functions, and regions regarding systems, processes, procedures and communication. The model proposes setting up functional councils and project teams to correlate knowledge and expertise among departments and task units and capitalize them to the benefit of the entire organization (Vasile, 2000).

Secondly, vertical integration integrates communication among persons working in different units, departments, and countries. Vertical

integration empowers the persons who work closely with customers and are highly involved in organizational activities to communicate more openly, more frequently and more efficiently with their managers.

Communication awareness makes a significant contribution to the culture of the open system of the organization and to the commitment as to being a continuous-learning organization. The model recommends the presence of three sources that should constantly highlight the need to communication to bring constantly to the attention of the top management the importance of communication. The suggestion is that the source should be a new type of communicator (Brătianu, 2018).

The organizations and the business environments nowadays go through permanent changes, and this explains the precise requirement for an alternative approach of communication towards strategic management of organizational communication.

The new type of communicator implies communication solutions to decisive organizational issues. Consequently, it is necessary to adopt a strategic communication approach for such communicator since this goes beyond the mere execution and implementation of the strategies of the organization. It is also about understanding the business-related challenges faced by the organization. More importantly, the communicator should be part of the top management team to be updated on the current problems with which the organization is forced to cope and to understand them in depth. Constant interaction with the CEO is therefore an essential element for this communicator (Chiciudean & David, 2011).

The idea guiding this new type of communicator is that various fields specialized in communication should cooperate towards selection of the tools seen to be the most effective in creating synergies which, in turn, guarantee that the total effect of communication exceeds the sum of its components.

Integration of parties concerned. The second domain of integration into the model is integration of the parties concerned (stakeholders). Focused on stakeholders, this model admits that organizations incorporating the concept of integrated strategic communication function in the "century of the parties concerned". This means that such an organization has a more comprehensive view on the environment and final users and takes account of all the parties concerned who have a legitimate interest in the success of the organization, and not only the customers (Harris & Nelson, 2009).

This notion has been predominantly disregarded as in most cases the attention was channeled to a one customer or another, different from the perspective of the parties concerned. As a result, the model argues that all

parties concerned, and not only customers, choose to what extent they are to interact with the organization. In other words, most advertising and communication agencies choose to be parties concerned, and in doing so, they are automatically provided with the chance to understand and influence the actions of the organization (Rus, 2007).

Integrated strategic communication is important for the management of the relations of the parties concerned due to superposition, interdependence and interaction among the parties concerned from a financial standpoint. The model claims that the parties concerned are more and more involved in how the product or the service is designed, assembled, promoted, and delivered.

Integration of environment. Including this integration in the model proposed supports the idea that the organization functions in an open system. The environment considered here refers to three aspects: economic environment, social environment, and political environment (Harris & Nelson, 2009). The organizations are forced to keep up with such environments in order to survive. This again means that the organization should function as a continuous learning organization. The model highlights the interaction among the organization, the parties concerned, and the environment required to manage integrated strategic communication in an efficient manner and to build strong relations. It should be noted that, generally, an integrated communication is successfully practiced within smaller organizations. Nevertheless, a larger organization may equally gain from implementation of this model (Tudoran Niculiță et al., 2020).

Some barriers have also been identified in relation to this model and its successful implementation, respectively (Cabin & Dortier, 2012):

- ✓ low communication level.
- ✓ barriers in various fields specialized in communication.
- ✓ organizational culture.
- ✓ technological barriers.
- ✓ managers' perception on communication;
- ✓ resilience to change.
- ✓ political power.
- ✓ marketing tendencies.
- ✓ short-term planning.
- ✓ lack of basic skill to communicate.

4. Conclusions

The freethinking and the freedom of speech have recently led to *development of communication activities* and their perception in a new vision. In a relatively short period, communication has become one of the engines of the economy as well as an integral part of what psycho-sociology of modern human collectivities is intended to be today. In this context, it is necessary to identify a new approach of the challenges confronting both modern society and organizations. The communication mix and, last but not least, the participation of the organizations to the social problems of their community are essential coordinates by which they consolidate their identity. Therefore, the *organizational image is redefined through communication* and culture of both the organization and the people within it.

In addition to motivation and professional skills, communication is the key to an effective organization. In most cases, the members of an organization use various forms of communication to communicate to one another, irrespective of their hierarchical level within the organization.

Needless to say, that *an internal communication strategy* will mainly be tested throughout crisis and transition periods. However, the strategy represents only half of the equation. Unless the organization overlaps the strategic measurable component to the internal communication function, it will fail to meet their goals in terms of results projected. Moreover, the organization will be unable to take the activities relating to internal communication from a merely informational approach to an approach intended to influence and train the employees towards the strategic results considered.

The main advantages of the implementation of the integrated strategic communication ISC model are:

- ✓ integration of top management facilitates on-going *communication of the organizational mission* to lower level of the organization.
- ✓ *communication awareness* contributes to a large extent *to the culture of the open system of the organization* and the commitment to a continuous learning organization.
- ✓ the model takes account of the execution and the implementation of the organizational strategies, on the one hand, and the comprehension of the business challenges encountered by the organization, on the other hand.
- ✓ various fields specialized in communication should work together towards selection of the tools seen as the most effective in creating synergies which, in turn, *guarantee that the total effect of communication exceeds the sum of its components*.

- ✓ the model focuses on consistency of the "one-voice, one-look" approach and integrates what the organization actually does and does not.
- ✓ the cross functionality of the processes in the organization is a prerequisite so that all departments should cooperate in planning and monitoring relations.
- ✓ the organization has a more comprehensive view on the environment and the final users and takes account of all the parties concerned who have a legitimate interest in the success of the organization, and not only the customers.
- ✓ the parties concerned are more and more involved in how the product or the service is designed, assembled, promoted, and delivered.
- ✓ the model proposed supports the idea that the organization *functions in an open system*.

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