

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Due to globalization, more and more companies expand and activate outside the mother companies borders. Regarding this fact the need for human resource mobility is growing bigger along with other resources. Therefore more companies work in multicultural environment and develop workgroups formed by members with different cultural backgrounds. Organizational communication, as an essential part of the management process, in these cases is more difficult due to the international aspect. To manage this, is important to understand the (additional) challenges, that comes from the different cultural values of colleagues.

The purpose of this paper on one hand is to present those cultural factors that influences the organisational culture and most of all the communication in the companies. On the other hand, to see how communication practices are changing regarding the cultural differences, I will analyse if there is any relationship between some GLOBE cultural dimensions and the variation of a telecommunication companies supply regarding some countries.

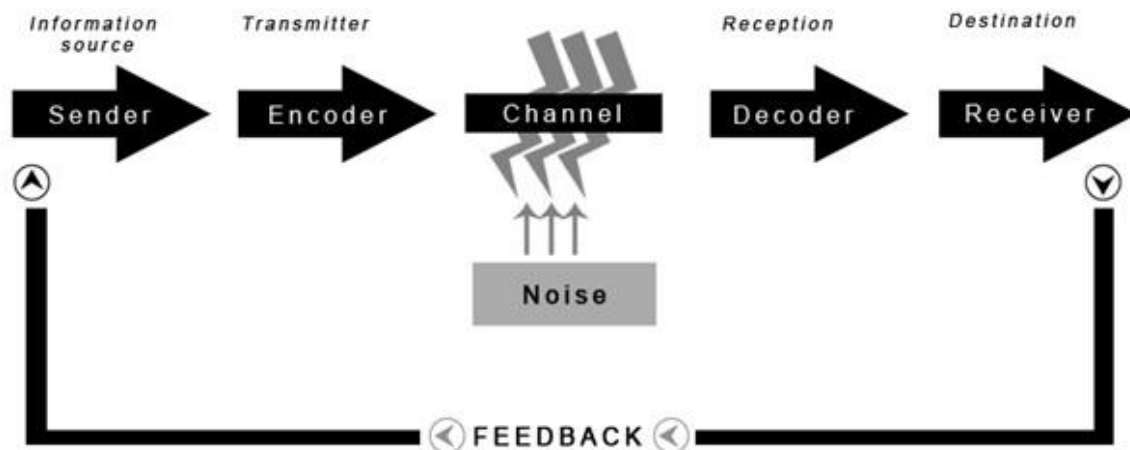
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Introduction

Our world is getting smaller and one of the reasons is globalization and the development of the technological background of international communication. Globalization is more and more important fact that can't be pass around and influences not just the international companies but the domestic ones too. More and more firms expand their activities outside their mother country. This means the transfer of the firm's resources, not just the relocation of capital but more and more the mobility of human resource too. But one can not relocate every person from a company's staff in the new subsidiary, local people are needed too. In this case the multinational firm must face two issues: on one hand the company have employees from the mother company in a different cultural environment and new people with different cultural values inside the firm. So more and more companies develop workgroups formed by members with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore we have a supplemental provocation, the multicultural environment (inside and outside the company), that makes more difficult the communication inside the organization and in the meantime the whole activity of the management.

Communication

We can find many definitions for communication, the main idea is that this is an act or a process when information is transmitted and imparted. The simplest method to present this process I think is to sketch a model of communication. One of the most simple and general concept is the Shannon and Weaver's model of communication, that was published by these two scientists in 1948. As it seems, this simple theory contains the classical basic elements of communication models like sender, receiver, encoder, decoder and so on. Generally communication concepts have another element, that influences the success of the process, the noise or barrier that affects the message during the transmission and the decoded information can be distorted or maybe not received from the receiver.



The Shannon – Weaver communication model

Source: <http://communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication/>

This noise or barrier can be physical but can be of another nature too for example can be the different background of the sender and receiver as the two participants of the communication process.

Characteristics of communication:

- * no matter how hard one tries, one cannot avoid communicating
- * communication does not necessarily mean understanding
- * communication is irreversible
- * communication occurs in a context
- * communication is a dynamic process (Moran-Harris-Moran, 2007)

If these characteristics are understood and kept during the communication, the result of the process will be closer to the purpose.

Organizational communication

The organizational and corporate communication is a form of social communication. In many cases the concept of the organizational and corporate communication is mixed up, but they must be separated, as they are not the same. The organizational communication notion refers to all organizations, to those organizations too, that have an economical activity. We speak about corporate organization only in the case of the companies, this communication can be called organizational communication, because they are a kind of organization. (Borgulya, 2010).

As a definition the corporate communication is understood as the communicating activity of every member of the specific organization, by which they contribute to setting and implementing of the tasks aiming the production of the organization's goods. Ergo it is organizational communication that take place between the companies intern, and extern groups which has as a purpose the organization's goals.

Gary Dessler mentions about special barriers that influence the efficiency of organizational communication, for example managers need to contend with the authority,

task, political and identity boundaries. Organizational culture can help the communication process, but some of them don't encourage it and in this case can be an important barrier. The organizational structure can also disturb the information transmitting process depending on how organic it's form is. (Dessler, 2004)

In this paper I concentrate on firms and the communication inside these organizations, when I mention in some cases the organizational communication, I refer at the same time and firstly to the information transmitting process of the companies.

Communication as part of the management process

Heinz Goldmann in his overview about communication in the Financial Times Management handbook says the followings: „Communication lies at the very heart of management. We expect that the heads of large organizations should be effective communicators able to use a variety of forms of communication, tools and techniques” (Goldmann, 1995)

Without communication the management functions cannot be fulfilled, further more one of the classical and basic role of the management is the information itself.

The classically interpreted functions of corporate communication:

- ★ the informer,
- ★ the motivator,
- ★ the monitoring,
- ★ the emotional and the integrating

Satisfying these functions communication serves the realization of different corporate goals. (Borgulya, 2010). If we ask managers how they spend their time at work, probably we cannot find one who doesn't mention communication as a daily management activity.

Studies of what managers do each day indicate that 75% of their time is spent writing, talking, and listening, that is communicating. In fact, all business ultimately comes down to transactions or interactions between individuals. The success of the transaction depends almost entirely on how well managers understand each other. (Moran-Harris-Moran, 2007)

Communication has a value creator effect, which occurs in three fields, one of these is to make the company's operation possible, the next is through the products and services creates value for the company. Because communication is a factor, that allows the functioning of the company, it can be compared with the living body's blood circulation. It ensures the information flow, which is indispensable for the company. Delivers information for planning and decision making, helps synchronizing the resources needed for activities, makes motivating, evaluation and verification possible, and deliver information outside the company.

Communication in different cultural environment

„Intercultural communication is a process whereby individuals from different cultural backgrounds attempt to share meanings.” (Moran-Harris-Moran, 2007)

Communication just seems to be a simple thing, but it is not, because as Moran, Harris and Moran present every person's socialization environment is unique. Therefore the difference between the socialization environments from different cultures is bigger and with

the increase of the cultural variables and differences, increases the possibility of the understanding problems.

Influencing factors in multicultural communication

The basic problem in the interaction between people with different cultural backgrounds is that the same thing can mean different things. In different cultures the answers are different to the same question regarding the life and everyday living (Borgulya, 2001). Therefore the basic values can be changed regarding the same things. But this doesn't predict necessarily a bad communication, the real problem is that usually everybody has an expectation regarding the reactions and behaviour of the other participant of the communication process, but this can be other than he must deal with.

Connected to this idea and reading the studies, we can observe that one of the most determining reasons are the stereotypes and bias (Csath, 2008). In both cases we have some patterns, models that are based on some experiences or just feelings from the past, that helps us to understand simpler the things around us. We create some categories and try to put the things and people in one of these categories based on little information. But these presumptions can be wrong and can imitate us on how we understand things. Also our attitude regarding others and things influence our perceptions and reactions and this affects our communication. Usually the attitudes and assumptions regarding the same problem differ from culture to culture and the solutions are different too.

Many researchers analyzed the culture from different points of view, the international, intercultural approach was led by Hall, Trompenaars and Hofstede too.

The American anthropologist, Edward Hall in his model emphasize a point of view, that influences very much the cross-cultural communication. He distinct the high- and low-context cultures and how this matter of context impacts communications. When individuals communicate they attempt to find out how much the listener knows about whatever is being discussed. High- context communication means, that the information is in the context (and the listener is already „contexted”, if not the message can't be transmitted), and characterized with few explicit words, for example in the Asian countries usually, or Spain. In the low-context communication the information arrives to the receptor through explicit codes and is based on the principle that the listener knows very little about the context and must be told practically everything, like in the USA, Canada or many European cultures. (Moran-Harris-Moran, 2007)

Trompenaars and Hofstede both define the dimensions of the cultures, whereby can be the differences more palpable and measurable. Some of these dimensions are quiet similar, but we find different points of view too regarding the culture.

Hofstede cultural dimensions:

- power distance
- individualism - collectivism
- masculinity - femininity
- uncertainty avoidance
- long-term - short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1994)

Trompenaars five cultural dimensions:

- universalism – particularism
- individualism- collectivism
- neutral-affective relationships
- specific – diffuse relationship
- achievement – ascription (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997)

I think some of them can be associated in direct way to the efficiency of the communication between individuals with different cultural backgrounds and others in indirect way. The dimensions that affects directly the intercultural communication will be discussed henceforth.

Hofstede's power distance indicates how people depend on each other and how they accept that power is distributed inequally. This factor influences the communication between the hierarchical levels and how these levels are respected in the firm. If the power distance is low, the employees know that they can turn freely with problems and ideas to the superiors and the communication is open and direct, that means also reduced sentimental distance. In the high power distance organizations, the dependence between employees and managers is strong, therefore they will not contradict the superior and the information transmission's direction is mainly one sided from the managers, the employees will initiate rarely and the whole process is very formal.

Individualism versus collectivism appears at both authors and have similar meaning, which define what is the expected in relationship with society and in the company, shows the value and inclination to the team work or more to the independent achievement. That determines the daily working style of the organization and can have an influence in the arrangement of the offices. At the collectivist organizational cultured companies there are big working areas with many desks separated just with some low wood walls, in this working spaces the communication is more fluent and personal. In the individual cultures we find more separated offices, some with doors, which „need to be passed” to have a conversation with the tenant of that office, it is evident that this organizational culture needs a different way of communication.

From Trompenaars model (beside the degree of the individualism) I think the neutral or affective nature of relationships shape the communication. This factor indicates how the members of the organization should expose or hide their emotions. The affective culture let emotions flow and the communication is filled with feelings. On the contrary, the neutral communication seems to be ice-cold and in this culture people control their emotions and try to hide them. Members of these two cultures have problems in relating to each other, because the emotional interlocutor speaks with feelings and expects a direct emotional response, but the answer of the neutral cultured part can sound heartless.

Specific versus diffuse cultures differ in how important is to separate the work life from private life. As the involvement of emotions in one culture is obvious and in others are controlled, is the same in case of this factor too. The specific culture doesn't allow the combination of work life with private sphere and people doesn't engage others in specific life areas. In diffuse cultures the every level of life tends to permeate all the others. At first view

these have not much to do with organizational communication. As Heidrich says, a member of the specific culture will react directly, precisely, in an objective way to a new situation, looking for a short way to the essence of the problem. The diffuse approach will react rather indirectly to a new situation, taking a longer time to reveal the essence of it. If we take this approach of this cultural dimension, it seems to be more important than taking into account just the simple point of view (Heidrich, 2000).

Cultural dimensions and telecommunication supply

The other purpose of this paper is to find relations between cultural dimensions (based on the GLOBE Study) and a telecommunication company supply. My hypothesis is that there are some details that refer to the cultural differences and there is a sort of variety between the supplies of different countries.

Like in the models of the mentioned authors in the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness or GLOBE as it is known the research initiated by Robert House in the early '90. This will be the basis of the cultural comparison. The GLOBE research also measures cultures in aspect of different dimensions; some of them are similar to the dimensions presented at Hofstede and Trompenaars. To find out how the cultural characteristics and the telecommunication supply connect I will pick the factors from GLOBE research that influences the most the communication process in the organizations: power distance and degree of collectivism. The power distance is similar with the Hofstede's dimension, but regarding the collectivism the GLOBE Study divide in two different dimensions: institutional and in-group collectivism. Namely the degree to which organizational practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action and in-group collectivism reflects the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organizations. (House et al., 2002)

Regarding the telecommunication company's supply data, I choose a telecommunication company, which is a global player of this industry in order to have information about more countries. I want to analyze the supply of this telecom company for business customers and interview a business account manager from the company's global department, who knows more country's markets. Regarding the supply I was surprised to see, that the products are quiet standardised, and are not shaped to the market and the local communication characteristics. The company tends to develop a standard product for the business sector too, even the product name is the same on each market.

But from the discussion with the sales manager I found out that after all that specific elements appear in the supply (based on a specific demand of the market), by which the company adapts to the local market. In the Romanian product range we find a unique service, the possibility for the customer to form groups in their company and the members of the group can call each other with reduced costs. My interviewee mentioned that this service was the part of the original supply in the past but they put it out form the offer, still they decided to keep it in Romania, because the high popularity of this option. This refers to a collectivist culture and though Romania doesn't figure in the GLOBE Study, from the other cultural researches we know that Romanian culture is more collectivist.

Conclusions

The cultural differences shapes not just the organizational culture (as that was proven by many researchers) and influences the communication, but have a big impact on the intercultural information transmission. The different cultural characteristics can be strong barriers in the organizational communication between people with different cultural backgrounds, some of them affect in a direct way this process. The different power distance or degree of emotions in the message can disturb the communication and result diverse answers than some expect. At the same time it is important the interlocutors directness in approaching a situation and how explicitly the message defined. About the importance of degree of collectivism in the companies communication, we can say that it is an influencing factor too and we have practical evidence for this in the paper.

Regarding the relationship between organizational telecommunication supply and cultural dimensions the paper cannot give a result. The studied telecom company develops standard product for different markets, therefore the comparison can't be done. But if we seek attentively we can still notice the signs that show the influencing power of culture on communication.

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