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Communication technologies in contemporary corporate social responsibility management

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Abstract

The main goal of the article is to construct a new communication model. This model implies transmission of basic principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR) within organization. The model will help to distinguish main barriers to socially responsible management in world's and Russian business practice. The analysis of communication channels within organization gives an opportunity to see the flows of CSR information and its influence on people's behaviour.

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1. Introduction

The Russian economy, as it stands now, can be regarded from various perspectives, but in any case one cannot deny the fact that it is undergoing persistent changes. Views on management are being altered, strategic plans are being shifted, and priorities are being rethought. In the East people commonly believe that living through an epoch of changes is the worst hardship for any man to suffer. One of the main challenges present-day managers have to deal with is to retain the 'human' face of business in these troublesome days. The aim of this article is to assess the condition of corporate social responsibility in today's Russia and to reveal the communication model which implies transmission of basic principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR) within organization.

CSR is a new and widely used approach to do business. It has evolved into corporate citizenship and strategic socially responsible approach to organizational planning (Coelho et al., 2003). The main focus of corporate social responsibility is the special social issues organizations must be respectful of: fair trade, quality standards, international and local labor laws, ecological issues, local communities' problems, etc. One of the most important aspects of CSR is the willingness to incorporate it into organizational strategy.

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Originated almost two hundred years ago in the United States business practices, CSR has spread to Europe and reached Russian enterprises. It is important to notice that the practice of a particular social technology nowadays arrives in a ready-made form and spreads via communication technologies, using multiple channels: from regular interpersonal (F2F) channel to electronic widely available channels.

Introduction of contemporary CSR models into Russian business environment has encountered with certain communicational barriers. It is important to start with a retrospective of per-CSR practice in Russia.

2. Corporate social responsibility of soviet enterprises and new

The reality of Russian management involves severe competition wherein managers prefer to sacrifice responsible and ethical principles of conducting a business to gaining a short-time but guaranteed profit. It is customary to suppose that the lack of socially responsible basis for doing business resides solely in today's Russia. Especially considering wide social responsibility enterprises used to carry out during Soviet times. An average Soviet enterprise had an obligation to provide wide range of social support to its employees. Also the biggest part of social infrastructure actually received funding from enterprises. Soviet period social responsibility included health care projects, cultural, and HRM development projects. It is important to emphasize equal employment policies: there were no gender or national barriers for employment or promotion. So it is possible to say that enterprises in Russia had a long and successful history of Soviet corporate social responsibility. But does it mean that CSR of modern Russia has inherited the Soviet times CSR traditions?

We can answer this question. Since early 1990s, after Soviet Union had collapsed, new managers have been facing a problem 'How to manage?' Everything they knew about running a business turned out to be irrelevant. Former managerial skills had nothing to do with keeping the business resilient in competitive market environment. An acute need for new knowledge made managers turn to extensive experience gained by their American colleagues. The terms '*management*' and '*manager*' have come into wide use among Russian businessmen.

It should be emphasized that the transition was so speedy that, offered a great diversity of management theories and practices, managers had to pick out only the most urgent ones, i.e. ones that could be put into immediate effect with a view to secure a profit. All that had much in common with hectic actions of a person who has to take out only his first-priority belongings when abandoning home in a natural disaster.

Under the conditions of panic and confusion, Russian businessmen overlooked the responsible side of business which represents virtually a cornerstone and key factor for any company to prove a success, for instance, in the USA. So, the realities of management in today's Russia induce managers and not them alone to regard CSR as a mere obstacle on the way to success. Perceptions of this kind bring about a good many of moral-ethical collisions. For instance, personnel policies of some companies provide for continuous staff recruitment on terms of trial engagement. A prospective employee is interviewed and offered a trial period of three months, with a salary at 50 per cent of the would-be. Needless to say that on expiry of this three-month trial period there is always an excuse not to sign a regular contract, and new hires on short-term contracts come to keep staff turnover going. As employees in Russia are unpracticed in class actions and don't attempt to legally assert their rights, approaching staff management in this way proves to create no problems and do good for the company. It goes without saying that such a way of doing business is practicable only in those trades which don't require special skills and wide experience. Having held CSR unnecessary in those days of changes, Russian managers think little of it today as well.

3. Communication models: Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model

It is possible to say that contemporary informational society makes its choices based on the forms and ways of the information transmission not only based on the information itself. Therefore the communicational models used for information transmission are crucially important.

There are too many communicational models have been developed within last years. Each model has been created for certain purpose. For the purpose of our research we have selected the *Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model*. Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model was invented in the 1970's and

published in 1981 (Friedemann, 1981). It is the combination of Paul Watzlawick's second axiom and the Organon model from Karl Bühler. The choice was based on the ability of the model to reveal the CSR issues companies encounter with while trying to implement CSR principles.

According to the Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model a message consists of four *different layers* (Fig.1).

(1) The first layer is the layer of *factual information*. This layer represents facts, digits, and accurate data. The efficiency criterions of this layer are:

- Factuality of the represented data.
- Relevancy to the communicational process.
- Adequate information.

The sender plays a key role on the factual layer. This layer requires from the sender thorough selection of information. The receiver plays passive role on this layer, their task is just to percept the information.

(2) The second is the self-revealing or personalization layer. This level represents subjective aspects of the message. It becomes clear when we can illustrate it with an example. Having different personalities people transmit the same message differently: a child and an adult transmit the same message with a different level of emotional involvement. Therefore the form of the message may change depending on time, place, and personality of the sender. We can indicate that sender plays a passive role on this level, while receiver is actively decoding a unique environment message.

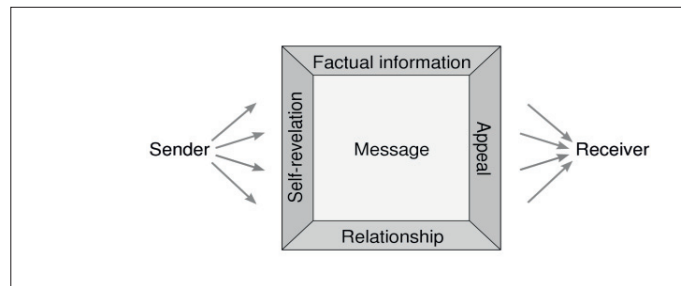


Fig. 1. Communication Model by Friedemann Schulz von Thun

(3) The third layer reflects relationships between sender and receiver of information. The participants of the communicational process reveal their relationships via:

- Phrasing
- Tone
- Nonverbal communication

One of the participants, the sender in most cases, shows the attitude, sometimes without any intention. The receiver also decodes the nonverbal message, estimating personal importance in communication process.

(4) The fourth layer is the appeal. It reflects how the message can influence on the receiver. In other words, the intention of sender regarding receiver: to act in a certain way. The sender indicates:

- Wishes
- Appeals
- Advice
- Instructions

It is important that the request from the sender can be either open or hidden for the receiver.

We can use the given model as a basis model to adjust it for the purpose of our research.

4. The Channels in Communication Model

Reconstructions and adjustments of communicational models are common methods of studying social processes. Using the Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model as a basis we offer a new vision of the sense transmission.

We suggest that not the message itself consists of four layers but the transmission goes via several different channels with equal importance.

The first is the semantic channel or transmission of sense of the message. Going back to the Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model we can clearly see that this channel comply with the layer of factual information, since both of them are responsible for the sense of the message.

The second is the syntactical channel and it transmits configuration of the message. The Friedemann Schulz von Thun Communication Model the syntactical role is played by self-revealing and the relationship layers. And the last, pragmatic channel transmits the anticipated result of the message and it has the same functional meaning as the appeal layer in the The Friedemann's communication model.

Thus, the model that we suggest to use for CSR study consists of three transmitting channels: semantic channel that transmits data, syntactical channel that transmits form and attitude, and pragmatic channel that transmits experience and actions. If communication process is efficient, then all three channels work simultaneously: the message reveals the sense to both sender and receiver; it has a proper form and motivates participants to actions (Fig. 2).

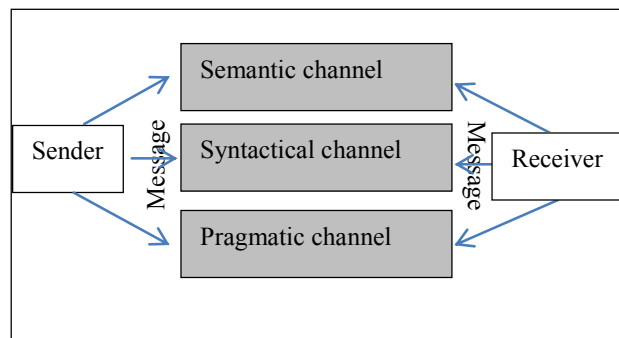


Fig. 2. Three-channels communication model

It is quite common that one or more channels lose their form and meaning during communication process. It causes deformation of the message also.

Let's say the message goes via syntactic channel only. In this case message does have sense for participants but doesn't motivate them to action and doesn't reflect attitude. So if two channels fail to work the efficiency of communication is extremely low. Or if the sender doesn't use the semantic channel, then the receiver gets the call to action without understanding the purpose of those actions.

Deformation of any communication channel creates major issues with information transmission. And we are going to estimate the deformation of the channels during transmission of CSR principles.

5. The Problems of CSR Transmutation

Let's use examples to show how the deformation of communicational channels may interfere with understanding of CSR principles. To make the indication of communicational flaws more obvious we will start by describing the effective communication process in CSR.

The Boeing Company reveals its annual Boeing Citizenship report (2013). Among other CSR activities, Boeing Company describes a special form of social activity – veteran programs. Company introduces a system approach

towards this social problem and implements it on a strategy level. Firstly, Boeing hires veterans to work on its plants/ Besides, Boeing Company develops web-site to help veterans use their military skills and knowledge in civil life.

Introduction of the veteran CSR program helps to form a new type of socially responsible organizational culture which has already brought first results. In the year 2013 Boeing employees donated more than 16 million dollars to Military and Veteran-specific programs or organizations.

The Boeing example represents how company can effectively use all communicational channels to make the message work. The semantic channel shows the goal of the Boeing CSR veteran program: Recognizing the unique value of service members, veterans and military families, Boeing creates opportunities and invests in partnerships that provide path ways to build better lives for them, their families and their communities. The company realizes true problems veterans encounter with and does certain steps to help veterans and secondary stakeholders – their families and society in general.

The syntactic channel or form of the message is represented via multiple transmission channels: web site, the Boeing Employees Veterans Association (BEVA), an affinity group in which employees can motivate, mentor and coach one another, serves as a connection point for veterans and reservists throughout the company. All this makes veteran support accessible.

The pragmatic channel, which implies actions, is presented with particular CSR events Boeing holds to support veterans within the company and those, who are not part of organization.

CSR information is transmitted via incoming and outgoing communication flows. The Boeing example reflects the level of expectation of CSR principles in American organizations.

How does it work in Russian companies? We can say that CSR communication in Russia has major differences. The common features of CSR at Russian enterprises are: internal focus of CSR, eclectic selection of the CSR objects, lack of integration of CSR principles into organizational strategy.

All those issues are reflected in the communication process organization use to inform about their CSR projects. As an example we will take one of the most successful enterprises in Russia that has opportunity to invest in CSR.

AvtoVAZ is one of the largest car manufactures in Europe. It publishes annual reports where it provides general CSR information (Annual Reports of Public Joint-Stock Company AvtoVAZ, 2011, 2013, 2014).

The major focus of AvtoVAZ CSR project is personnel: level of salary, training programs, car discount opportunities. We can see that the CSR program is very basic. The only way an interested party can get access to this type of information is company's report. Moreover, the CSR information is just several formal passages in a 108 pages document. So we can conclude that CSR of AvtoVAZ whether internally oriented or hidden. Thus we can clearly see that syntactic channel of CSR information here is deformed.

As we further analyze the report, we can notice that CSR programs of AvtoVAZ are very basic and stand on the lowest level of Carroll's Pyramid of CSO (Carroll, 1991).

In other words, this level of responsibility is granted by law. Company simply cannot ignore it. Therefore it is not a choice based on free will. Thus, we can suggest that the semantic channel is also doesn't functioning on a proper level.

Also it is very important to emphasize that CSR of AvtoVAZ is very formal. Company does not recognize social problems to work with. It can only indicate that pragmatic channel of communication is also missing.

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