Foreign language skills a must in multinational companies—an intercultural perspective
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Abstract

No matter in which language we communicate, we have to communicate, whether we like it or not. It is very important to make oneself understood, therefore we have often to communicate in the company's language. The larger meaning of communication is by looking at the communication from an intercultural perspective in a multinational company. The concept of corporate communication is in business administration and communication studies identified by the totality of all communication tools and communication activities of a company that will be used to represent the company and its services in all relevant target groups. For a company it is not only important to have a positive corporate culture and to voice it, but also, to check it regularly out. In this context it should be noted that a corporate culture is subject of changes, whether they are social changes or other kind of changes, like learning a foreign language.

Keywords: communication, multinational company, intercultural perspective, foreign languages;

1. Introduction

The importance of communication is explained by the often-cited axiom of Paul Watzlawick: “One cannot not communicate” (Watzlawick et al.1996: 53). No matter in which way we communicate, we communicate, whether we want it or not. This quote gains in importance by considering the communication from intercultural perspective in a multinational company.

As well as being best qualified, the Communication and Foreign Languages Department’s staff are high level professionals. Our teacher have experience, they are gathered to an innovative team and are always interested in developing ways of bringing learning to life.

The range of courses we offer provide to careers working in multinational companies as PR specialists. We continue to develop our teaching methods in the department and to attract learners in growing numbers each year.

We take advantage of other areas of experience to revitalize learning by students. We try to fit the learning methods into the real world so that the students will find themselves involved in the future company identity very soon after graduation.

One of the real strengths of this department is the support we can provide to our students – we actively encourage all of them to get good communication skills, both in the mother tongue and in one or two foreign languages. This

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means that they do not have to sacrifice the first year of job for a promising PR career. We work from the beginning of their study, developing the methods adapted to the users need, student and not at least employer, to keep all their options open.

As professionals in high education, we recognize the importance of training and working practices. Our facilities include special courses of teaching foreign languages and all types of communication. We believe it is important to prepare students as fully as possible for professional practice so we constantly find ways to test their skills.

We also incorporate training for the students from abroad, for employers who hadn’t enough classes of foreign language at the high school or for the staff from abroad to get Romanian language skills.

Teaching is without doubt one of the most rewarding professions. It offers constant intellectual challenge and stimulation, the chance to offer young people good career prospects and, above all, the opportunity to make a difference.

Teachers play a crucial role to raise standards across the education system. The country’s economic and cultural future depends on high academic standards being achieved in schools, and teachers help to make this happen.

The term Corporate Communication denotes in the Business Administration and Communication Studies the entirety of all the communication tools and measures of a corporation, which are being used in order to present the company and its services to all relevant target groups.

Many companies try to address their target countries by as few languages as possible. Some rely in doing so on English as unique language, which is being used at international level, while others are using further languages as for example German, French and Italian, in order to reach as many dialogue groups as possible in their local language. Companies measure their degree of professionalization to some extent also against the number of used languages. Generally, communication work is being practiced more intensively in the external markets and locations of corporations only since a few years.

2. Corporate Communication in Multinational Companies and its Intercultural Component

What does Multinational Corporation - MNC mean? Definition:

A corporation that has its facilities and other assets in at least one country other than its home country. Such companies have offices and/or factories in different countries and usually have a centralized head office where they co-ordinate global management. Very large multinationals have budgets that exceed those of many small countries. (http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/multinationalcorporation.asp)

There are two Types of Multinational Corporations:

Classical multinational corporations which have their headquarters in the country of origin, they operate in many countries, but they still have a strong national identity and Modern multinational corporations those which are characterised by open-mindedness towards various cultures, which is visible through the creation of a corporate identity. This type of corporation doesn’t follow the national culture any longer, but assumes a unitarily, globally regulated corporate culture, which ensures communication and handling of information between the locations. The foundation of multinational corporations leads to the encounter of people who belong to different cultures, that is, people with different conventions, habits and behaviour patterns. They therefore perceive each other as peculiar, strange and different and this causes communication difficulties. If the structure characteristics have been identified and worked out, it gradually becomes possible to understand and break them down, which is actually leading to the elimination of the communication problems.

Intercultural communication represents specific contact situations that denominate the contacts between individual persons or companies. This is predominantly mould by the contact of the person as individual to other persons, while in today’s business world, persons communicate with companies and companies communicate with each other at international level.
That the respective dialogue partners originate in different national cultures is being revealed by their individual language, their culture and communication, and extended by hidden or disguised perception of values, rules or behaviour patterns, as by conventions or significant symbols.

In the modern business, both a manager and any other representative of a company are required to have a fundamental knowledge in order to be able to prove a cross-cultural competency in the ethnic and cultural confusion of today’s business world. The competency to behave correctly towards the specifics of a foreign culture and to understand it, is a guarantor for success for the company management.

The term „culture“ means primarily the entirety of man’s creation. In the combination of culture, communication and business, this aspect anchored in the primary meaning, which is treating both the physical conditions and the changes of the nature generated by men, has been deliberately disregarded.

Man is born as part of a community in a culture, in order to learn there and to communicate in his national language, in that thereby resulting society, general behaviour patterns and to overtake special attitudes, value systems and knowledge and to transmit these in turn to the next generation.

Culture is emerging as the „group’s personality“, as substitute for the general behaviour. Though the individual community members are preset through their general behaviour, they have each the ability to develop an own personality and to partly influence and/or enrich this community and its general behaviour by their own individual personality.

As individuals we assign ourselves to one or more groups, which represent in their entirety a culture. The causes of communication problems are various. They don’t occur just between different cultures, speaking different languages, but also within the own culture in the everyday life.

A good information exchange is indispensable not only in the everyday life of a society, but also in the business life. This is reflected in the success of a company. Furthermore, an understanding of the culture in its historical context is also important for an adequate communication, speaking the countries language makes this even better.

Communication serves to the elimination of problems, the expression of wishes and objectives in any kind of relationship and represents an information exchange. Consequently, in order for him to be able to react correspondingly to the information, it is also very important that the receiver himself receives the information correctly. For example, if an employee gets only a vague description of what he has to do understand the language, a failure is generally bound to occur, because he doesn’t understand the language, a failure is generally bound to occur, because the employee will do only a minimal job for fear of errors.

Hence success or even failure is arising depending on the communication. In a narrower sense a business is an economical activity, the conclusion of a sale contract or the entrepreneurial activity itself and in the broader sense this business will be extended to any type of activity.

The management and the associated corporate governance can be broken down basically into two categories: the functional and the institutional management. The management is deciding thereby not only, which processes will be executed in which space and time distribution, but also and especially on how these processes are to be carried out.

In the cross-cultural context of communication both categories have to be considered. On the one hand, it must be considered that a company is structured and managed differently (institutional management) depending on the country, on the other hand, the activities of a manager (functional management) may also vary from country to country. This difference from country to country and from culture to culture should be identified as possible before the contact to the foreign company or even to individual customers, because due to poor or missing intercultural preparation, mismanagement may also occur. For example, in specific cultures religion represents an important element of the business, while in other cultures a corporate organisation based on rigorous hierarchy contrary to a majority decision quorum is doomed to failure from the beginning. Cultural factors might be of vital importance not only in the business with foreign cultures, but they assume frequently a decisive role in the management style of any internationally acting company. They are doubtless of such great importance, that cultural factors decide on the success or failure of a corporation. Because of this it is of almost existential importance that beside economic and operational topics the management deals very intensively also with culture. Nowadays, in the context of globalisation, it is unavoidable to deal with the topic of communication with international business partners, and thereby to involve the cultural conscience optimally for a successful “business”. In order to be able to maintain a good customer contact also at international level, it is important to handle cultural differences with sensitivity. Communication occurs in different cultures in the most various ways and it influences all aspects of communication.
Those business partners who radiate self-rule and aplomb, and are thereby able to adapt themselves to the corresponding religious norms, values and behaviour patterns of the different cultures, will for sure achieve better results for a company than a businessman with no knowledge of cultures and communication and their combination into intercultural communication. For a successful negotiation many different cultural aspects have to be considered. Mastering the language itself might be also a big advantage. Generally, tolerance and open-mindedness are required in order to be able to handle correctly possible differences. This includes also a cultural relativism, which means that foreign cultures with their customs, values and norms are recognized without considering the own culture as superior to the other cultures. For a good communication it is very important to know the people of the respective culture. One has to be aware of the different cultures, have a consolidated knowledge and then apply the latter correctly. It is thereby essential that all business partners, who participate in a cross-cultural negotiation, possess knowledge about the respective other culture. Only this way it is possible to achieve success in a world of globalisation and show respect and appreciation towards other cultures. Intercultural communication in the commercial language refers to a research field that deals with communication problems caused by language and culture in international economic relations. Its mission is to analyse systematically and from interdisciplinary point of view, which factors influence negatively or positively the cross-border communication in the sphere of economic activity.

In order to communicate, one has at first to understand. Understanding means to identify what is new by means of the already known. In terms of language understanding implies that the heard/read information is recognised through already familiar language, i.e. formal and semantic structure patterns and components. Here is meant the knowledge of the syntactic structure, of the meaning of words and of the conditions related to reality, which regulate the usage of words. In the spoken language come along paralinguistic information carriers that also interact directly with non-verbal and extra-verbal elements. Their usage is culture-specific. Paralinguistic and non-verbal units – voice raising, intonation, gesticulation, facial expression and body movements can not only complement what was said, but also substitute that. Difficulties in cross-cultural understanding result of the fact that we tend to interpret what we heard, saw or read with our own interactional competency, even if we master the pronunciation, lexis and grammar. Their mastering doesn’t guarantee yet that the information is understood the way the sender meant it. The usage of communication means is never uniform in a society. There are significant socio-cultural differences, depending on the group identity and socio-biography of the receiver. It is not to be overlooked that already the perception of the heard and seen may depend on culture-bound factors. Our biologic and ecologic requirements, as well as the education norms and role allocation in the society may influence the interpretation of that what we hear and see. The interpretation and evaluation of the heard and seen occurs in relation to the cultural, social and psychological rules of a society. At the level of the communicative act this happens with regard to the situation-specific norms. Culture is to be understood as everything that gives a particular distinction to a group or an individual – their acting and behaviour patterns are part of that too. As to the economy, the intercultural communication plays an important role. Within the framework of economic relations are involved persons from various countries and cultures. It is a fact that talkers/listeners from different countries are that marked by their socio-cultural background, experiences and habits, that they bring them systematically into the communication act as explicitly or implicitly made orientation models.

3. Conclusions

For a company it is important not only to possess a positive corporate culture and to transmit it, but also to review it continuously. In this context it has to be observed that a corporate culture may be subject to changes, for instance due to social changes or the merger with another company. In addition, a company has to check continuously if the corporate culture is perceived and understood by the employees the way the company wishes to. The exchange of cultural knowledge, learning both partners language within the company should also be promoted, in order to bring together subcultures and to mediate between them.

There are several tools for informing the employees and there should be used as many as possible of them for bringing the corporate culture closer to the employees. Various possibilities can be used to transmit employees the corporate culture and the information, like making accessible written out norms and rules in the home language, taking up the company history, using specific symbols
and metaphors, offering programs for employees and finding common activities to promote the sense of shared identity and finally get each other trust. Participating and have training in the specific foreign language will generates a positive corporate culture.

Experiential training in the specific foreign language adapted for each individual style, his preferences, strengths, direction, is more likely than conventional prescribed training or teaching and produces positive emotional effects, notably confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of personal value. People need both learning, adapted for them as individuals, and also the traditional prescriptive training focused on external needs, characteristic for the company. It is important to use the best sort of training and development methods in teaching foreign languages for the given situation. Only a balance of methods can bring both satisfaction for the company and help the individual grow as a confident and contented person.

People need certain prescribed skills and knowledge for their education and their work. But they also need to be helped to develop as individuals too, which indubitable carries many benefits for external purposes.

The employee is aware of his role in the company, a climate of mutual trust and respect between employee and company management was generated by a good communication.

References