QUALITATIVE COMMUNICATION – A CHARACTERISTIC OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: Sustainable development is a relatively new theory and still emerging and finding shape, moreover the concept of sustainable development has found at a time when environmental issues are the subject of heated political debate.

Initially though sustainable development was meant to provide a solution to the ecological crisis engendered by excessive industrial exploitation of resources and the continuous depletion of the environment as well as the preservation of the environmental quality; currently the concept has included the quality of life in its entire complexity, both economic and socially. The object of sustainable development is here and now, i.e. the preoccupation for fairness and equity among states, not only among generations. The present paper sets forth a synthesis of the relations among general principles such as: the principle of sustainable development [1, 9, 13], the principle of sustainable quality [8, 11, 12], the principle of qualitative communication [8, 11], the ethical principle [8].

1. INTRODUCTION

The current challenge of humankind is overcoming the economic crisis, globalization, post-globalization and their accompanying consequences. Our opinion is that these may be effectively overcome with minimum negative effects provided that interdisciplinary studies and projects, communication and the lack of value crisis are all taken into account.

For human actions (undertaken in industrial or non-industrial organizations) the economic factors can only serve as general guidance, by counselling managers to make ample use of the abounding resources and to do away with the resources that are in acute deficit.

We are confident that the general principles of effective organizations have been established for each field of activity by setting forth general rules for efficient actions, most of which can be transferred from one field to another.

For instance, ever since the 12th century mathematicians have contributed to methods of function extremization, which can be defined as a general mathematical formulation of the inherent human proclivity to accomplish maximum results. Certainly, restricted function extremization us subsequent to simple extremization, which is also very old [4]. Moreover, even the intricate structure of searching for an optimal solution, in the circumstances of positive cooperation between two or more organizations, in view of result optimization, has been repeatedly formulated by various specialists (e.g. mathematician John von Neumann, economist Oskar Morgenstern) [10, 18].

Nowadays, the mathematical specialization called operational research includes the totality of procedures employed for the search of optimal solutions. Operational research has emerged from specific fields of human action, and the qualitative content is always determined by the respective field of activity. This has led to parallel research trends. Thus statistical checking of some mathematical models for the study of some processes will be called econometrics, if it is applied to economy, and technometrics, if it is related to technical, matters, and biometrics, if biology is subject to study.

Generally speaking, the fundamental structure of reasoning in operational research is the extremization of certain functions undergoing a system of constraints. These may be linear, non-linear, functional, etc. The difficulties entailed by numerical calculus are more efficiently being solved by means of computers able to remedy ever more complex problems.

However, the proper functioning of all industrial or non-industrial organizations, it is essential to promote qualitative communication, as a sub-component of organizational culture – one of the components of sustainable development. Human experience is highly relevant also due to its communication.

We would like to strongly emphasize the role of experience in human activities, as well as the fact that human experience cannot be entirely described rationally by means of mathematical models. Most

of the knowledge that cannot be expressed in words, will fall under the general commercial term of know-how. No technological process has become perfect yet so that it might replace the human being in terms of communication abilities, subtle and infinitely nuanced thinking, able to instantaneously perceive highly complex olfactive, sonorous or optical images.

Therefore, it is imperative to evince a high degree of concern for the social and organizational culture components in view of accomplishing the sustainable development of an industrial or non-industrial organization. This should necessarily be related to the concern for the two components of sustainable development: i.e. economic and environmental.

How effective is qualitative communication? What are its characteristics? We consider that it should include the following: promptness, accuracy, minuteness, lisibility, univocity. One could also mention the ability of information receivers to understand the language used to convey the message.

The accuracy of any information relies on its eridicity, as opposed to erroneous information. Minuteness and refinement are opposed to generality and fall under the category of accuracy. A piece of information is accurate enough provided that it communicates every necessary detail for a given situation.

On the contrary, an erroneous detail might worsen the value of communication, since it adds up to the content error the characteristic error related to the content, thus diminishing the range of action possibilities on the part of the informed person. This should never happen in the communication process taking place in the knowledge-based society, since it does not contribute to qualitative communication.

2. THE FOUR COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability should represent more than a mere project undertaken by various specialists in view of intelligent resource management as well as more than a simple concept, widely used in certain contexts. This is a paradigm where the future is designed as a balance of its three components (economic, social and environmental) in view of developing and improving life quality. Sustainable development is a rather hard-to-define concept, since it continuously changes and enriches with multiples meanings.

Sustainable development should be undertaken by each individual an it represents a process of continuous and permanent improvement, of learning and training. We should all make a lasting contribution to the various aspects of our existence and for the following generations, as well. This is the only solution to ensuring the future of mankind.

The concept of sustainable development relies on the premise that human activities depend on the environment and the planet`s resources. A society`s health, social security and economic stability are fundamental characteristics of the quality of life.

The goal of sustainable development is the attempt to identify a stable theoretical framework for making decisions in any situation, wherever there is a human/environment relation, irrespective of the nature of the environment: natural, economic or social.

Organizations must strive to meet individual requirement without making any compromises that entail a disadvantage for the development opportunities of future generations. This is a prerequisite for a healthy sustainable development meant to create balance.

„The development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", has become already an accepted definition of sustainable development which is the DNA of any organization. It requires a complex approach to wealth, accompanied by a long-term perspective of the consequences of present activities, as well as the total commitment of civil society to the identification of viable solutions.

At a time of great economic uncertainty, it is imperative that organizations maintain their balance, protect liquidities, it is also essential to have a long-term and long-range perspective, to have initiative and to be prepared to cope with such situations. Organizations have to diminish their budgets and marketing-advertisement related expenses, to lay–off employees as well as cut salaries and bonuses. Unfortunately, these circumstances lead to a dismissal of the sustainable development concept, however let us not forget that this is the best safeguard that companies may use to counteract market fluctuations. Therefore, the best and deceptively simple answer and solution for organizations to save is: sustainable development.

It is true indeed that organizations have to pay special attention to their own expenses and attempt to best capitalize the value of money. Hence they

should invest in human capital in order to preserve a safe environment and provide a positive outlook, they should invest in equipment, technology, distribution channels and in advertisement, of course. Failure to meet these requirements is an obstacle to survival and sustainable business represents the most appropriate and intelligent option for effective consumption of resources, waste management and business processes. This is the only viable alternative to attain maturity of the Romanian market, form its condition of emerging market to the mature market, where the consumer comes a vector of the adjustment of market balance.

Organizational culture is determined by a set of values, traditions, myths, slogans, etc. enabling its members to understand the status of the organization, the running out its tasks and the definition of important roles and goals. Culture is an abstract and intangible concept defined by the measurement and study of certain objectives. It plays an important part in the managerial behavior and not only.

Organizational culture emerges and develops in time. Its starting point coincides with the date of setting up the organization. As the organization grows, the organizational culture will change by means of symbols, histories, role models, slogans, celebrations, presentation of accomplishments and experience, etc.

3. QUALITATIVE COMMUNICATION – A CHARACTERISTIC OR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

It is imperative to define organizations by highlighting their human dimension. In a nutsell, the organization is a social system in which and by means of which individuals interact in view for accomplishing common goals. Various definitions of the organization have been formulated. One of them defines organizations as „social entities that emerge as activity systems aimed at accomplishing objectives, deliberately structured and having identifiable limitations."[6]

An organization requires a distinct form of correlation between personal goals of the human resources involved in the running out of activities and its mission and objectives. Organizational objectives represents the rationale for setting up of organizations and their functioning.

The definition of an organization as entity has been frequently approached by specialists in organizational theories. The continuous evolution of society as well as the changes brought about by cultural and technical development has entailed new dimensions to the definition of the concept.

The notion of organization is complexly defined as „an entity including the human structure with its socio-psychological aspects, its own culture represented by values, beliefs, expectations, symbols, its own structure referring to the tangible aspects of the organization, its policies as well as the formal systems of management and control, the hierarchy." [15] „Institution" is one of the related terms to „organization", from a comprehensive point of view. In everyday use, the term „institution" has been used as a synonym for „organization", and in this respect we refer to state institutions, governmental institutions or deconcentrated institutions. This relativity of the meaning requires further clarification of the two terms. [6]

As we have already noticed, organizations are groups of people performing specialized institutions in view of accomplishing common goals. The term „institution" has a twofold meaning, the former being more abstract and the latter equally general as the term organization". The former meaning is that of social institution, referring to those relatively stable structures of statuses and roles with the aim of meeting certain individual needs in society or performing some social functions [16]. The latter meaning, and also the most frequently used, is that of public institution, including those organizations that, on the basis of the state-funded resources, aim at attaining educational, social or administrative goals for a particular population segment.

Irrespective of the meaning of the organization we choose to refer, i.e. either the general meaning or public institutions as afore-mentioned, mention should be made that the definition of these entities, their identity as well as their social position will be differentiated by their own organizational culture.

The relevance of this concept can be noticed first and foremost in the theoretical trends that aim to interpret the entire organization from the vantage point of organizational culture. Some of the studies that advocate this trend, as a result of the emergence of a sociologically-based managerial literature, approach the organization from its specific experience and attempt, quite often unawarely, to analyze the processes, that will legitimize the respective model.

The standardized image of the organization mentioned in such studies is a creative one, based on an integrative common culture that stimulates and capitalizes its members` potential. Gary Johns pointed out that "culture represents a way of life for

the members of the organization. Even when there is a strong culture, this way of life may be difficult to read and understand by those who are not familiar with it. One method to understand a culture is to examine the symbols, rituals and stories that define the organizational existence. These symbols, rituals and stories represent for acquiring and strengthening the culture for the insiders." [7]

"Since culture as a system of organizational norms and values is determined by the mission that needs to be accomplished and not by the community where it operated, therefore the organization will transcend community precisely by means of its own culture. Should there be any conflict between community values and organizational values, then organizational culture will prevail. Otherwise the organization cannot accomplish its mission and consequently it cannot bring its own social contribution to support the community and society, a contribution that will further help all its members." [17]

The conceptual framework of organizational culture is firmly rooted in social situations, anthropology, sociology, social psychology and organizational behavior. Specialists in this fields have defined culture as the fundamental component of society.

Michael Armstrong [3] stated that: "Organizational or corporate culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that, without being explicitly formulated, might determine individual behaviour and contribute to problem solving. Values refer to what is considered important in relation to human and organizational behaviour. Norms are unwritten behaviour rules. By definition, organizational culture refers to abstract notions, such as: values and norms that are subject to change in the entire organization or part of it. These may not even be defined, discussed or noticed. In other words, culture may be regarded as a codified term for the subjective part of organizational life. Regardless of the situation, culture may have a significant influence on human behaviour."

Organizational culture represents an essential component of modern approaches to human resources management, actually the ascending trend of theoretical preoccupations and pragmatic approaches regarding the organizational culture reflect the new vision about human resources in the modern organization as well as the new implied management. Due to its comprehensive scope and its implications, organizational culture surpasses the strict area of organizational management, entailing implications in the organizational processes, which

are significantly influenced in terms of their content and development by the organizational culture.

Thus theoreticians emphasize that symbols, rituals, values and norms represent the main components that define organizational culture. However, an important aspect tends to be overlooked, i.e. the mechanism employed to convey all these elements, to inculcate them in the conscience of human resources and the community where the organization belongs. This essential mechanism for organizational branding is communication. Organizational communication, internal and external communication, each with a great impact on the targeted audience.

Let us further approach important aspects regarding internal communication, starting from the presentation of relevant elements for managerial communication.

Effective managerial communication is a strategic instrument for organizational change. Chris Argyris [2] was one of the promotors of the concept of organizational communication as a response to the postulates of scientific management developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor which supported a radical break between managers and employees, resorting to a frequent illustration, „managers know best, whereas workers are stupid and lazy, always in conflict with managers." [14] This cornerstone in the science of managerial psychology has urged the necessity of improving organizational communication which has thus become one of the fundamental objectives of organizational development interventions.

In common managerial practice, organizational communication will be differently approached by every individual, thus adding a new perception, both personal and subjective, to this concept. Therefore it is not easy to define a problem within an organization confronted with defective organizational communication or where miscommunication has become an aggravating factor. [5]

Effective internal communication has become a key element of organizational strategy. It should have a permanent character and be accomplished by any means, as well as function emotionally rather than intellectually.

Most organizations in performative economies evince nowadays the tendency of decentralization or organizational structure accompanied by the transition from vertical to horizontal structure; the tendency to adopt Total Quality Management

Principles (TQM) as well as the idea of committing employees and promoting work team in all fields of activity.

In view of positive accomplishment of all procedures initiated by the top management it is imperative to develop an increased concern for substantiating qualitative communication management. First and foremost, the principles of quality management should be applied and subsequently observed.

It is commonsensical that the quality principles require the commitment of the entire staff; however this principle cannot prove efficient and effective unless the communication process is firmly structured on solid foundations. In this respect, it is imperative to adopt measures in view of completely removing any communication barriers or hindrances in the information flow, not only for the understanding of the organizational quality policy, or the option for TQM as a prerequisite for the organizational functioning.

If these prerequisites are only theoretically approached and dealt with only by adopting procedures, regulations and not by their proper application, then the top management will continue to believe that the policy regarding information transfer and communication process is functional, whereas this is actually bottlenecked. In this respect, top management and organizational leaders have to perform regular internal studies by means of marketing instruments regarding the perception of the communication process, the organizational climate that might be affected by a defective communication process, accompanied by removal of the factors that affect, disturb, hinder the communication process; so that the organizational mission and objectives are safely accomplished.

More specifically, the process of result study and interpretation will involve specialists in communication, statistics and psychology that may or may not belong to the internal human resource of the organization, but are able to endorse honesty, by their professional experience and expertise, i.e. the top management will set forth results that are accurately reflective of the objective reality which can be radically improved or restructured. It is highly relevant to consider in the creation of the working teams for organizational projects, the selection of team members who evince compatibilities thus doing away with emotional-related communication barriers, conceptual barriers, environmental barriers and any other type of barrier that diminishes the efficiency and fidelity of message transfer.

A qualitative communication process, as an integral part of the organizational culture may account for a sustainable development of the organization. Nowadays, it is relatively difficult to accept the existence of defective communication in organizations; however, the lack of awareness of the consequences entailed by a poor management of communication – such as affecting, disturbing, blocking communication – will dismiss in time any effort required to implement quality management and will further diminish any prospect for organizational development.

4. CONCLUZII

Until recently, contemporary society had focused on a comparison with the accomplishments of predecessors, thus constantly resorting to history, instead of a re-orientation, a change of perspective, thought patterns and stereotypes, life style. Should we seriously consider sustainability, then we have to genuinely take into account such drastic changes that will have an impact on all the aspects of life. Change should alter habits, as well as individual conception of economy, human resources and the environment. It is neither hard nor impossible to envisage an authentic sustainable society, however it may be extremely difficult to put this concept into practice since everything should be subject to change, including ourselves.

The tendency of current society should be towards the future of humankind, i.e. sustainable development, in other words it is not the connection with history but rather direct access of the future. This is precisely why we should all attempt to have "memories of the future" not only of the past. The future should be not only expected or accepted, but rather developed!

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