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Communication, company mission, organizational values, and company performance

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Abstract

Although research confirms that company mission and organizational values may influence the performance of individual employees as well as the company, it is evident that explicitly or implicitly codified statements of company mission and organizational values are simply not enough. Employees should feel the meaning of the mission and values, they should exercise them passionately and positively. It is therefore not only important for companies to define such statements but spread such ideas among the employees.

By focusing on literature review and empirical research, the paper illustrates and verifies the significance of written and communicated company missions and organizational values. The study is based on a sample of Slovenian companies. In the study, we confirm positive connections between the existence of company mission and organizational values and their communication within a company on one hand and some of the non-financial aspects of company performance on the other.

Keywords: mission statements, organisational values, company performance, Slovenia, empirical research

1. Introduction

The research confirms that company mission and organizational values influence company's achievements and accomplishments of its employees. Accordingly, to Bart et al. (2001), only if employees feel the essence of a

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mission, they will be able to enforce and implement it with deep passion and determination. However, it is evident that just the existence of a written form of such statement may not be enough.

Desmidt and Prinzie (2009) emphasize the importance of a written mission statement as a tool that may stimulate communication processes within a company, especially the information transfer and converging of relevant information. However, Whitbred (2004) points out that employees may develop different interpretations of the company mission and organizational values despite the existence of a written form such statements. For example, descriptions of those who are positioned higher in the organizational hierarchy usually have a much higher degree of overlap with actual company mission. It is therefore not only important to codify the company mission and organizational values or put them into a kind of a written form, but also the process of doing it as well as the process of communicating it. Internal communication processes in a company might have a fundamental role in this (Musek Lešnik & Arzenšek, 2008; Florjančič & Lesjak, 2010).

In order, not only to inform the employees about the company mission and organizational values but also to make the employees live them and implement them in everyday practice, more should be done in a company. Just putting posters on walls or corporate websites may be insufficient. Learning that enables processing, storing, and recalling of information requires internalization of ideas. That is why a one-way dissemination of company mission and organizational values may have quite limited reach. Without adequate managerial support, the organizational values, regardless the quality of the form in which they are written, they would only stay on paper (Hassan, 2007). For that reason, the companies should communicate core elements of their identity throughout various socialization channels and by doing so provide their employees with different opportunities to identify with those elements. Such practices, which emphasize the communication and strengthening of company mission and organizational values, and are oriented towards attitudes and understanding of employees, can increase their sensitivity and awareness of central elements of corporate identity and contribute to the enhancement of group identity (Katzenbach and Santamaria, 1999).

Slovene research (Musek Lešnik & Arzenšek, 2008) that included 200 biggest Slovene companies revealed that employees in many cases do not adopt key identity elements of their companies. The findings showed that in Slovene companies, company mission and organizational values seem to be quite fuzzy concepts, mostly used for PR purposes, but they in most cases do not touch the broader community of a company. The data proved that many companies do not understand the meaning of company mission and clear organizational values, or have problems implementing them.

The aim of the paper is to investigate approaches to the development, communication and effectiveness of company missions and organizational values. The study is based on a survey among companies of different sizes from Slovenia, a typical member of European Union. The paper is organized in three parts. The first part is based on literature review and describes key concepts and links between them. In the second part, the research methodology and results of the analysis are described. The last part of the paper consists of a short discussion and summary of findings.

2. Literature review

2.1. Importance of communication in a company

Communication of company mission and organizational values may be an important aspect of strengthening inner awareness of corporate identity and its external dissemination (Chong, 2007; Musek Lešnik & Arzenšek, 2008; Rojko, Lesjak & Šušteršič, 2015). Meglino & Ravlin (1998) point out that organizational values might also be of great importance to a person considering whether being dedicated to something or not. Employees usually get attached to something they can relate to, to things they appreciate. A higher level of identification with the company mission and organizational values may, therefore, lead to a greater consistency of individual's actions (Musek Lešnik & Arzenšek, 2008). One of the conditions for identification of the main elements of corporate identity is to know them well. Powell & Dodd (2007) point out that a significant amount of literature emphasizes the meaning of the dissemination of company mission, organizational values, as well as company objectives leading to higher commitment and increased consistency in employees' behavior.

Communication can improve the insight of employees in company's business philosophy and its strategic intentions, as well as ensure the understanding of company objectives and strongly impact individual's motivation, commitment, and identification with the company (Asif & Sergeant, 2000; Schuler, 2004; Stuart & Kerr, 1999). Garnett, Marlowe & Pandey (2008) point out that communication in a company functions as a meta-mechanism for shaping and spreading organizational culture and affecting the results in mission-orientated companies. Internal communication can be a critical factor in the process of enhancing employees' identification with company mission, organizational values, and company objectives (Law & Breznik, 2017; James & Lahti, 2011; Smidts et al., 2001). It also has a significant influence on employees deciding whether to stay with the company or leave it due to some reason (Appelbaum et al., 2009). By enabling better insight into company's philosophy, it provides necessary conditions for the unification of employees on a common and shared vision of future objectives (Dolphin, 2005). It is important for companies to help the employees to embed common understanding of organizational values into their »mind and hearts« because the employees tuned to the organizational values represent a significant competitive advantage by transferring their value-connected experience to outside stakeholders.

Companies need dedicated employees that contribute to the achievement of organizational objectives (Lee et al., 2006). Employees want to contribute to the company success and be proud of the company (Dortok, 2006) and its social identity (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). The more the employees perceive that their work contributes to the company achievements, the more they identify themselves with the company mission and organizational values (Wright & Pandey, 2011). The more the employees trust the company, the more are personally and emotionally involved in their work. Well-defined and clear company objectives lead to better understanding of company mission and harmonization between company mission and the employees. High level of involvement can lead to more consistent efforts needed for realization of organizational objectives. Not interested and unalienated employees take quick decisions that not only result in decreasing of work dedication but also in the implementation of unwanted practices in the workplace (Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007).

Employees that identify themselves strongly with their company will most likely make decisions consistent with the company objectives (Smidts et al., 2001). In this case, their values, goals, and practices match the organizational values and company practices (Carmeli & Gefen, 2005; Van Dick, 2001, Meyer & Allen, 1997). Dedication of employees is a consequence of trust in company objectives and values and is defined as preparedness to invest the effort in the company and as an intention to stay (Little & Dean, 2006). High level of the fit between the personality on one side and organizational objectives, values, behavior, and norms on the other usually predicts low personnel turnover as well as low absenteeism (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). Employees can, therefore, play a fundamental role in implementing of corporate identity only when they know the company good enough (Ackerman, 2000).

2.2. Internal versus external communication

Despite common practice of regular external communication, companies may have much more possibilities to influence their employees rather than their customers. Namely, employees can strongly influence perceptions and standpoints of customers or any other external stakeholders. Last but not the least, Dolphin (2005) points out that among various relations developed and maintained by a company, the most important are those established and managed by the employees. However, this does not mean that internal communication of organizational identity is successful by itself.

Balmer & Gray (2003) define organizational communication as a process through which company stakeholders detect the forming of identity, image, and company's reputation. They stress out the importance of primary category of communication oriented towards internal and external stakeholders. They note that it is the key factor in communicating corporate identity to the employees. Herstein et al. (2007), among conventional sources of communicating corporate identity to employees, underline systems of human resources management and system public relations management. In many companies, communicating corporate identity is especially emphasized in the case of external stakeholders. Company mission, organizational values as well as company vision may become essential components of messages destined to communication with the external world (e.g. through websites, yearly reports). Nevertheless, such emphasis on public relation aspects of communicating corporate identity can have an

unintended side effect reflected in neglecting of communication with the internal stakeholders (Musek Lešnik & Arzenšek, 2008). However, in the case of a poor organizational communication, developing a mission statement with clear organizational values just may not have any influence at all or even a negative one either on personal or company level. Gotsi et al. (2008), for example, point out that some researchers suggest first to set an attractive company vision and clear organizational values, and only then to use internal communication channels and HRM practices to encourage employees into »living accordingly to the brand«. Stuart & Kerr (1999) note that if corporate identity is well managed, the resulting image of a company should precisely express its values, beliefs, and strategic intentions.

Mitchell (2002) points out that people in charge of internal communication in a company often incessantly "bomb" their employees with messages focusing on organizational identity. However, they may succeed neither in convincing the employees that organizational identity is unique nor in the need to live the company mission and the organizational values. More efficient communication is required to increase the awareness and understanding of organizational identity which may also significantly influence the sense of employees' belonging and their work (Appelbaum et al., 2009; James & Lahti, 2011; Kohles, Bligh & Carsten, 2012). For shaping and strengthening of organizational identity, vertical communication between different hierarchical levels is more relevant than the horizontal one which mostly appears at the individual level related more to expert identification. Among the dimensions of vertical communication, participation in decision making, adequacy of disseminated information, organizational support, and the existence of discussions with the members of top management are of crucial importance.

Many companies publish statements with company mission and organizational values, and vision just about everywhere. Nevertheless, such approach may not be enough. Wojtecky & Peters (2000) explain that making information accessible does not equal communicating it. Katzenbach & Santamaria (1999, p. 110) warn that »when new people come aboard, most companies try to communicate their organizational values […], but the majority of newly employed gets only a bit more than a short presentation of organizational values before it is expected from them to start expressing these values in their workplaces«. With an apparently limited range of communicating the company mission and organizational values, these contents are being transmitted to the social context of a company, especially throughout interpersonal communication that includes stakeholders from several levels of organizational hierarchy. Strategic encouraging of interpersonal »face to face« communication in a company is of outermost importance as well. Interpersonal communication seems to be linked with some aspects of company performance such as added value per employee.

2.3. Socialization as a means of communication

Socialization in a company is a process through which the (newly employed) workers not only learn and adapt to new work positions and new or changed roles in an organization but also get acquainted with the organizational culture (Donavan et al., 2004a, 2004b; Klein & Weaver, 2000; Karatuna & Basel, 2017; Sitko-Lutek & Jakubiak, 2016). The latter contributes to internalization of organizational identity as well as to the development of the sense of belonging. Cooper-Thomas & Anderson (2006) note that »social cohesion bridges the differences between individual and organizational« and, therefore, accelerates spreading of shared values, attitudes, behavior, and norms that support peer relations and encourage shared understanding of organizational aims. While formal employee education (e.g. training, introduction) aims at development of knowledge, skills and abilities for successful work, the same enthusiasm should be present when aiming at consolidation of values and organizational culture in a company (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006; Ellinger et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2006). Socialization refers to areas that surpass only work-related knowledge and skills and reach into the field of organizational culture, beliefs, and values (Ardts et al., 2001, Donavan et al., 2004). In most cases the newly-employed workers and their companies are aware of the importance of learning; but this does not necessarily apply to the understanding of the importance to learn organizational culture (Donavan et al., 2004).

An important agent in the socialization process of newly employed are individuals who the new employees are in contact with during their introduction period as well as later after that time is over. Those agents are usually their immediate supervisors. Sluss et al. (2012) realize that relational identification with immediate supervisor generalizes into organizational identification over affective, cognitive, and behavioral mediation mechanisms. The key condition

for organizational identification is the impression of prototypicality of the immediate supervisor. When the employee, perceives his or her immediate supervisor as a symbolic figure in the context of a company, a generalization of identification elements from interpersonal level to the level of an organization happens.

3. Empirical study

The aim of our study is to acquire information about development, codification, communication and implementation of company missions and organizational values in a sample of Slovenian companies. Besides, the paper focuses also on the relationship between the processes of clarifying, defining, and communicating of company mission and organizational values and perceived aspects of financial and non-financial performance of the companies. Through the empirical study we would like to answer the following research question:

- How do companies approach the development of company mission and organizational values?
- How do companies approach communication of company mission and organizational values?
- How do companies embed the company mission and organizational values into the organizational structure of the company?
- Is there a relationship between the perception of company performance and understanding of company mission and organizational values?

3.1. Research sample and research methodology

In the study, an online survey was implemented. In the autumn of 2011, 16.809 Slovene companies were invited to participate in a survey. We succeeded to get the feedback from 303 companies. The response rate was 1.8%.

The biggest share of companies in the sample came from the most developed region of Slovenia, Central Slovenia (one-third) followed by the second most developed region, Podravska region (16.9%), the Savinjska region (12.8%) and the Gorenjska region (5.9%); from the Cassavas and Matanuska-Karst region, the least developed Slovenian regions, we did not receive any completed surveys. Most of the companies that returned the questionnaire are limited liability companies (more than 95 % of companies that have responded to the questionnaire).

Most of the companies in the sample are active in the information-communication, manufacturing, construction, scientific, technical, commerce and motor vehicles maintenance sectors (Table 24). Among sectors, the tertiary sector is the most represented (40.7%), followed by secondary sector (28.1%); the smallest number of cooperating companies are active in the primary sector (2.7%).

Most companies had been active in the market for 16 to 20 years (Table 25). The average age of the companies in the sample is approximately 17 years. Among companies that replied to survey, most are micro companies (65.3%) and small companies (24.3%), the percentage of large enterprises is only 2.3%.

Among respondent, we mostly find leaders, managers, or chairpersons of the board (81.0%). Approximately half of them are men (52.5%). Most of them work in the company for up to 5 years, and there is a relatively large group of those being in the company for more than 15 years.

For the statistical analysis of the collected data, we used statistical program SPSS. Since we deal with discrete variables, we used the χ^2 test to define differences between the groups of companies (Howell, 2002). For determining the contribution of interval variables to variance differences between the groups of companies we used canonical discriminant analysis. To check the relationship between the company mission and organizational on one side and company performance indicators on the other (financial performance indicators were included in the analysis too – ROE, ROA, added values per employee in the period from 2004 to 2009 and average relative change of income for the same period).

3.2. Analysis of the data

  a)   *Communication and implementation of company mission and organizational values*

The data shows that about two-thirds of companies have their company mission and organizational values written or codified in an explicit, at least, implicit form. Fig. 1 shows more detailed data about the frequency of the companies that have company mission and organizational values either in an explicitly or implicitly written form or not written at all. As can be seen from the picture, most companies put stronger emphasis on codification of company missions rather than on organizational values.
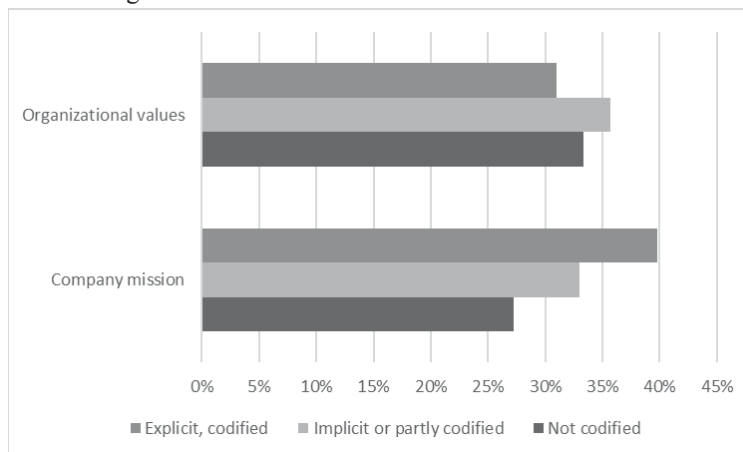

Fig. 1. Frequency and types of company mission and organizational values.

Data shows that most companies developed their company missions and organizational values because their competition had published them (83.5%) or because of internal impulse since they found them necessary (81.7%). Only a small proportion of companies developed them because of the pressure on the market or upon request (6.3%). In more than a half of the companies, company mission and organizational values or documents defining them were created informally (58.8%). Only in less than a quarter of companies (22.9%), process of setting up the company mission and organizational values was supervised by a formally appointed leader and less often through series of informal meetings (16.7%).

Companies most often communicate their company mission and organizational values through their websites and less frequently through another document such as business reports. In their communication, they seem to be oriented towards the internal as well as the external public in a balanced way. Companies explain the contents of company mission and organizational values to their employees most often in a verbal way through group discussions but also through individual annual interviews. Among nonverbal ways, informing over e-mail and intranet is the most common. As the study shows, communication of company mission and organizational values to the employees is mostly delivered to the employees by e-mails, written statements, internal newsletters, posters, group meetings, work processes, the usability of products and services, directing by the supervisors, as well as appraisal interviews.

Table 1. Communicating the records of organizational values, company mission, and vision

Type of use	N	Yes	% of Yes
Embedding in organisational structure	*1165*	*414*	*35,5*
• in company standards	233	114	48.9
• in the company aims and objectives	233	59	25.3
• in company policies	233	50	21.5
• in benchmarks	233	104	44.6
• in company rules and regulations	233	87	37.3
Communication with external stakeholders	*908*	*354*	*39.0*
• conduct in dealings with other companies	227	86	37.9
• highlighting in contact with other businesses	227	82	36.1

• conduct in dealing with customers	227	78	34.4
• highlighting in contact with customers	227	108	47.6
Embedding in work and work procedures	*699*	*218*	*31,2*
• in work processes	233	37	15.9
• in descriptions of procedures	233	80	34.3
• in guidance assumed	233	101	43.3
Embedding in products and services	*698*	*259*	*37,1*
• in the design of products or services	233	79	33.9
• in the reliability of products or services	232	78	33.6
• in the utility of products or services	233	102	43.8

Table 1 shows that company mission and organizational values are most often embedded into organizational standards or highlighted in contact with company customers. Less often company mission and organizational values reflect organizational objectives, regulations, or work processes. More detailed analysis of the data reveals that Slovenian companies most frequently embed the company mission and organizational values into communication with external stakeholders (other companies, customers), a bit less frequent in products, services, and company structure (objectives, policies, rules and regulations, policies, benchmarks etc.) and the least frequent in work and work procedures in a company.

b) *Influence of company mission and organizational values on company performance*

Companies self-evaluate themselves at the highest at nonfinancial factors of performance. They believe that they are achieving good results at the speed of customer treatment, company reputation, the affiliation of employees, the level of absenteeism and relations with suppliers. On the other hand, they self-evaluate themselves as less successful when it comes to indicators of financial performance (ROE, ROA, added values per employee, average relative change of income). Integration of company mission and organizational values into organizational processes positively relates to the degree of explicitness of the company mission and organizational values. Recognition of company mission and organizational values among the employees and company's management seems to be positively related to their embedding in work processes, the reliability of products and services, as well as to the consideration of how the standards are reflected in company's rules and regulations. The study also shows that the explicitness of company mission and organizational values statements positively relates to some aspects of the perception of company performance. The explicitness of those aspects may lead to the perception of better performance.

In continuation of the analysis, we performed canonical discriminant analysis to determine which variables that represent financial and non-financial performance contribute the most to reflect the difference between companies that create their company mission and organizational values either explicitly or implicitly or not at all. Discriminant analysis eliminated two discriminant functions. Among them, the first one explained 57.2% of the variance and is statistically significant at the level 0.07. The second discriminant function was not statistically significant (sig = 0,18). For this reason, we should consider only the first discriminant function.

Table 2. Structural matrix of saturation of the grades of indicators with discriminant functions

Company performance	*Function 1*	*Function 2*
the company's reputation	0.609[*]	0.218
employee loyalty	0.579[*]	0.204
relationships with suppliers	0.529[*]	-0.057
employee productivity	0.368[*]	-0.069
number of clients	0.350[*]	0.126
speed of customers' treatment	0.249[*]	0.122
return on assets (ROA)	-0.032	0.722[*]
added value per employee	0.041	0.609[*]
staff turnover	0.164	-0.188[*]
costs per employee	-0.081	-0.176[*]
absence from work	0.012	-0.019[*]

Table 3. Position of group centroids in the space of discriminant functions

In what format are your company's values:	*Function 1*	*Function 2*

Explicitly written	0.078	0.379
Implicitly or partly written	0.307	-0.246
Not written	-0.478	-0.128

As table 2 shows, structural matrix indicates that nonfinancial dimensions of company performance are the most saturated with the first discriminant function but not with the dimensions of financial performance. Also, the position of group centroids in the space of discriminant functions shows, as indicated in Table 3, that self-evaluation of company's non-financial indicators are higher in companies with explicitly or implicitly codified organizational values and lower in companies where the values are not codified at all. This kind of relationship seems to be most particular in companies with implicitly codified company mission and organizational values suggesting that explicitness itself is not enough for internalization and that less present but more internalized company missions and organizational values are more decisive in a company. Despite they are not explicitly defined they appear in company's documents and practices more often than those presented loudly and with much more emphasis. The latter is just not accepted, and employees do not internalize them.

4. Discussion

In the paper, we conclude that the existence of explicitly or implicitly codified company missions and organizational values may be necessary for better company performance. The study confirms that the company's reputation, employee loyalty, relationships with suppliers, employee productivity, number of customers, and the speed of customers' treatment are the aspects of non-financial company performance which may be enhanced by the existence of implicitly or explicitly codified company mission and organizational values. Because the link is even stronger in the case of implicitly codified missions and values, we assume that internal and external communication of the mission and values in a company may be of great importance as well.

The process of developing and dissemination of company mission and organizational values, which seem to be crucial for improving the non-financial aspects of company performance, is possible through group meetings taking into consideration various aspects of company performance. As already indicated, more frequent informing about the mission and values usually relates to self-perception of better company performance. Communication may also be based on written statements about company mission and organizational values, which consider various aspects of self-perceived company performance and competitiveness. The frequency of informing about those issues relates to better self-perceived performance too. Internal newsletters related to some aspects of self-perceived company performance may be linked to higher costs per employee, however, communicated through intranet it may be linked to a greater self-perceived speed of treating complaints in a company. The frame of individual annual appraisal interviews, which relate to some aspects of self-perceived company performance, may also relate to higher self-perceived company performance.

5. Conclusion

The study presents relationships between explicitly or implicitly codified company mission and organizational values and company performance. It stresses out the importance of internal communication of such statements leading to internalization of organizational values and thus making the employees live them and implement them in everyday practice. Nevertheless, the cause-effect relationship between those constructs should be further investigated since the research methodology in our study does not allow for firm conclusions about such relationships. Further research may be based on mixed research methodology combining quantitative research methods such as structural equation modelling, and qualitative research methods implemented through structural interviewing of people in managerial positions. In such case, the qualitative method would further describe, explain, or upgrade the results of the quantitative method (Caracelli & Greene, 1993).

Acknowledgements

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