CORPORATE IMAGE AS A KEY FACTOR OF PRESENTATION OF THE COMPANY'S INNOVATIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract: To compete successfully in Industry 4.0 modern companies must manage professionally and their innovative image. Its competent management is in the corporate PR domain. The article presents the ways to maintain the image in the public sphere based on a nationally representative survey of the top managers and owners of 1000 Bulgarian companies.

Keywords: corporate image, competitiveness, innovation, corporate PR, corporate culture

INTRODUCTION

Corporate culture is the invisible nature of an organization that makes sense of organizational life (Schein, 1992; Martin, 2002). It is defined as an "automatic pilot" who guides the actions of managers and employees in organizational routines, shaped by corporate philosophy, values and norms, in which newcomers are socialized. Corporate culture predetermines organizational behavior and organizational climate. It is directly related and interdependent with the management of the organization. It "learns" through the organization's communication, and the existing corporate culture determines the understanding of the importance and implementation of the organization's overall communication policy. Among the most explored aspects of corporate culture is its relation to the competitiveness of the organization (Kotter & Hesket, 1992; Dimitrova, 2012), as well as its study as a necessary precondition for creating and introducing innovations in the organizations (Dimitrova, 2017).

Corporate culture is the framework in which the other "intangible values" of the company exist and are managed, including the corporate image.

CORPORATE IMAGE

The corporate image is a multi-dimensional, fluid construct, regarded as internal / owned by the members of the organization / and external / to the stakeholders outside the organization / (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). The image is determined by its constant interactions with organizational / the corporate brand, identification with organization and reputation covered by corporate culture. Proper management of these constructs is a result of the established communication strategy and ensures a significant competitive advantage for the company (Dimitrova, 2013). In the context of the contemporary development of the business environment, boundaries between the organization and surrounding environment are very contingent; its stakeholders can be both internal and external, which implies the tendency for the integration of
communications (Christensen & Cheney, 2001; Quirke, 2012). The integration of communication aims to send consistent messages to all groups related to the organization. The image is the result of both the controlled and uncontrolled messages of the organization, as well as the experience that the different stakeholder groups have with the organization and each other. Every company that creates and implements innovation needs to manage its innovative image steadily. For this purpose, it is necessary to present and manage it among the key groups of stakeholders.

The company's innovative image goal to internal stakeholders is to promote support for innovation, to promote the pursuit of it and to motivate sustainability of attitudes towards innovation. For external stakeholders, it is necessary to be acquainted with the innovative discoveries of the company. However, the innovative image cannot be achieved without the existence of corporate culture and communication that determine organizational behavior that encourages dialogues and interactions between company members and external stakeholder groups.

It is of utmost importance to maintain trust between the organization and its various stakeholder groups, as well as minimize the uncertainty in making contacts between them. The latter is possible only in the conditions of open, interactive communication and transparency. It is imperative that the image conforms to the organizational reality.

**INNOVATION**

*Innovation* is becoming an increasingly necessary condition for achieving, maintaining and enhancing the companies' competitiveness operating under Industry 4.0. Innovation is defined as recreating an idea or invention into goods or services that create value; satisfies certain needs, minimizes prices, adequately utilizing resources. It is also found in all the parameters of the changed organization, i.e. the innovative culture management, innovative leadership, value co-creation, orientation to participation in business ecosystems, etc. The types of innovation are a process, product, marketing and organization. It is considered to be radical and incremental, open and closed. Innovation directly related to organizational learning, knowledge management, changes (Dimitrova, 2017). Maintaining and managing the innovative image of the company is in the corporate PR domain.

**CORPORATE PR**

*Public relations* (PR) is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relations between organizations and their publics (PRSA, 2012). PR is a management function. The Corporate PR or PR specialist is an integral part of the organization's structure. The domain of corporate PR is the implementation of internal and external communications through traditional channels and those of new media, to preserve the brand and image of the company. The ultimate goal is to maintain and enhance the reputation of the company.

In the large companies, the experts from the corporate PR department have different profiles, in the smaller companies; PR specialists are of the generalist type. In the context of implementing specific projects in companies or capacity shortages, additional PR agency specialists, who have a variety of expertise and skills, can be involved. There are also companies that use the services of an external PR agency.
QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

For this article, we will look at the results of the National Business Survey, July-August 2015\textsuperscript{22}. It is based on a closed-ended questionnaire including a representative sample of 1,000 companies doing business in Bulgaria. The ratio of micro / small / medium / large businesses is 60:30:10. Respondents are owners and top-managers of companies. The method used is a standardized interview. The article focuses on the management of innovative corporate image through professionally realized corporate PR in the context of the positive nature of the relations between corporate culture and competitiveness. According to the size of the company, there is no significant difference in confirming the understanding of the positive nature of the relations that exists between corporate culture and competitive performance.

In analyze to the respondents that the enterprise they are working on is oriented towards the creation and deployment of innovative products and services, we can note that this is not yet an effective organizational policy for the respondents. Only 20\% respond positively to the question. These are mainly large companies, followed by medium, small and micro-companies (Figure 1).

\textbf{Figure 1: Number of Employees/Does your company's corporate culture support its economic performance (results)?}
\textit{Source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017)}

\textbf{Figure 2: What is the number of employees in your company? / Has your company developed innovative products and services?}
\textit{Source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017)}

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Through the answers to the next question, it is possible to trace the link between the innovation processes and resources and HR-capital owned by the companies. Notable is that among the Bulgarian business, the innovative practices application is most typical for the large and medium-sized companies (Figure 2).

Positive support finds the link between developed innovative products in the answers of respondents and relations between corporate culture and competitive advantage (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Does your enterprise have innovative products and services developed / Does your company's corporate culture support its economic performance (results)?](source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017))

As we have noted in theory, the integration of the organization's communications is essential for the competent management of all the processes in the organization, including intangible values, such as the corporate image and the corporate culture. The surveyed companies point to a good understanding of the importance of internal communication. They realize it through a variety of communication channels. Applying a purposeful policy to maintain the corporate image is a top priority for a very tiny part of respondents. This trend is traced in a dynamic aspect and can be defined as a sustainable one (Dimitrova, 2013; 2015; 2017).

![Figure 4: Number of employees in your company? / How do you maintain your company's image in the public domain?](source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017))
Companies that declare the implementation of corporate PR-policies use the industry's most significant exhibitions and forums. They found it as an opportunity to maintain and positively promote their image. In spite of the PR-aspect, this type of event has mainly economic justification. Depending on the company's size, its PR-specialist/department or use an external expert/agency rely mostly on medium and large companies. We can note that corporate PR is more widely used for large companies in comparison with the participation into exhibitions organized for the small and microbusinesses (Figure 4).

Respondents who support the positive impact of corporate culture on enhancing the competitive advantages are the respondents who are mostly implementing a policy of maintaining the corporate image in the public domain (Figure 5).

![Figure 5: Does your company's corporate culture support its economic results (performance)? / How do you maintain your company's image in the public domain?](image)

*Source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017)*

From the answers to the question of the relations between the internal and external communication of the company, we can draw two conclusions. One underlines the need to implement internal communicational policy support through targeted measures with the help of corporate PR. The second is related to the dissonance in the communicational policy of the respondents (Figure 6).

![Figure 6: How do internal communications are implemented in your company / How do you maintain your company's image in the public domain?](image)

*Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017)*
Company's perception is formed by policies, practices, products and services, socially responsible actions and is managed using communications (internal, external and managerial). Worth mentioned, many of the respondents neglects the use of professional PR for image-management and hence corporate reputation.

Respondents, who develop innovative products and services more than others, pursue a purposeful communication policy maintaining their innovative image. Communication with innovative practices, products and services is essential, because it enhances the understanding of the stakeholders in the company's overall activities, presents data about changes, innovative methods and its reliability.

Figure 7: Does your enterprise have innovative products and services developed / How do you maintain your company's image in the public domain?

Source: Dimitrova, Y. Culture of Innovation (2017)

CONCLUSION

Results of our survey show that companies oriented towards the innovations implementation, as opposed to others, rely on a professional PR to manage their image. They recognize the importance of integrated communications and highly appreciate the understanding of the real significance of corporate culture towards their competitiveness. The relations between the implementation of innovations and the propensity to maintain an innovative image through the corporate PR toolkit is also recognizable. Among the Bulgarian business, the trend towards innovation is not yet widely supported. As a result, there is the incomplete understanding of the importance of managing the innovative image.

Adopting the idea of innovation as an essential part of the corporate culture and the strategy of the organization should become an imperative for the companies operating in Bulgaria. Given resource constraints, networking approaches should be sought with the assumption that innovation is the corporate mindset.

REFERENCES
