

Competitiveness through Communication. Learning from the European Experience

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Abstract:

Romanian enterprises are currently aware of the constraints imposed by the European integration. They will be competitive only if they have the willpower and ability to discover market niches that are to be dealt with in a personalized way. Designed as an organic and interactive system, the integrated communication becomes a competitive strategy. The use of an international language (English being now mostly used) and the access to interactive media have become minimal conditions for placing goods and services on the consumer's choice horizon. The demands are nevertheless much greater, hence the necessity to value all the aspects related to the communicational message axis: the linguistic, the contextual and the multicultural aspects.

Such a communicational system can be put into practice even by small and middle enterprises.

Key words: *competitive advantage, differentiation, communicative competence, IT infrastructure*

Within the competitiveness equation, the most frequently used terms are *quality* and *creativity*. The Romanian economic environment begins to understand and to apply modern methods such as 6 SIGMA, KAISEN, TQM, EXCELLENCE, LEAN TECHNOLOGIES, etc., but which involve huge costs, even unreachable by Romanian companies.

Should there be condemned to disappearance small and medium enterprises that presently do not reach these models? Our opinion is 'no', if an essential component of modern management, the COMMUNICATION, is valued.

The Communication – a Means of Introducing the Product/Service in the Selection of the Consumer

The organizations that compose the Romanian business environment generally use communication mechanistic methods, preponderantly media advertising (press, television, external advertising, and radio), where the leadership is held by the producers of large consumption goods: beer, cosmetic products, electronics and domestic robots.

At the end of 2005 the Romanian media market was by 20,9% larger than in 2004, while in France, for example, the media market grew by 1,7%. The market growth in our country is largely due to television, which attracted 63% out of the total of advertising budgets.

At the same time, keeping the reference, in France the biggest costs destined to media advertising are allotted to the written press, which has a strong impact on consumers (Table 1).

Table 1. Percentage of costs for media in France and Romania in 2004

Media	France		Romania	
	%	bn. Euros	%	bn. Euros
Written press	41.1	4.29	33.7	0.083
Television	35.9	3.74	52.8	0.13
Outdoor	13.2	1.37	6.5	0.016
Radio	8	0.82	5.7	0.014
Cinema	1	0.1	0.73	0.0018
Internet	1	0.1	0.57	0.0015
TOTAL	100	10.43	100	0.246

Source: *France Pub* n° 9/2005 and *The Initiative Special Report* 2005

Media advertising aims at raising the interest in a product or brand. It can bring success very quickly, but it has an impersonal nature, it conveys a monologue for the target population as a whole, while other communication means send out messages better adapted to the targets (Table 2).

Table 2. The Communication mix

Basic communication techniques	Subsequent communication techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advertising-media ○ Direct advertising ○ Advertising through events ○ Public relations ○ Point-of-sale advertising ○ Visual identity ○ Rumor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Product and design ○ Packaging ○ Sales force ○ Sales promotion ○ Lobbying ○ Financial documents ○ Recruitment adverts

Source: Décandin, J. M. in Ana Lucia Ristea (coord.), 2002: 459

Integrated Communication, an Element of Management Competitiveness

The evolution of communication methods from the classic system previously presented towards integrated communication represents the necessity of correlating all the communication instruments to which the organization has access, in an organicist and dynamic model that establishes interactive relations between the elements [1].

The main decisions that are involved in the accomplishment of an integrated communication program are linked to fixing the target groups, to choosing the communication mix and the communication forms, as well as the communication content.

The model is circular and complex, contextual and relational (Figure 1).

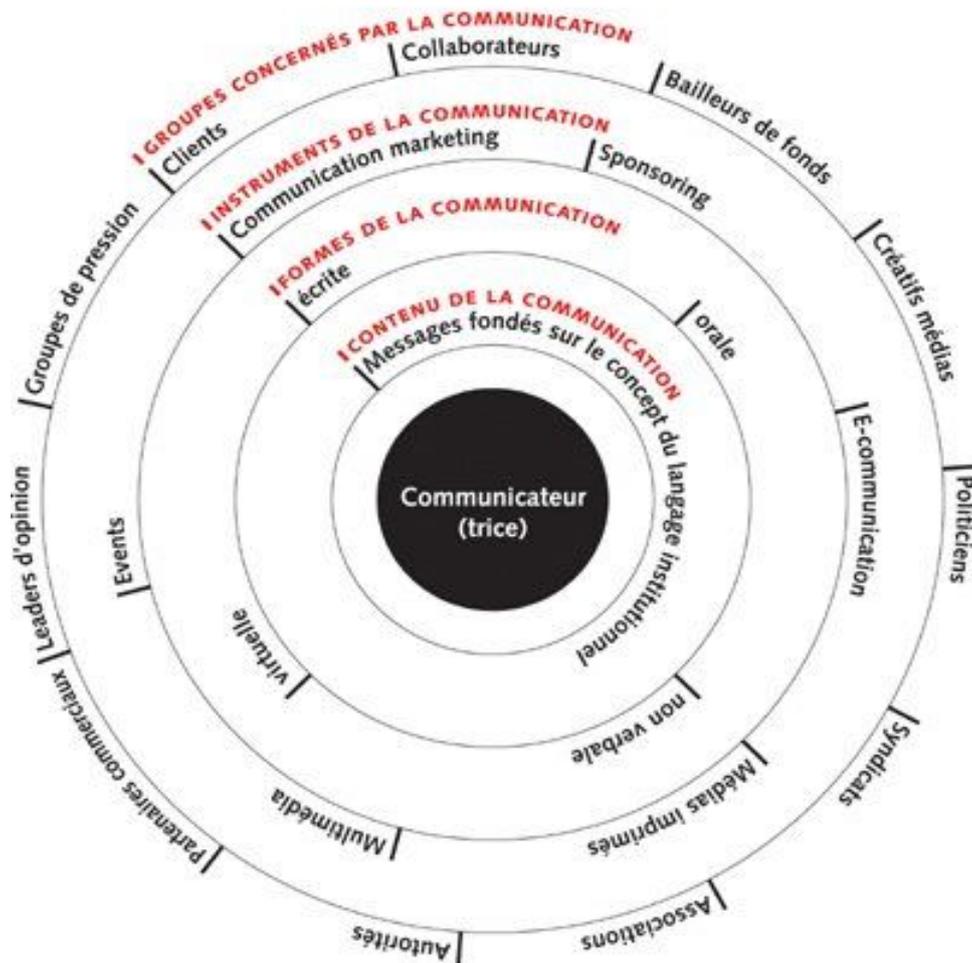


Fig. 1. Integrated communication model

Source: http://www.headline.ch/data/download/grafik_fr_mquelle.pdf, Institut pour la communication d'entreprise de la Haute Ecole professionnelle du Nord-Ouest de la Suisse

This communication means represents the 'vault key' of management systems for any organization that aims at being competitive in a hypercompetitive market.

The technological performance and skills have become minimal conditions for competitiveness.

They remain at the stage of vendibility premises if goods and services do not benefit from an effective external communication with the current and potential customers and other interested factors.

This external communication is a continuity line of internal communication, the latter being a genuine 'supporting pillar' together with the internal potential of the organization (Figure 2).

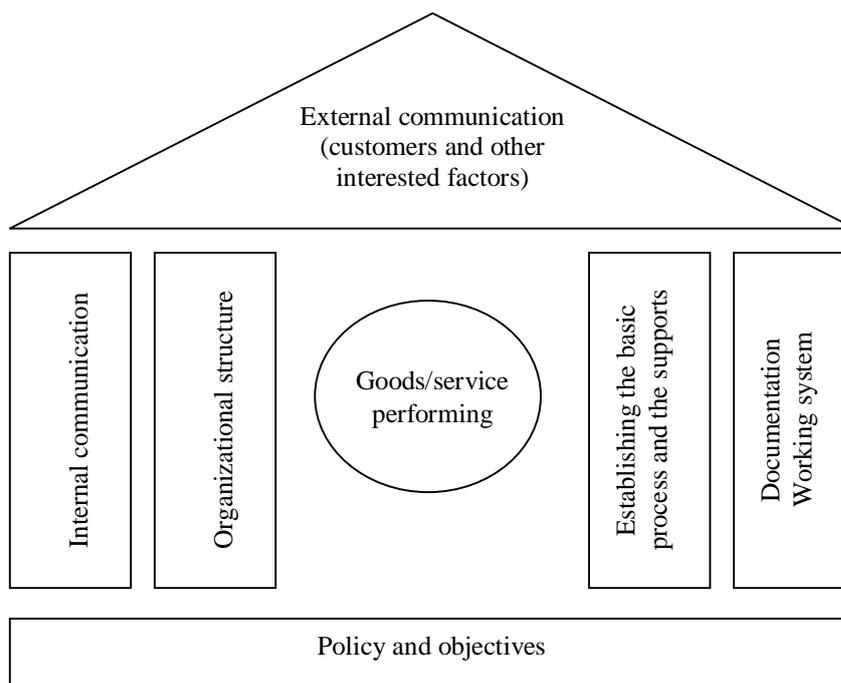


Fig. 2. Structure of an integrated management system

Source: M a n d i c e s c u , G., *Abordarea integrată a sistemelor de management, calea optimă pentru orice organizație* [Management system integrated approach, the optimum way for any organization], 2004, pag. 241

Communication Skills in the EU Multicultural Market

Romanian enterprises are already developing most of their export business in the western European market. But the integration means much more than this. It demands an outstanding communication for making evident the goods and services that will freely circulate on the new huge market that is to be created. Communicating on such a market represents not only what, in a simplistic way, these companies count on, i.e. using the English language.

Presently, the messages conceived for promoting the goods/services are focusing on the form and structure of the international language chosen. But the demands are far greater, therefore it is necessary to take into account all the aspects related to the communicational message axis: the linguistic, extra linguistic and contextual aspects. The communicative competence comprises six components [4]:

- *The discourse competence* – the ability to interpret a series of utterances in a comprehensible way and to get coherent texts adapted to a given context;
- *The functional competence* or *action competence* refers to the goals of target receivers, to the goals of the contexts in which they can operate and those of the functions they can assume by using the foreign language concerned;
- *The grammatical competence* is related to the linguistic frame, to the ability to recognize the lexical, morphological and syntactic characteristics of a given language and to handle them in order to form simple words and sentences, but which are quite challenging, capable of drawing the target audience's selective attention;
- *The intercultural competence* is represented by the relationship between knowledge, skills and attitudes that give the companies the opportunity to communicate and develop effective

contracts despite cultural frontiers. Businessmen need to get informed about the culture of the country where they intend to place their goods/services, they need to understand and accept the beliefs, the mentality and the behaviors of the partners and of the customers of the respective markets, otherwise the mastering itself of a foreign language is useless.

- *The sociolinguistic competence* refers to adapting of a language to a given context or situation (as people write and speak the same language), according to age, sex, class, society educational level and professional skills. There are differences from one region to another within the same country. There are phrases that usually have an overall accepted meaning, but which differ from the literary one;
- *The strategic competence* concerns the ability to use verbal (and nonverbal) strategies in order to accomplish and maintain the contact with the interlocutors and to manage the communication act in accordance with the receiver's predictable, by reducing difficulties and resorting to effective strategies.

The European Council has themselves drawn the Common European Reference Framework (1996/2001), proposing a four class grouping of the communicative competence components [7]:

- *the sociolinguistic component;*
- *the linguistic component;*
- *the pragmatic component;*
- *the strategic component.*

The international languages are not mere instruments allowing the transition of information from sender to receiver. They are, above all, the communication vectors of the cultures out of which they emerged. The history of the country, the social norms and the society historical fundaments are as many factors necessary to acquire knowledge about the target individuals' culture. It is only the communicative competence that provides the interactive process, the dialogue, the agreement between parties.

Conclusions

- *Using only some of the communication techniques (i.e, advertising), one can get fame, but the image can be reached with greater difficulty;*
- *For a positive image and which is to leave its mark on the consumer's long term memory, a communication mix establishment is needed;*
- *The mix should however not be conceived as a sum of communication means, but as an interactive organic system that is to function in a synergic way and which professionals call "integrated communication";*
- *Such a communication system can be smartly built even within small and medium enterprises;*
- *Based on the communicative competence, the system allows to operate on large multicultural markets;*
- *Structured and managed in this way, communication turns into a distinctive competence of the organization, thus contributing on a large scale to its competitive advantage.*

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Competitivitatea prin comunicare. Să învățăm din experiența europeană

Rezumat

Firmele românești conștientizează în prezent și constrângerile pe care le determină integrarea europeană. Ele vor fi competitive numai dacă vor avea voința și abilitatea de a descoperi nișe de piață pe care să le abordeze în mod personalizat. Concepută ca un sistem organic, interactiv, comunicarea integrată devine o strategie concurențială. Folosirea unei limbi de circulație internațională (cea mai utilizată fiind acum limba engleză) și accesul la mijloacele media interactive au devenit condiții minime pentru plasarea mărfurilor și serviciilor în câmpul de alegere al consumatorului. Exigențele sunt însă mult mai mari, fiind necesară punerea în valoare a tuturor aspectelor care sunt legate de axa mesajului comunicațional: aspectul lingvistic, contextual, multicultural. Un astfel de sistem de comunicare poate fi conceput chiar de către firmele mici și mijlocii.