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CHAPTER VII

A FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE STRUCTURE-SYSTEM PARADIGM FOR GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction – 2. Literature review – 3. Research objectives – 4. A framework based on the structure-system paradigm for governance and management of corporate communication – 4.1. The main firm-specific communication resources – 4.2. Policy and coordination decisions of communication at the strategic level (governance) – 4.3. Allocation and coordination decisions of communication at the tactical-operational level (management) – 4.4. Policy, allocation and coordination decision-making within the circular process of corporate communication management – 4.5. Planned communications vs. unplanned communications – 5. Practical implications – 6. Summary and conclusions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental changes (e.g. globalisation, economic recession, or growing consumer needs) are leading to the redefinition of the role of the organisation in relation to its key stakeholders. For this rationale, understanding corporate communication strategy represents a key factor for organisations threatened by those changes. In line with van Riel and Fombrun (2007: 9) "[…] the only way to overcome the existing fragmentation of communications in most organisations [...] and thereby to create economic value" is to adopt a strategic approach to the management of corporate communication. In addition, corporate

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communications need an integrated approach to their management (Cornelissen, 2008).

Given that researchers in the field of corporate communication are currently attempting to establish corporate communication as an autonomous discipline of management, they are increasingly viewing it as a matter of great importance to develop such a strategic approach. Nevertheless, only a few contributions to the literature on corporate communication deal specifically with this issue. As a consequence, it is useful to focus our research efforts on those elements that can contribute to the further development of corporate communication as a separate area of management.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. In the following section, the existing literature is reviewed. This review helps us to identify specific elements that can be used to develop a framework for decision making process for corporate communication (DMPCC), which is the objective of the study. We then present the proposed framework. Finally, we present some practical implications that strengthen the arguments made in support of the idea that communication management should be viewed as a separate area of management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In corporate communication studies, different conceptual models of management have been developed for the management of the corporate image (Kennedy, 1977, Dowling, 1986; Abratt, 1989) and identity (Marwick and Fill, 1997; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Stuart, 1999). These models provide researchers and practitioners with a broad variety of practices for the management of corporate identity that range from the basic to the complex, thereby "[...] accentuating the need for practitioners to take a greater number of variables into account when developing corporate identity programs" (Stuart, 1999).

However, these models do not address corporate communication management; neither do they examine corporate communication strategy in depth, in terms of the types of decision that are entailed and the link between the strategic and tactical decisions that are involved in communication. Indeed, the idea that corporate communication requires strategic thinking has received very little attention in the literature (Tibble, 1997; Steyn, 2003). In part, this neglect is due to the fact that in most of the theory relating to strategy, "communication is often still seen as a largely tactical activity with practitioners acting as communication 'technicians'" (Cornelissen, 2008:99). This outlook is reflected in practice, in that senior management tends to consider communication largely as a tactical function (White and Dozier, 1992) responsible for carrying out programmes of communication and preparing and producing communication materials (e.g. producing concrete messages and sending them to external audiences, organising press conferences, and managing trade shows and promotional campaigns etc). Kitchen and Schultz (2000) arrived at similar conclusions, in that they found that a majority of firms confined their activities to the tactical coordination of promotional elements and only a very few organisations operated at a strategic level in this regard.

It has been suggested that the management of communication needs to move from being tactical to strategic (Holm, 2006). A corporate communication strategy must have a prominent role and contribute to the organisation's corporate strategy (Cornelissen, 2008). In addition, there should be a convergence between brand and corporate strategy (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Rao, Agarwal and Dahloff, 2004), because corporate branding is an important element of a corporate strategy (Balmer and Gray, 2003).

Researchers who adopt the central corporate perspective presented in the preceding paragraph view communication strategy as a functional strategy formulated by corporate communication departments that operate at the highest corporate level of an organisation (Steyn 2003; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007; Cornelissen, 2008). The function of a firm's communication strategy is to focus on the development of planned communications consistent with its corporate mission and vision and on meeting the corporate objectives set out in its corporate strategy policy (Argenti, 2007; Steyn, 2003; Cornelissen, 2008). Corporate communication strategy is the outcome of a strategic way of thinking and of decision-making process involving the different parties (communication managers, the CEO and executive directors of other functional areas in the organizations, and communication practitioners) who work together to shape and make these strategic decisions (Steyn, 2003; Cornelissen, 2008).

Strategic intent is of central importance in communication strategy, and concerns the identification of a desired position for the organisation "in terms of how it wants to be seen by its different stakeholders groups upon which the organization is dependent"

(Cornelissen, 2008). In an era of stakeholder management (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Berman et al., 1999), corporate communication strategy should be inseparable from the strategic management of a firm's relationships with its stakeholders (Steyn, 2003). The building, protection, and consolidation of a favourable corporate reputation are the final goals of corporate communication (van Riel, 1995) and constitute some of the most important strategic organisational objectives.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As described in the foregoing section, significant contributions to the debate on communication strategy may be found in the literature. However, a conceptual framework that offers a deeper perspective on communication decisions within corporate communication management still needs to be devised. Indeed, corporate communication can be characterised as a management function (van Riel, 1995) that involves a whole range of managerial activities, such as planning, coordinating, and counselling the CEO and top management (Cornelissen, 2008). However, these issues deserve further attention and in-depth analysis.

Among these, communication resources and the decisions required to create and use them, are worthy of closer examination. In effect, decision-making related to the use of resources is one of the main issues that arise from earlier studies of corporate strategy (Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1965; Andrews, 1971). The proper utilisation of resources is essential for achieving corporate objectives, and as such is considered one of the building blocks of corporate strategy (Hofer and Schendel, 1978). In studies of strategic management, the important role played by the resources in the elaboration of corporate strategies is confirmed and further strengthened by studies that apply a resource-based view. The resource-based view borrows heavily from earlier research by Penrose (1959), and stresses the importance of firm-specific resources for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage over a relatively long period (Lippman and Rumelt, 1982; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1986a, 1986b, 1991; Dierick and Cool, 1989; Grant, 1991; Mahoney and Pandian, 1992; Peteraf, 1993). To gain such an advantage, the resource-based view of the firm posits that resources must be rare, durable, imperfectly imitable, and imperfectly substitutable. Any resources that meet these criteria are of value, and are typically rooted in a unique historical pattern of firm development that tends to provide an enduring advantage in that they are protected by one or both of two isolating mechanisms, namely social complexity and causal ambiguity (Reed and De Fillippi, 1990).

Resources are also key factors in corporate communication. Any strategic intent may be pursued only if the resources required to support it are available. Therefore, decisions on creating and using these resources play a fundamental role in the formulation and implementation of a corporate communication strategy. In the literature on corporate communication, it has been stressed that resources are an important factor in the setting an effective communication strategy and the achievement of communication objectives (Argenti, 2007). However, the resources in question have been discussed in the literature at the general level of money, human resources, and time. Given this lack of specificity, the need arises for a clearer focus and an in-depth examination of the types of resource that may be used for corporate communication. As emphasized by researchers who support the resource-based view, not all corporate resources are easily tradable. Valuable resources (strategic resources) are created within the organisation and controlled by it (Barney, 1991).

Barney's notion is also valid in relation to the corporate resources of communication. Consider a key resource, namely that of the corporate brand. A strong, well-managed corporate brand meets the criteria posited by a resource-based view, and thereby qualifies as a sustainable valuable resource (Balmer and Gray, 2003). "A corporate brand is rare because it is the result of a unique historical pattern of development which suffuses a corporate brand, not only with a rich palette of characteristics that are functional (quality, performance, familiarity and predictability), but also with myriad ethereal elements that are rich in image as well as in symbolic terms" (Balmer and Gray, 2003). The values quoted here have their roots in an organisation's identity (De Chernatony, 1999; Balmer, 2001) as well as in its culture (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). A corporate brand is durable because it tends to decay relatively slowly (Grant, 1991). This feature makes the corporate brand a resource that enjoys a greater longevity than most other types of valuable resources. A corporate brand is also generally thought to be imperfectly imitable, because both of the two isolating mechanisms (i.e. social complexity and causal ambiguity) are at work (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Finally, the fact the unique process that went into the building of the brand renders it imperfectly substitutable.

Apart from considerations about brand, in the literature on the government and management of corporate communication there is little mention of how resources are identified or of the relevant decisions required to create and use them. The present paper aims to address this gap and to provide an in-depth examination of the issues that have been neglected in the past. Therefore, the study presents a conceptual framework for government and management of corporate communication based on Viable Systems Approach (*VSA*) (Golinelli, 2010).

4. A FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE STRUCTURE-SYSTEM PARADIGM FOR GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

The specification of a framework that meets the requirements outlined in the previous section must be based on the prior identification of communication resources.

In line with some basic assumptions that are made by the resource-based view, communication resources can be categorised as being either firm-specific or non-firm-specific.

Firm-specific communication resources express the specific capabilities, strengths, core values, and/or historical references relevant to a particular organisation. They are rooted in the firm's identity, allowing it and its products to be recognised by stakeholders. Therefore, firm-specific communication resources are valuable and unique, and give strong support to the creation and maintenance of competitive advantage. These resources are the outcome of strategic decisions, and have long-term implications.

4.1. The main firm-specific communication resources

The main firm-specific communication resources can be identified as:

- basic key words, such as common starting points (van Riel, 1995; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007), themed messages (Cornelissen, 2008), and brand mantras (Keller, 1999);
- distinctive short messages derived from the basic key words. These are typically slogans/taglines (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007);
- unique symbols and sounds, i.e. elements of corporate visual identity and corporate jingles (Birkigt and Stadler, 1986; Fill, 1999; Bernstein, 1984; Abratt and Shee, 1989; Olins, 1989; van Riel, 1995; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Melewar and Saunders, 1998; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007);
- codices (sets of rules or heuristics) related to the management and expression of corporate brand (Tilley, 1999; Balmer and Gray, 2003);
- organisational storytelling (Czarniawska, 1997, 1998; Gabriel, 2000; Brown et al., 2004) derived from corporate stories (Myrsiades, 1987; Larsen, 2000; Smith and Keyton, 2001; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

In contrast, non-firm-specific communication resources are typically acquired through market transactions, and are not based on a firm's identity. They are tradable and have short-term implications. Typical non-firm-specific communication resources are the means of communication (media) and the services/expertise of communication (copywriters, art directors, storytellers etc.) required by an organisation to implement communication strategy in short-term campaigns.

In order to identify a decision-making framework for the use of firm-specific and non-firm-specific communication resources, Parsons' view (1956) of organisational decisions is useful. The contextualisation of the Parsonsian sets of decisions applied to the is a further step in defining the proposed framework. In fact, Parsons identifies the three types of organisational decisions that focus on the creation, utilisation and coordination of resources, in policy, allocation, and coordination.

Policy decisions are those that commit the organisation as a whole. They concern decisions to create the resources required by an organisation, and lead to significant changes in the resources that belong to it. Allocation decisions refer to the choices related to the effective implementation of the resources created by policy decisions. This second type of decision in Parsons' scheme concerns the utilisation of the resources available to the organisation. Finally, coordination decisions are aimed at achieving the integration of the organisation as a whole system, in order to achieve the proper coordination of resources.

4.2. Policy and coordination decisions of communication at the strategic level (governance)

Within the framework, policy decision-making at the strategic level concerns the firm-specific communication resources created by an organisation, and has long-term implications. Policy decision-making usually involves a number of different parties, namely communication managers, CEOs, managers of other functions or departments, and practitioners. Firm-specific resources are made coherent, harmonised, and synergised by decisions related to the coordination of communication. Indeed, integrated communication also occurs at a strategic level, and not only at a tactical-operational level (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000).

In this respect, corporate visual identity and other firm-specific communication resources should be designed via decisions on policy and coordination to support the communication requirements to build a strong reputation, e.g. visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency, and consistency (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004). These five requisite qualities are all inter-related and are intertwined with impressions based on the symbols and means of communication used within an organisation (van den Bosch et al., 2005).

Decisions on policy and coordination in communication are a part of the communication strategy under the proposed framework. Indeed, communication strategy is considered to be a ‘dual’ decision aligned with corporate strategy and the core values shared by members of the organisation (i.e. corporate culture). Communication strategy involves two types of closely linked decisions, related to: (1) the strategic intent of an organisation, concerning its desired position in terms of corporate reputation as informed by the vision of the CEO and senior executives (i.e. organisational vision) (Cornelissen, 2008); and (2) the creation and coordination of firm-specific communication resources (see Table 1). The strategic intent involves a change or consolidation of the organisation’s reputation.

Policy and coordination decision-making refers to the stages of planning, organisation, and coordination at the strategic level of corporate communication management.

Table 1 - Corporate communication decision-making: a framework based on decisions on the creation and utilisation of communication resources

<table>
<tr><th>Levels of decision making process for corporate communication</th><th colspan="2">Corporate communication decisions</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Strategic

(governance)</td><td rowspan="2">Communication strategy
(dual decision)
(long-term implications)</td><td>Strategic intent
Decision on the desired position
for the organisation in terms of corporate reputation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Policy and coordination decisions
Decisions on the creation
of firm-specific communication resources</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tactical and operational

(management)</td><td colspan="2">Allocation and coordination decisions
(short-term implications)
Decisions on the utilisation of firm-specific
and non firm-specific communication resources</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Siano, Vollero, Confetto, and Siglioccolo (2010).

Within the process of strategic management, policy decisions refer to planning, organization and coordination of firm-specific communication resources. The policy decisions are governance decisions and involve defining the resources of the communication structure. The concept of structure is derived from Viable Systems Approach (Golinelli, 2010; Barile and Saviano, 2011) and indicates the set of communication resources that organization has got at a given time. This set of resources, which is the communication structure of the firm, may undergo various types of changes and adjustments (addition of new resources, elimination or modification of existing resources) over time. Policy decisions regulate the structural components of corporate communication in order to guarantee consonance with the stakeholder targets (suprasystems).

The Viable Systems Approach constitutes a valid support for improving and developing managerial skills in the field of corporate communication. The paradigmatic distinction between structure and system (Golinelli, 2010; Barile and Saviano, 2011) clearly enables to grasp the difference between decisions about creating communication resources and decisions of utilization of these structural elements. This distinction is useful to clarify the aims of governance decisions and management decisions in the field of corporate communication.

The distinction between structure and system represents a foundational premise of the systems approach. Structure-system paradigm (Barile and Saviano, 2011) is the key concept of the proposed decision-making framework for the governance and management of corporate communications.

4.3. Allocation and coordination decisions of communication at the tactical-operational level (management)

Under the proposed framework, decisions on allocation and coordination pertain to choices on the utilisation (the 'what', 'when' and 'how') of communication resources (firm-specific and non-firm-specific) in short-term campaigns related to the carrying out of strategic intent. In particular, these decisions concern:

- the utilisation (application) of firm-specific communication resources for conveying messages (advertisements) to the stakeholder groups affected by the strategic intent;
- the selection and utilisation of the communication mix (the techniques and means/channels of communication) used to send messages to stakeholder groups and to carry out the strategic intent;
- the integration, harmonisation, and realisation of coherent, concrete messages (internal and external communications) and the combination of promotional elements of the communication mix (advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, traditional media, digital media, etc.) in order to obtain the synergistic effects of integrated communications (van Riel, 1995; Thorson and Moore, 1996; Schultz and Kitchen, 2000);
- formulation of short-term programmes and campaigns (annual/infra-annual communication plans) in line with the available budget.

Decisions on allocation and coordination are taken by communication managers and practitioners/consultants and refer to the stages of planning, organisation, and coordination at the tactical-operational level within DMPCC (see Table 1).

According to Viable Systems Approach, allocation decisions are management decisions, as they refer to the use of the resources constituting the set of firm-specific communication resources. Allocation decisions also evidently concern the use of non firm-specific communication resources, which are acquired through market transactions (e.g. advertising spaces, services of communication, etc.). The use of firm-specific and non firm-specific communication resources enables to generate corporate communication flows, and, in this way, to create the system of corporate communication of the firm, according to the structure-system paradigm (Barile and Saviano, 2011). Utilising firm-specific communication resources and non firm-specific communication resources, through management decisions, enables the firm to reach its communication objectives and strategic intent.

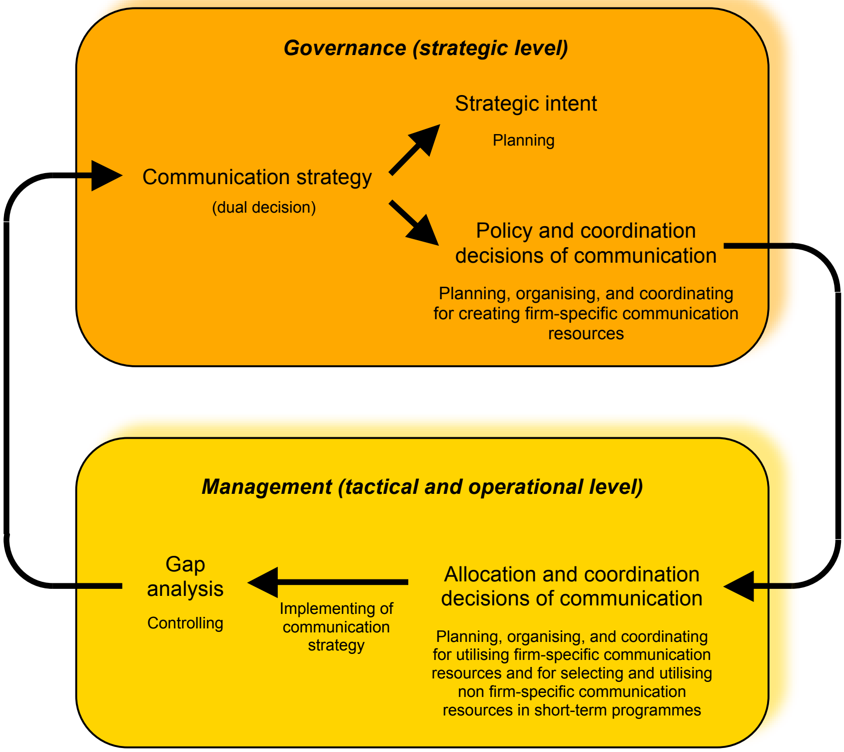
As seen, allocation decisions regard the stages of planning, organising, and coordinating for utilising firm-specific communication resources and for selecting and utilising non firm-specific communication resources in short-term programmes.

4.4. Policy, allocation and coordination decision-making within the circular process of corporate communication management

Following the implementation of a communication strategy, the subsequent stage of communication control within corporate communication management involves the collection of data (feedback) on the results of corporate communication and the assessment of the effects of communication via methods and techniques of reputation measurement (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). In this stage, a gap analysis procedure is carried out to ascertain how the organisation is seen by different stakeholders (its corporate reputation) and its desired position (Cornelissen, 2008). The gap analysis forms the basis of the formulation of a strategic intent aimed at changing or consolidating the organisation's reputation. This analysis provides guidance for further decision-making on policy, allocation and coordination (see Figure 1).

If a firm's strategic intent is not carried out effectively, further policy decision-making might be necessary to change current firm-specific communication resources and/or further allocation decision-making to change how the firm's communication resources are used.

Figure 1 – Decision making for corporate communication: the circular process focused on creating and utilizing communication resources



Source: Adapted from Siano, Vollero, Confetto, and Siglioccolo (2010).

In an interactive, networked marketplace, the allocation and coordination decisions of communication require a sense-adapt-respond approach (Schultz and Kitchen, 2004), in which communication directors and practitioners must constantly listen to the various stakeholder groups in order to satisfy declared or undeclared needs and respond via the most appropriate communication channels and forms.

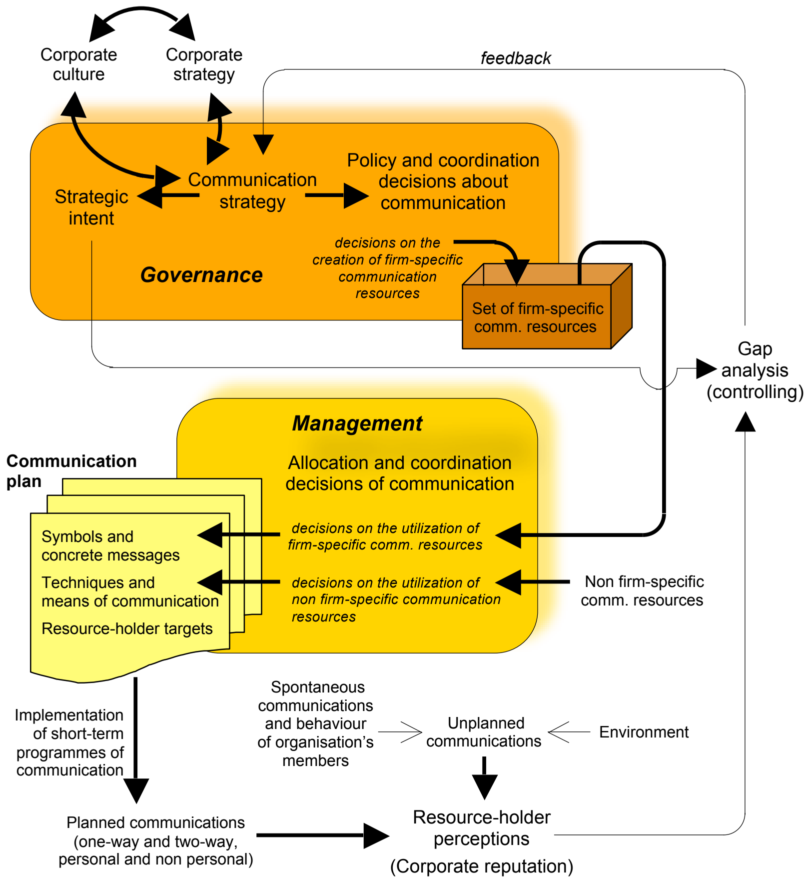
Any changes that arise from adjustments to decisions are aimed at improving planned corporate communication, and at changing the corporate reputation as required.

4.5. Planned communications vs. unplanned communications

The proposed conceptual framework focuses on planned (organisation-controlled or intentional) communications. Planned corporate communications consist of one-way and two-way (personal and non-personal) communications (Hartley and Pickton, 1999). They are implemented through corporate identity cues or signals, namely (1) symbolism (corporate visual identity), (2) planned forms of public relations and sponsorship, publicity, advertising and sales promotion and (3) representational forms of behaviour (e.g. the behaviour of store employees or a firm's call centre staff) (Balmer and van Riel, 1997; Cornelissen and Elving, 2003).

To a certain extent, the behaviour of members of an organisation can be controlled The term 'behaviour' in this context describes the ways in which employees, managers, and CEOs interact with each another and with external audiences in social events. Face to face communications are crucial in transmitting a brand's values. Indeed, these values are discernible through a firm's corporate behaviour and activity (Balmer and Gray, 2003). Actions on the part of CEOs, managers, and staff all play an important role in stakeholders' perceptions of an organisation (Ind, 1990; Gray and Balmer, 1998), because the behaviour of members of an organisation projects its image (Kennedy, 1977; Dowling, 1986). In fact, top management "has a special role to play in representing the organisation to internal and external audiences. In particular, the […] CEO plays an important symbolic role as the spiritual and emotional leader of the organization" (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007:16).

Figure 2 – The decision making process for corporate communication: an overview



Source: Adapted from Siano, Vollero, Confetto, and Siglioccolo (2010).

On the other hand, organisational behaviour is not the only means by which individual members of an organisation interact with stakeholders. Stakeholders also perceive organisational behaviour from the point of view of organisational performance. Socially responsible behaviour can be seen as planned communications, such as advertising and annual reports on an organisation's themes, strategies, initiatives, and managerial practices, that are related to CSR (Lewis, 2003; Dawkins and Lewis, 2003; McWilliams et al., 2005). CSR initiatives may be important elements of building, enhancing, or maintaining a firm's reputation (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Sarbutts, 2003; McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright, 2005; Hillenbrand and Money, 2007).

The signals conveyed by an organisation about its identity consist not only of those that are deliberately planned and timed, but also of those that are unplanned (Grönroos, 2000a). In the latter category are accidental cues or unintended messages, such as those that arise from informal and unofficial communications and the spontaneous behaviour of members of an organisation with respect to outsiders, which often occurs and cannot be fully controlled (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002). Unplanned communications are often unknown to the organisation and very often unwelcome (Markwick and Fill, 1997; Fill, 2005).

A firm's environment is also a source of uncontrolled and uncontrollable communications, such as those launched by its competitors (e.g. through comparative advertising), interpersonal communications (online/offline word-of-mouth), intermediary communications (word-of-mouth disseminated by the mass media, opinion-leaders, NGOs and institutions), and intrapersonal communications (the psychological consequences of previous personal experiences and memories of the individual) (Cornelissen, 2000; Grönroos, 2000b). Uncontrolled communications that issue from the environment reflect either positively or negatively on the organisation and can affect stakeholder perceptions and corporate reputation-building (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002).

An overview of the process of corporate communication management is illustrated in Figure 2, which makes use of the framework proposed in Table 1. The levels at which decisions are made, the categories of communication decisions and communication resources, and the planned and unplanned communications are shown in the Figure.

5. Practical implications

The conceptual framework proposed herein constitutes a useful means of support for managers of corporate communication. It offers a comprehensive view of the different types of communication decisions that need to be taken within corporate communication management in corporate life.

Figure 3 shows typical circumstances of corporate life in which practitioners must focus on policy and coordination decisions of communication. These decisions are mostly made when an organisation is in the start-up stage and needs to create firm-specific communication resources. However, there are other circumstances in which managers must take decisions on communication policy and coordination in order to change one or more firm-specific communication resources, for example in the cases of brand repositioning and overcoming a crisis of reputation. These situations usually involve changes in the positioning expressions of an organisation, and policy-coordination decisions may be required, for example:

– to redefine common starting points/themed messages, thereby adapting them to express core themes around which an organisation can focus its actions and distinctiveness;

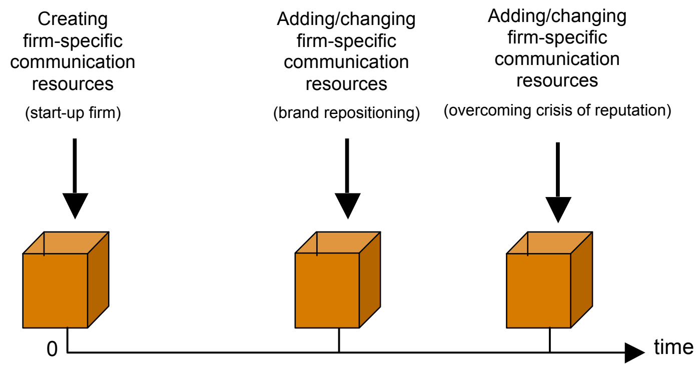
– to reformulate the slogan/tagline in order to increase the consistency between an organisation's actions and brand characteristics;

– to modify one or more elements of corporate symbolism to strengthen emotional appeal and to enable the organisation to be perceived as being more transparent and coherent (via the alignment of core organisational purpose, values, and beliefs with employees, managers, and CEO behaviour);

– to rethink the means of story-telling to render the organisation's statements more credible, in situations of insufficient transparency in the conducting of its affairs.

At the same time, practitioners frequently focus on decisions of allocation and coordination in order to make the best use of a firm's communication resources. Such decisions may be useful in a variety of different ways to increase the visibility and distinctiveness of communication initiatives. A more focused and selective utilisation of a firm's means of communication can help to achieve better visibility through exposure to stakeholders. This involves a rather different use of firm-specific communication resources. For instance, an unusual or alternative way of using a corporate blog may be an appropriate sort of allocation decision.

Figure 3 - Communication policy decisions in typical circumstances of corporate life



Source: Adapted from Siano, Vollero, Confetto, and Siglioccolo (2010).

References to the history of the organisation are another interesting instance of this. Such references can be important manifestations of corporate identity and "can be particularly valuable for corporate communications thanks to the reliability age can provide" (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009). Managers could make allocation decisions that involve the selective use of corporate history to legitimise ideas related to the distinctiveness of an organisation (Schulze, 1987; Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009). This technique can also allow the emphasis, from time to time, of specific aspects of the organisation's history that managers wish to highlight in corporate branding (Lundström, 2006).

6. Summary and Conclusions

The framework for decision-making within corporate communication management that is proposed herein has the overall aim of contributing to the further development of corporate communication as a separate area of management. To this end, we have focused on communication resources and decisions concerning the creation and utilisation of these resources, two topics that have been somewhat neglected in the existing literature.

The particular characteristics of the framework may be summarised as consisting of:

- a distinction between two sets of communication resources: firm-specific and non-firm-specific;
- two levels of decision-making: governance decisions (strategic level) and management decisions (tactical-operational level);
- a circular process of decision-making;
- two sets of decision-making in communication resources according to structure-system paradigm: (1) policy and coordination decision-making at a strategic level (decisions on the creation of a set of firm-specific communication resources); (2) allocation and coordination decisions at a tactical-operational level (decisions on the utilisation of firm-specific communication resources and on the selection and utilisation of non-firm-specific communication resources);
- the need for coordination decisions both at the strategic and tactical-operational levels;
- the consideration of the communication strategy as a 'dual decision', concerning strategic intent and policy and coordination decisions of communication.

The characteristics of the framework support the view that corporate communication is an autonomous area of management. In particular, the Parsonsian view of organisational decision-making as applied to decisions about corporate communication has two main advantages for dealing with corporate communication from a managerial point of view: (1) the distinction between the different types of planned decisions on corporate communication that managers take in corporate life, and (2) the contribution that each type of decision makes to building, protecting, and consolidating a favourable corporate reputation through the use of plans for corporate communication.

The setting of communication strategy as a dual decision also contributes to the view that corporate communication is a separate area of management. It encourages the view that any strategic intent may be pursued only if strategic communication resources are created. If communication strategy is considered as a dual decision, it follows that the creation of firm-specific resources via policy decisions is of great importance in fulfilling the strategic intent.

Nevertheless, an understanding of the key role of communication decisions at the strategic level does not imply that the making of communication decisions at a tactical-operational level can be ignored. In the proposed framework, both types of corporate communication decisions contribute to enhancing corporate reputation.

Ultimately, those practitioners that take the framework as a reference are thus enabled to make decisions on DMPCC following a method that clarifies the basic assumptions, steps, and objectives, and their implications. The insights provided by the study may be considered as (1) elements that lend further arguments to support the consideration of corporate communication as an autonomous area of management and (2) 'stimuli' to encourage a change in the perception of corporate communication as a management function based on professional knowledge and competencies, rather than as a peripheral area of management that is made up of the set of technical skills possessed by practitioners.

The analysis of firm-specific/identity-based communication resources represents a first attempt at addressing a topic that requires in-depth examination. Such investigation should stimulate vigorous debate among researchers from a variety of different backgrounds, for example, corporate communication, branding, and corporate reputation.

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