Corporate Communications as a Strategic Function in State Owned Enterprises: A case study of Namibia Tourism Board (NTB)

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Abstract: **Corporate communications, also known as Public Relations, (PR), has over the years grown into a progressively significant utility in business organisations. This article presents results of empirical study conducted on six Namibian business organisations. The paper used both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection. The main aim of the study was to determine the roles of public relations officials and the overall impact of corporate communications on the overall strategic planning process of an organisation.**

Keywords: **Corporate communication, Education, Public relation, Business organisation and Strategic function.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to determine the roles of public relation officials and the impact on corporate communication on the strategic planning process of an organization. In recent years, researchers and practitioners have become increasingly interested in Corporate Communication Management (CCM). Bowman and Ellis (1969) stressed that corporate communication is a management tool which has arisen in response to increasing concern about the communication in complex and sophisticated corporate organizations. Their views were supported by G M and Dozier (1986) who argued that since corporate communication entails selectively communicating the organization's views and objectives to those stakeholders whom it regards as important, it can therefore be described as a key management strategy.

1.1 Background of the research paper:

For two decades, and particularly during the 1990s, academics and practitioners have engaged in a lengthy attempt to define and develop a method to measure corporate communication. Nonetheless, just what the term means and how it informs assessment methods remains unclear. Although most corporate communication researchers and executives could benefit from using an integrated and more systematic framework, the academic field of corporate communication is scattered, divergent, lacks coherence and has no universal meaning among various professional groups. This confusion concerning the central concept of corporate communication has not been resolved.

However, throughout the 20th century, the field of corporate communication has been developed in schools of communication and journalism under areas called public relations or public affairs. In the early years, corporate communication practitioners worked more on tactical communications with the media for the good image of organizations. In the early 1970's, the corporate world changed and demand from internal and external stakeholders of companies became more sophisticated and complex. The organisations required more than the simple internal public relations (PR) function supplemented by PR consultant firm. For example, public relations practitioners faced great challenges to deal with a 'new generation' of stakeholders. Consequently, the top management of many organizations started looking at communication as more than just a 'communication' to the stakeholder.

1.2 Objectives of the research paper:

To explore the concept of corporate communications in broader context.

To analyse the role and tasks of corporate communications, and particularly, - the impact on strategic decision making.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is commonly acknowledged that corporate communications has an essential part to play in a business organisation. Winner (1993) outlines the significant part that corporate commutations ought to play. Nevertheless, to date, there is no world-wide accepted definition of corporate communications. Winner (1993) cited Harlow as having quite a significant number of definitions of the concept. For the purpose of this study, corporate communications will be seen as: the strategic management process by which an organisation communicates with its various audiences to the mutual benefits of both and to its improved competitive advantage. White and Mazur, (1995) outline that the critical role of public relations officers or communications personnel is still developing as a recognized function. In other terms, it is misinterpreted in several business organisations. Kitchen, (1993) quoted Moore et al as suggesting that the role of cooperate communications personnel is one of the most important in any organisation. Kitchen stressed that the importance of the role of cooperate communication lies in the idea that it is an early cautioning system. His views were supported by Lauzen (1995). Nonetheless, pragmatic studies into the work of the public relations personnel is thus far limited. Wright (1995) sanctions this by producing his concept of the communications executive. His view was resonated by additional authors: Broom et al (1986), Grunig (1992) and Pavlik (1996).

Researchers appear to be vague about what is expected of the PR directors. Howard (1992) compares the process of corporate communications to throwing a dart at a wall and then drawing a target around it. This advocates a repeated role; and possible prevarication around what one should to be doing. Winner, (1993) argues that vagueness is as possible a source of anxiety and stress as being overloaded with work.

A few specialists consider that communication presents the slightest of their worries (Simon, 1986). Jackson (1995) questions the role. There are a wide range of portrayals given to basically a similar errand. All put distinctive accentuation on much a similar activity. It is one that is significantly more extensive than what Grunig and Hunt (1984) recognize as the press agent model. It differs from one business to the other (Brody,1988; Guth,1995) and between various nations (Nessmann, 1995). Communication executives are not simply drawing up promotions and composing purposeful publicity (Howard, 1992). Bowman and Ellis (1969) suggest that professionals exist to make and encourage relations amongst organisations and their publics/stakeholders. As Lauzen (1995) proposes, they furnish social cross-preparation with their publics and hand-off hierarchical esteems to and from their audiences. This may put the professional in a harmful position for he remains between the organisation and the world outside. While White and Mazur (1995) citing Mann comment that businesses or organisations need to close the hole between what they say and the way they act. Howard (1992) investigates the more extensive parts of the workplace. He recommends that the part of best communications officials in major organisations might be a blend of different typologies: organizer, guard dog, impetus, communicator, savant, stimulant, advisor and compatriot. He comments that the executive ought to be unequivocally mindful of his organization's corporate personality, corporate theory, style and structure. The nature of the role requires that the determinations are adaptable, versatile to changes and investigated continually. In the event that system is one of communication or training, personnel should create messages that mirror the coveted practices. Two specific parameters confront a public relations personnel: a) the wellspring of obligation; b) to whom he reports. Pincus et al. (1994) remarks on a conviction usually held among managers of how little they trust PR adds to corporate performance. Maybe to work viably the interchanges managers ought to be helped by high perceivability and status all through his organisation. Is it true that he is an individual from the overwhelming coalition? (Wright, 1995). Howard (1992) focuses on how basic it is that the PR personnel reports direct to the CEO; along these lines guaranteeing that the connection with top administration thinking is as close as would be prudent. Bowman and Ellis (1969) affirm that the PR personnel ought to have a center part in the management structure. Their view is that the specific information and abilities of the professional legitimize his place at the basic leadership table. Lauzen (1995) proposes that the avoidance of experts from this basic leadership process lessens corporate communications to a low classification bolster work. Bowman and Ellis stress this by saying that if the official isn't himself an executive then he ought to undeniably answer to one. A specific method for affirming the status of the expert is to note to whom he reports (Simon, 1986). The status may rely on the organisation's own perspective of communications (Winner, 1993) and of different organisations in its area. Be that as it may, the official

must convey specialist and in substantial associations he should have a lot of it. Absence of media believability as often as possible emerges on the grounds that audiences are not fulfilled that the representative is adequately part of the strategy making to be completely solid (Howard, 1992). White and Mazur (1995) include that the cooperate communications official must be listened to. Alluding to Terrence Collis, they epitomize that he was one of only a handful couple of senior communications officials who had not only clout, as well as supposedly had it. The organisation should admire him as a man of knowledge. Organisations are starting to comprehend that with such a significant number of social, political and moral issues affecting their execution, dependable supervisors must choose the option to consolidate an attention to open issues into their day by day administration choices. The certainty that should exist between the association and its communications personnel must be shared. Unquestionably there are events when the organization needs to look for the executive's chamber with respect to how a fragile issue ought to be dealt with (Winner, 1993). Albeit much has been published regarding the matter, no observational research on the part and undertakings of corporate interchanges has been found after a broad research.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The little measure of existent research does not lead scholars towards information of what the corporate communication personnel does; for instance, Anderson, (2001) thinks about whether the role differs between organisations. Nor does it show which unequivocally his audiences may be (or where they may be found). Allert, and Chatterjee, (1997) ague that that the roles of the corporate communications personnel has no limit regardless of organisations. However, Argenti, (1994), brings a very important question in his findings. He stresses that in the event that there is no limit to the roles, who sets them and where are they found.

The researcher's underlying exploration demonstrates that 10 percent of respondents trust that the role varies between companies; research affirms this is absolutely the case amongst public and private companies. Contrariwise those interviewed affirmed in rise to measures that social issues effect on the role; as does the impact of the CEO. Nonetheless, 40 percent of interviewees felt that there were varieties, yet just of a degree. There was an assertion concerning the two, its decent multiplicity and range. Further, respondents alluded to relatively boundless potential and of the need to guarantee consistency of the message to an extensive range of people.

The researcher found that the role has a couple of limits. 45 percent of the communications personnel/PR personnel met have widespread independence; another 35 percent felt that such requirements that are forced upon them are slight - not minimum in light of the fact that most report directly to their CEO. One cooperate communications chief talked about the magnificent activity; in spite of the fact that he seemed conceded that it can be tedious. One delineation of the last mentioned was the issue caused when the activities of her workers were in coordinate clash with her recommendations or advices. Thus she was regularly in this manner left with the undertaking of grabbing the subsequent PR pieces.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion is affirmed in the researcher's mind by the way that the vast majority of those interviewed showed extensive information of, and bent for, a comprehension of the significance of communications strategy; quite a number being worried about supporting their offer cost or advising their colleagues. Similarly as fascinating was the overwhelming hand utilized by some real CEOs in shaping their own strategy especially on the foot: intriguing likewise was the inconvenience of PR strategy on the PR individuals from board level in a noteworthy grocery store.

Corporate communications is rapidly becoming a senior discipline. It cries out for further research in a number of areas. The impact of excellent communications and their effect on strategic processes is one; the role that it plays in developing and promoting corporate image and identity is unquestionably another.

The challenge for future is to identify the construct of corporate communication both as an interdisciplinary academic field of study that draws on a broader range of specialties bound by principles and theoretical and methodological issues and as a community of practice in which individuals and groups with similar occupational skills share common goals and interests associated with corporate communication.

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