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CEO Communication and Reputation in the Czech Republic: An Inspiration for Czech SMEs

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Abstract

The article endeavours to explain approaches to strategic communication by chief executive officers (CEOs) and other executives. A CEO's good communicative capabilities can have a positive impact on both corporate reputation and the efficiency of the organization as such. Supporting the reputation of the company through appropriate CEO communication should be a key goal of communication professionals in large companies as well as in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This article uses data from the European Communication Monitor (ECM), which is a unique and largest transnational survey on communication management. The critical overview of this survey, carried out among communication professionals in the Czech Republic, describes the Czech approach to CEO strategic communication, and may be an inspiration for SMEs in the Czech Republic.

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Keywords: strategic communication; public relations; CEO; marketing; European Communication Monitor

1. Introduction

The aim of strategic communication is to support 'organisational goals and drives corporate value' (Zerfass et al. 2013:7). The management of communication processes in Europe has been strongly institutionalized over the past few decades, and a collective pattern of communication has created a demand for professionals who are involved in internal and external communication (Verhoeven et al. 2011:95). In commercial, governmental, public or non-governmental organizations, communication professionals are essential to decision-making and strategic planning.

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The development of strategic communication is important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well. Moreover, 'small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in the Czech Republic, have big shortcomings in strategy making and planning' (Koudelková; Orban 2013).

Organizational communication is mostly described as public relations. Nevertheless, we also encounter terms like communication management, corporate communication, integrated communication or strategic communication as well (Verhoeven et al. 2011:96). I will use the term strategic communication in this paper.

Research on strategic communication is rapidly developing field of study (Hallanah et al. 2007, Moreno et al. 2009, Moreno et al. 2010, Verhoeven et al. 2011, Zerfass et al. 2013). Many recent research papers in the field of strategic communication or public relations have been focused on international comparison. One of the distinctive, long-term research projects is called the European Communication Monitor (ECM). The ECM was organized for the seventh consecutive time in 2013, and conducted the most comprehensive research in communication management and public relations worldwide, with 2,710 participating professionals from 43 countries. The Czech Republic was one of the countries.

There are a few articles about the development of strategic communication in the Czech Republic (for example, Savitt 2001, Kasl Kollmannová; Orban 2013, Kollmannová 2013). Nevertheless, comprehensive comparison of the state of strategic communication both in the Czech Republic and abroad is lacking. This paper therefore focuses on the state of Czech strategic communication in international comparison. The research is based on data from the ECM 2013. The main focus of the work is on strategic communication in relation to CEOs, which means that the following research questions need to be asked:

RQ1: What are the most important factors in relation to a CEO for the overall success of an organization in the Czech Republic and abroad?

RQ2: What are the most important competencies of a CEO in the Czech Republic and abroad?

RQ3: In what communication situations is a CEO's reputation the most relevant?

2. The research context and methods used

The ECM is a long-term international project for research on communication management, which is conducted by a group of experts led by Professor Ansgar Zerfass at the University of Leipzig.

It is organized by the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA), the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD), and Communication Director magazine. 2,710 communication professionals from 43 countries replied to a questionnaire focused on five key areas: the personal characteristics of communication professionals (demographics, education, job status, professional experiences); features of the organization (structure, country); attributes of the communication function; the current situation of strategic communication (Zerfass et al. 2013:9).

The questionnaire consisted of 39 questions divided into 18 sections. 43.2 per cent of the participating respondents work as communication managers or CEOs in a communication consultancy. 28.4 per cent are responsible for a single communication discipline or are unit leaders, and 22.5 per cent are team members or consultants.

74.8 per cent of the respondents worked in communication departments in joint-stock companies, private companies, governmental, private, political, or non-profit organizations. 25.2 per cent of the respondents are communication consultants working freelance or for agencies and consultancies

Most respondents (35.3 per cent) are based in western Europe, followed by northern Europe (26.2 per cent), southern Europe (24.5 per cent), and eastern Europe (14.1 per cent). The Czech Republic is included in the last-mentioned group (Zerfass et al. 2013:11). The east European region also included countries which are usually not considered at all: Armenia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. This region provided 381 of the answers of the communication professionals. There were 68 respondents from the Czech Republic, that is, 2.5 per cent of all respondents in the research.

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