

# Professional Languages Alone Do Not Suffice for Successful and Socially Responsible Internal Communication between Different Cultures

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## Abstract

Successful internal communication in an intercultural environment depends on the organizational culture, business environment, social responsibility, and leaders' skills. Thus, internal communication and employee adaptation to changing business environments ask what a successful socially responsible internal communication requires. This contribution discusses theoretical foundations of qualitative research, how the organizational culture can define which direction the organization should choose to attain social responsibility, and how internal communication can improve understanding of professional language and be decisive in a working environment. The generated model offers insights into understanding social responsibility and organizational culture to improve internal communication.

**Keywords:** organizational culture, social responsibility, communication, internal communication, business languages.

## Introduction

Leading a successful organization is difficult. Employees are their organization's living workforce; their adaptation to new business environments crucially has an impact on business success. This proposes the question of whether knowledge of professional languages is enough for successful internal communication of different cultures, along with other questions, such as how much the knowledge of organizational culture matters in an organization for internal communication. One must understand how organizational communication matches social responsibility, too.

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In order to address the challenge of successful and socially responsible internal communication in different business environments, the authors structured this article into several chapters. The methodology of the research is presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, in which the authors examine the theoretical foundations of organizational social responsibilities, organizational culture, and internal communication. The authors further search for interaction between theoretical foundations to better understand successful internal communication and indicate that simply understanding that knowledge of professional languages for successful internal communication may not be enough. The authors of this article ask two main questions: 1) Do business environment, social responsibility, and organizational culture affect successful internal communication? 2) Is business language enough for successful internal communication? Hence, the authors present two important hypotheses:

H1: Business environment, social responsibility, and organizational culture affect the success of internal communication.

H2: Business languages only partially suffice for success of internal communication.

For their theoretical research, the authors used scientific description, which helped them to define theoretical starting points on organizational culture, internal communication, social responsibility, and professional languages. The authors also used the comparison method. Thus, the authors explored and compared different theoretical starting points and facts. The methods of deduction and induction have a significant influence on the research, which helped the authors reach important conclusions. At the end of this paper, the authors define the practical purpose of their research.

## Methodology

The authors begin with a literature review on the findings of Slovene and global foreign authors on the organizational culture, internal communication, social responsibility regarding the leadership skills, and role of business languages.

Researchers' "biases" also belong to the majority limitations of this article, including the authors' relationship to the problem under research. The authors explain their reasons for researching it, i.e., to increase their credibility. It is important to select a dialectical system of perspectives on the same topic (Mulej, 1979).

To match the selected limits, the authors used the following keywords: social responsibility, organizational culture, organizational culture analysis, internal communication, and business languages for the databases Google Scholar,

Cobbi.si, and Scopus. The authors found in Google Scholar 31 sources linking corporate social responsibilities and organizational culture; in Cobbi.si, 22 sources; in Scopus, nine source. Links between corporate social responsibilities and internal communication were found in Google Scholar in over 200 sources; in Cobbi.si, 12 sources; in Scopus, one source, only two works on the authors' topic were found similar, which proved beneficial for this work. The first used article researched coherence between organizational culture and changes in corporate social responsibility in an economic downturn (Jaakson et al., 2012); the second described a variety of perspectives on corporate social responsibility (McWilliams et al., 2006). Jaakson et al. (2012) explored manifesting of different types of organizational culture in certain corporate social responsibility activities to uncover how the presence of certain types induces changes in social responsibility caused by drastic shifts in the economic environment. McWilliams et al. (2006) offer a good indicator of a variety of perspectives on corporate social responsibility, which were used to develop a framework for consideration of the strategic implications of corporate social responsibility.

The method used, i.e., single case study, serves as an exploratory study.

## Corporate Social Responsibility

In its globally official (and sense-making) definition (in ISO 26000), the social responsibility means one's responsibility for one's influences over society, i.e., humans and nature, reaching beyond and including legal obligations (ISO, 2010). Social responsibility belongs to human attributes expressed with seven principles in ISO 26000, i.e., accountability; transparency; ethical behavior; respect for stakeholders; respect for rule of law; respect for international norms; respect for human rights; crucial are two concepts from systems theory: interdependence and holistic approach (ISO, 2010). Thus, social responsibility should replace, in a nontechnological innovation process, the current abuse of the government and market by the most influential persons via neoliberalism. This will require innovation of values, culture, ethics, and norms and can hardly result from activities of humans with no (positive) mental toughness (e.g., Potočnik, 2016; Zupančič, 2016; Cunk, 2016; Felber, 2012; Štrukelj, Boršič, 2014; Štrukelj, 2015; Rašič, 2015; Schwab, 2016; Gostiša, 2017).

Originally, one saw in social responsibility a human attribute; later one started discussing corporate social responsibility (Zore, 2016). However, organizations make no decisions and undertake no actions; they are tools of decisive persons. Companies are called "legal entities" to diminish the humans' individual responsibility and to divide it from decisive humans'

rights. (See contributions in Hrast eds., 2016–2017; Mulej & Dyck, ed., 2014 & 2015 [four books]; Mulej et al., ed., 2013, 2014, 2015 [three guest-edited journal issues]; Mulej et al., ed., 2016 [three books]; Gostiša, 2014 & 2017; etc.)

Wartick and Cochran's (1985) model for corporate social responsibility redefined Carroll's (1979) four dimensions of corporate social responsibilities as the "principles of corporate social responsibility." Hence, an organization's culture would form the basis to formulate and manage its social responsibilities. The corporate social responsibility dimensions and activities that are most relevant to the business environment in developing countries relate to workplace, society, and environment (Visser, 2005).

Social responsibility constitutes a strong commitment to social obligations via the organizational culture emphasizing the execution of organization's obligations toward its employees and other stakeholders (Sharma et al., 2009, p. 207 in Milfelner et al., 2015, p. 222). A good definition of corporate social responsibility, with a common terminology, as in ISO 26000 (ISO, 2010), aids humans in modeling the role of organizational culture and leadership in determining the importance of their corporate social responsibility. Researchers now can analyze how changes in corporate control, particularly through mergers or acquisitions, affect the type and level of corporate social responsibility activity in organizations (McWilliams et al., 2006).

Analysis of the strategic implications of corporate social responsibility is hampered by cross-country/cultural differences in the institutions that regulate market activity, including businesses, labor, and social agencies. Environmental differences lead to different expectations and returns to activity. For companies operating in multiple countries/cultures, this complicates the decisions on which activities to engage in and how much to invest. As the knowledge base on corporate social responsibility develops worldwide, one will be better able to analyze and advise on corporate social responsibility regarding an organizational culture (McWilliams et al., 2006).

## Organizational Culture

The literature in the 1980s (Peters & Waterman 1982) discussed organizational culture and explored the success of Japanese companies (Ouchi, 1981; after Alvesson, 2002). In early 2000, authors started to define organizational culture as a comprehensive system of norms, values, notions, beliefs, and symbols (Rozman 2007, 2008, & 2010; Schein, 1990; Denison et al., 2012; Fullan, 2014, pp. 5–6; Verčič, Verčič & Sriramesh, 2012; Schein 2010). Sweeney and McFarlin (2002, p. 336) define organizational culture as beliefs, values, and behavior, which are visible internally

and externally. "How we do things around here" reads their understanding of it.

Many authors on organizational changes involve organizational culture in one sense or another (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008, p. 15). Their common denominator may be social responsibility, exposing responsibility, interdependence, and holism (ISO, 2010; EU, 2011) and principles and measures of business innovation as integral parts of the values, organizational culture, ethics and norms of behavior. Their implementation should make employees, for normal egoistic reasons, be less selfish (short-term and narrow-minded) than in the previously dominant practice. Therefore, the solution to the problem can be found in the new synergy of knowledge of the growing dominance of the creative class, requisite holism, and social responsibility, thus replacing affluence as a dead-end; the new motivation lies in proper organizational culture, which would lead also to employees' creativity-based well-being (Žižek et al., 2009a, p. 9). Culture is often either the key issue to be changed or something that one must take seriously to enable change (Dauber et al., 2012).

## Modifying the Organizational Culture

One must define the norms and values of organizational members who interact with organizational internal communication to understand an organizational culture better (Treven, 2001, p. 45).

When companies are expanding into other countries, leadership must become much more sophisticated, and the companies must prepare their employees to adapt to the new culture and communication, putting the new organizational culture in the framework of social responsibility (Fullan, 2014, pp. 5-6). Some authors (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008) suggest that the frequent neglect of the aspect of organizational culture is a major reason why organizational change efforts often fail to match the plan. Few if any organizational changes navigate around culture rather than tackle cultural changes. The organizational change involves confronting the persistent pattern of behavior that is blocking an organization's higher performance, diagnosing its consequences, and identifying the underlying assumptions and values that have created it. At a minimum, culture may create problems and deserves consideration. This demands a look beyond surface and at the meaning, definitions, and identities of the people involved (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2014).

Many researches confirmed the effect of organizational culture and knowledge on sharing behaviors, especially those that matters for social responsibilities (Bhatt, 2001; Koskinen eds., 2003; Arenius eds., 2003).

Organizational configuration is any multidimensional constellation of conceptually distinct characteristics that commonly occur together (Meyer & Hathaway, 1993). With this kind of analysis and the possibility of subsequent business environment changes, management can carry out such an analysis successfully with the help of internal communication (Meyer & Hathaway, 1993). Analyzing and changing internal communication regarding the business environment and social responsibilities is important and complex. Thus, global organizations must support organizational values such as openness to change and learning, including adoption of values of social responsibility, ethical behavior (Keyton et al., 2012, pp. 13–15).

### Internal Communication

Every employee has information that is necessary for the entire staff and critical for the successful internal communication and, consequently, the social responsibilities (Thill & Bove, 2002). If one poorly understands the organizational culture, one's expert knowledge of languages will not enable successful communication; it might cause the failure of it, which in turn will lead to organizational and individual stress. Then, one will realize that a successful internal communication (Možina et al., 2004) demands several interaction skills for successful leadership. They include the employees' socialization, identification with their organization, training, information, animation, motivation and loyalty, knowledge of the organizational culture, social responsibility, etc. Then, the professional languages will matter more because the goals will be clear.

Poor internal communication indirectly causes poor organizational performance: employees lose confidence in their leaders (Bitenc, 2006), especially if they detect that the organizational culture is neither matching social responsibility nor their own values regarding the organizational culture. Employee satisfaction drops, and (good?) organizational results can no longer make them loyal to an organization. Employee dissatisfaction causes poor work performance, more absence, grouping, poor work quality, and a lack of interest in creating progress—all of which causes long-term problems in the organization's operations.

### Model of Successful and Socially Responsible Internal Communication

The resulting new management model of successful and socially responsible internal communication matters (Figure 1). It can help one understand the preconditions for successful social responsible internal communication when an

organization is in a new business environment and is confronting different business cultures.

Successful and socially responsible internal communication in multinational organizations demands perception of the national (and regional) culture and its role in internal communication in a multicultural business environment. To understand this connection, first, one must determine the culture's influence on employees' behavior, which consequently affects the values and norms of organizational culture or can even break social responsibility. The interaction between national culture in a new business environment and expanded organization is shown in the authors' model of successful and socially responsible internal communication (see Figure 1).

Why is understanding of internal communication important and why is such a model necessary? There are many reasons, including the successful organization's performance based on realizing its social responsibility, which the authors included (Figure 1). Waldman et al. (2004) apply strategic leadership theory to corporate social responsibility because certain aspects of transformational leadership are positively correlated with the propensity of organizations to engage in corporate social responsibility. These leaders employ corporate social responsibility activities strategically (McWilliams et al., 2006). This means that corporate social responsibility is also visible in employees' health, administrative innovation, business learning, life-long learning, and environmental questions, which directly reflect in an organization's leadership and organizational culture (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000, p. 91). One proves many links of corporate social responsibility to the organizational strategy (Waldman et al., 2006; McWilliams et al., 2006; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Baron, 2001; etc.), but links to the internal communication are still poorly researched.

For successful and socially responsible internal communication, one must know the differences of organizational cultures between various business environments and their characteristics (see Figure 1). Differences between cultures cause invisible barriers, which one can be overcome with knowledge and willingness to change the latter for a successful operation within the organization. If knowing and understanding the cultural differences of a business environment within social responsibility, managers can direct their employees in the right direction with successful internal communication. Taking into account cultural characteristics and business practices of other countries matters for successful business and competitiveness (Brenčič & Hrastelj, 2003, p. 261).

Diversity of languages is a major difference in cultures (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000, p. 94), i.e., language expresses

character and values of a culture but not an organizational culture itself, which depends on other norms, beliefs, etc. Based on that, the authors can claim that knowing and speaking another language is a first step toward knowledge of foreign country's culture, but neither toward knowledge of values of the organizational culture and corporate social responsibilities nor toward successful and socially responsible internal communication (Cateora & Graham 2002, p. 106).

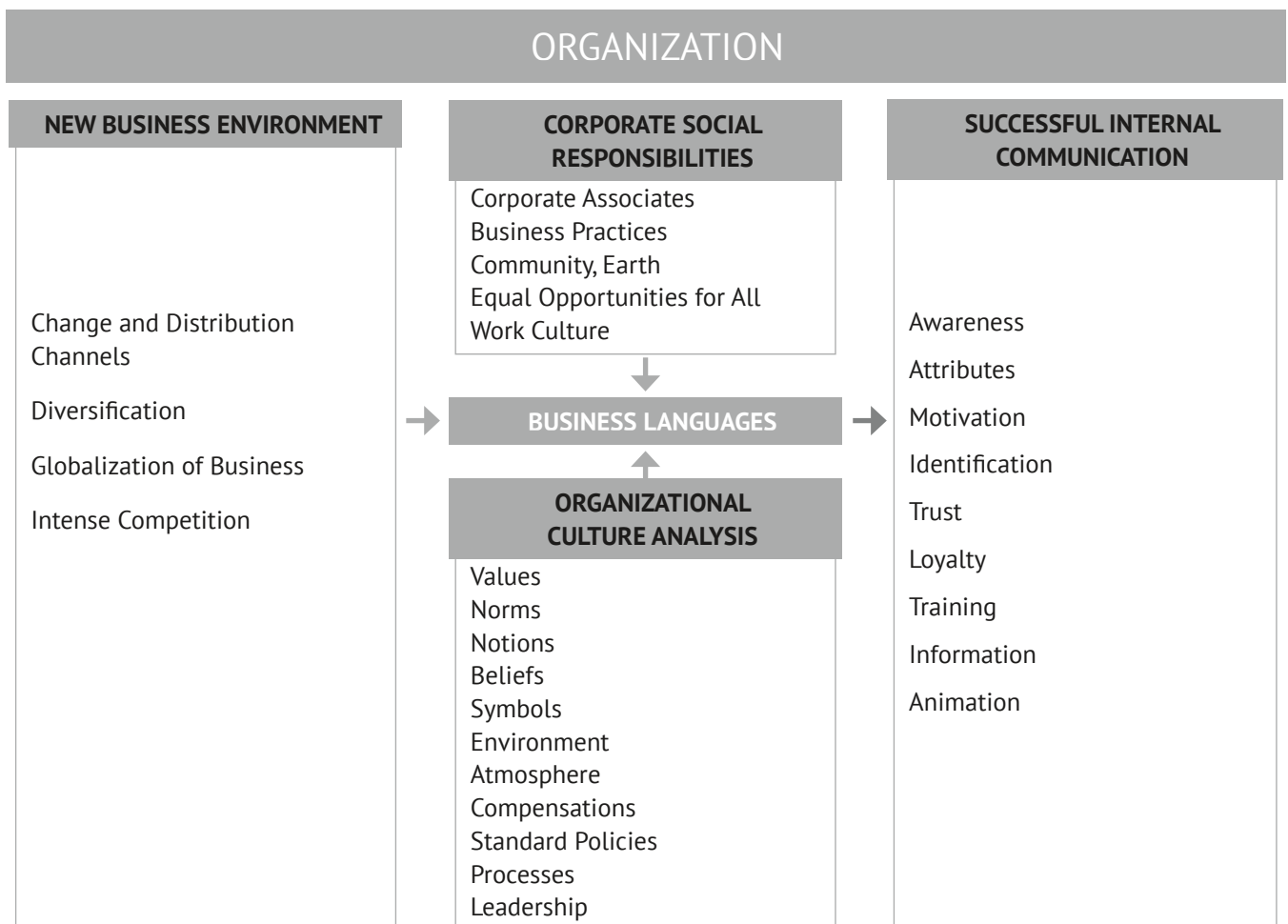
## Discussion and Implications

This article can help humans to realize that knowledge of professional foreign languages alone is not enough for successful and socially responsible internal communication between different cultures. Organizational culture differs from organization to organization and requires analysis for people to understand by which principles employees work and what are the goals of successful internal communication within social responsibilities as tools of the whole organization regarding their new business environment.

In regard to the first question of this article, if the business environment, social responsibility, and organizational culture affect successful internal communication, the authors can respond positively. The authors can add that one's knowledge of language barriers and understanding of intercultural organizational differences within the organization in other business environments can enable a successful organizational operation. Knowledge of a professional language is an important skill for highly qualified personnel, but understanding an organizational culture matters even more in successful internal communication, i.e., it shows the values and norms that are necessary for the successful operation of an organization, considering organizational cultures within social responsibilities.

The second question of this article asks if business languages alone suffice for successful internal communication. Thus far, the authors claimed that the importance of knowledge of foreign languages grows only when organizations are aware of their organizational culture and corporate social responsibilities regarding their business environment. Knowledge of foreign languages is an employees' indispensable competence; it belongs in an organization's objectives and vision.

**Figure 1.** Integrated Model of Successful and Socially Responsible Internal Communication



Source: Authors



But which foreign specialized language is the “essential” one for a successful business? From the literature (Wright 1999, p. 199), one can see that English is the official global working language in politics, economy, defence, judiciary, and culture. Language can achieve a global status in society only if it is globally recognized and widespread at ethnically heterogeneous political, economic, and other organizations (Crystal, 1997; Muha, 2003).

Relationships among a business environment, social responsibility, organizational culture, and internal communication are shown via comparison method in the first five chapters of this study, where the authors first used methods of scientific description and defined theoretical starting points. Chapter 6 discusses the followed methods of deduction and induction, where the authors make important conclusions from their theoretical research. With the help of the induction method, the authors created their hypotheses. The authors (Crystal, 1997; Muha, 2003; Wright, 1999, p. 199; Thill & Bovee, 2002, p. 165; Cateora & Graham, 2002, p. 106, et al.) claim that successful internal communication depends on many different factors such as understanding of organizational culture, organization strategy, intercultural competence, organizational environment, etc. Hence, the authors of this article support Hypothesis 1 and claim that business environment, social responsibilities, and organizational culture affect the success of internal communication. The second essential question asks if the knowledge of professional languages alone suffices for the successful internal

communication. Several authors (Crystal, 1997; Muha, 2003; Wright, 1999, p. 199; Thill & Bovee, 2002, p. 165; Cateora & Graham, 2002, p. 106, et al.) claim that knowledge of business language is important, but it is not the only factor that matters for successful internal communication. Thus, the authors of this article support and accept Hypothesis 2, which states that business languages only partially suffice for successful internal communication.

The authors (Terpstra & Sarathy, 2000, p. 91; Mumel, 2008, pp. 187-188; Golobič, 2010, Lipičnik, 2005, et al.) claim that successful implementation of socially responsible internal communication requires control over its most common obstacles. Thus, the authors include the consequences of (1) the different meaning of information for individuals, (2) the false belief, (3) the mentality, the relationship between superiors and employees, (4) the characteristics of vertical and horizontal communication in the organization, (5) mutual distrust, (6) the transfer of only positive information in order to glorify oneself, (7) competitiveness, (8) too quick conclusions and other factors.

Further research should be based on the development of the questionnaire (measurement instrument) aimed to measure types of organizational culture and social responsibility regarding new business environments and business languages, which should be utilized in daily business. Measurements should support socially responsible internal communication in multinational organizations, which are often in different business environments.

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## Poklicni jezik ne zadošča za uspešno in družbeno odgovorno interno komunikacijo med različnimi kulturami

### Izvleček

Na uspeh notranje komunikacije v medkulturnem okolju pomembno vplivajo organizacijska kultura, poslovno okolje, družbena odgovornost in veščine vodij. Za uspeh le-te in adaptacije zaposlenih na spremembe okolja je ključno, kaj je potrebno zanj glede na družbeno odgovornost. Članek predstavlja teoretična izhodišča kvalitativne raziskave in prikaže, kako lahko pravilno definirana organizacijska kultura v delovnem okolju ob upoštevanju poslovnega okolja pomaga izboljšati interno komunikacijo; pri tem izpostavi znanje tujih jezikov. V članku je tako oblikovan model redne pozornosti na razumevanje družbene odgovornosti in organizacijske kulture, kateri izboljšuje notranjo komunikacijo.

**Ključne besede:** organizacijska kultura, družbena odgovornost, komunikacija, notranja komunikacija, poslovni jeziki