
CHARACTERISTICS AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

In today's business environment, well-established cooperative relationships allow for a lasting competitive advantage. The significance of cooperative relationships can be demonstrated by the concept of relational capital in which the surplus value of an enterprise is considered when its estimation by classical valuation methods, both accounting and financial, does not coincide with objectively perceived total value of the enterprise. It was assumed that the organization's relations with the elements of the task environment (the relations with the cooperating entities in particular) are, at its basis, of a voluntary nature, so they can be shaped by individual organizations. It was also assumed that the organizational communication system influences the shape of the cooperative relations, and in consequence it influences the potential benefits associated with them.

1. The cooperative relationships

According to the resource paradigm of an organization, relational resources are important to the functioning of such an organization. These resources come from various inter-organizational activities [24, p. 22], and inter-organizational relations

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in particular. These relationships tie organizations and external entities as equal peers. In principle, they include suppliers, clients and competitors, whose importance as actors of horizontal relations has increased over the last few decades [16].

The concept of organization's relations with the environment, especially with the elements of the task environment, can refer to two kinds of relationships. Firstly, these bonds can be interactive, which means that they can involve the exchange of resources, including knowledge. Secondly, relationships may be noninteractive when organizations share some common features, such as cognitive systems, value systems [18] or identity and strategy derived from isomorphism [4]. Interactive relationships with the environment represent relatively durable transactions, flows of resources, and other types of connections between the organization and at least one element from its environment [17]. Such relationships in the light of the resource-based view sum up to the relational capital. A particular type of relationships with the environment are inter-organizational relationships, that can be perceived as the outcome of a process in which at least two organizations have formed strong ties and extended their social, economic and technical services to reduce costs or increase organizational value, and in consequence to obtain mutual benefits [1].

Relationships between companies can be analyzed in respect to different areas and from multiple perspectives. C. Lane and R. Bachmann suggested an analysis of relationships at three levels – interpersonal, organizational and institutional [13]. The core of a relationship can be based on interpersonal contacts, contracts or membership in associations uniting organizations that are present in a given sector – these are called the institutional relationships.

Contract-based relationships have the greatest importance for an organization's activities, as contracts are the basic instrument for regulating business. Agreements between cooperators can be broken down according to the area of the contract-based regulations. This way a few different kinds of contracts can be distinguished, including development, purchasing, production, marketing and distribution agreements [22, p. 131]. The extent to which the given areas are regulated by the agreements can thus be considered as a measure of the interconnection of the partners. These relationships are generally formed by the manifestation of the will of the cooperation. The cooperative relationships can be divided into arm's length contractual relations, which do not form an implicit long-term commitment, and obligational relations that impose such an obligation. The criteria that differentiate these two types of relationships are interdependence and time span for reciprocity [20, p. 4].

Considering the above remarks on the perception of relationships, it is necessary to adopt the definition according to which the cooperative relationships form vertical or horizontal ties between cooperators (i.e. an organization and its suppliers, customers and cooperating competitors), maintaining the repetitive flows of tangible and intangible resources to obtain mutually satisfying benefits.

The dynamics of contemporary business environment justify the need to have a broader look at interactions between organizations. These entities do not limit their actions to the analysis of their relationships only in the context of inter-organizational relationships, but more often they consider the dynamics of network structures in which they participate. According to M. Ebers [21], inter-organizational networks can be defined as certain bonds that establish repetitive, partner-specific relationships based on an exchange of a definite (often determined as a moment of reaching a common goal or desire to terminate a relationship for another reason) or an indefinite period between a finite number of business actors. These actors maintain individual control over their resources, but in some cases, they also negotiate or co-ordinate their use. This is different from the market as a structure of resources allocation, where one-sided coordination of plans and actions is preferred. In addition, as a part of business networks, participants communicate a wider range of information to each other than in the case of separate market exchanges. Inter-organizational networks differ from hierarchy (enterprise), understood as a structure of resource allocation, primarily because their participants do not create a new economic entity, and thus maintain a unilateral control over their own resources. B.R. Barringer, J.S. Harrison [2, p. 387] presented a concept in which inter-organizational networks are created by constellations of enterprises more often organized with social contracts as underlying bonds, rather than legally binding contracts as a foundation. According to the authors of this concept, a network is a separate form of cooperation alongside other ways of the allocation of resources (i.e. market and hierarchy). It should be noted, however, that in the networks themselves there are different forms of cooperation between the participants, so that the relationship between the network and the different types of cooperation (relations) can be treated as analogous to the relation of the whole to a part.

T. Ritter, I.F. Wilkinson, and W.J. Johnston [19, p. 179] made a clear distinction between the term of inter-organizational relations and a business network by describing inter-organizational relationships as components of business networks. The authors described five levels of a business activity, from the level of independent actions of individual actors to complex network links between them. Independent actors conduct business activities without entering relationships with other entities. Two-sided relationships (diads) are the relationships between two different actors. A relationship portfolio is a situation in which individual actors are linked by relationships to more participants. The level of interrelated relationships presents the configuration of the actor's relations and the relationships in which the participants of his relationship portfolio remain. At business network level, the analysis is made of all relationships between the elements of a given population. As can be seen, the primary object of analysis in inter-organizational relationships are the relationships between two entities (diads).

E. Urbanowska-Sojkin [23, p. 126] distinguished twelve types of co-operation links between enterprises and arranged a proposal for the gap between the market and the hierarchy, ranking them in order from the lowest to the highest level of cooperation: trade, information exchange, R&D assistance, technical assistance, leasing, co-production, franchising, consortium, joint venture, buyout, and merger. This concept rightly does not consider the structure of inter-organizational networks as a separate category. This can be explained on the one hand by its elusive character of inter-organizational relations, and on the other by their high degree of flexibility – for example, both joint ventures and R&D assistance are elements of inter-organizational networks. Thus E. Urbanowska-Sojkin presented various types of relationships that are elements of inter-organizational networks.

D. Latusek-Jurczak [14] presented a breakdown of forms of cooperation with co-operators based on two criteria. The first criterion of the division was the coordination mechanisms of relations and as a second criterion she has chosen the motivation to enter business relationships, among which she pointed out the benefits of standardization, the benefits of diversity and the collaborative acquisition of knowledge. However, this is not an exhaustive catalog of motives for undertaking inter-organizational co-operation, although the author undoubtedly pointed out the most important values of selected criteria. Especially important is the motive of the joint acquisition of knowledge by the parties of the relationship.

2. The organizational communication system

Organizational communication is perceived as an informal and formal flow of information within the organization [7]. Communication within a single entity allows the transfer of key and relevant information within an enterprise, that in turn allows coordination of employee actions. The organizational communication system is one of the most important components of any organization. It is defined as “those interdependencies and interactions among and within subsystems, through the act of communication, which serve the purposes of the organization”. The system is similarly defined by W. Haney [9], according to whom it is “the coordination by communication of a number of people who are interdependently related”. The multitude of views and definitions of organizational communication and its system are built on following three bases [6, p. 16]:

1. Organizational communication occurs within a complex open systems which is influenced by and influences its environment, both internal (culture) and external,
2. Organizational communication involves messages and their flow, purpose, direction and media,

3. Organizational communication involves people and their attitudes, feelings, relationships and skills.

Considering the above statements, it should be recognized that inter-organizational communication systems developed for cooperative relationships are derivatives of intra-organizational systems, particularly in the context of business-to-business relationships. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the characteristics and instruments of organizational communication systems influence the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships. As technology develops, more and more businesses use instant communication methods. However, they did not divert from more traditional methods used to convey information.

In order to characterize the organizational communication system, five pairs of alternative values describing this system were proposed. These pairs are: 1) unilateral – bilateral, 2) symmetrical – asymmetrical, 3) formal – informal, 4) supportive – defensive, 5) persuasive – informative.

Bilateral communication is defined as a transactional format in which the sender receives and decodes an indication of his relative success in terms of the receiver's comprehension of the content and intent of the sender's message, while unilateral communication occurs in the absence of receiving and decoding such an indication [8, p. 128]. Symmetric communication occurs when two parties send equal amount of information and asymmetric communication is defined as a situation in which there is a difference in magnitude of messages or their number [3, p. 44]. Formal communication is described as a form of conveying information by conventional or official channels used in the organization that is related to the role assumed by the person who sends information and informal communication is a form of conveying role-related and other information by the use of non-standard channels that often do not allow sender to retain the sent message [10; 11]. The concept of supporting and defensive communication was introduced by J. Gibb [5]. According to him a defensive communication climate occurs when an individual feels threatened or anxious while communicating with others. During the process it may appear normal outwardly while inwardly the person is investing considerable mental energy in defending him or herself. On the other hand a supportive communication is clear and accurate with information that is freely shared in encouraging and supportive environment. A informative communication aims at delivering facts and knowledge, while a persuasive communication is designed to convince the recipient that a given outlook or statement is correct [15].

Apart from the characteristics of the organizational communication system also the influence of the use of instruments of this system on the cooperative relationships was examined. We identified twenty five instruments 1) direct conversations, 2) newsletters or newspapers, 3) e-mails, 4) employee discussion forums, 5) help-lines, 6) intranet, 7) social media, 8) newsletters, 9) scripts and manuals, 10) reports,

11) billboards, 12) meetings, 13) opinion and employee attitude surveys, 14) management consultation hours, 15) trade unions publications, 16) ideas and complaints boxes, 17) integration events, 18) management by walking around, 19) unofficial meetings after work, 20) informal relationships between employees, 21) gossips and rumors, 22) supporting staff initiatives, 23) working teams, 24) memos, 25) P.A. systems (business radios).

The outcomes of the research on the influence of the characteristics and instruments of the organizational communication systems on the cooperative relationships are presented in the next section of this paper.

3. The influence of characteristics and instruments of the organizational communication system on the shape of cooperative relationships – presentation of research results

To identify the relationship between the characteristics and instruments of the organizational communications system and the shape of cooperative relations, we decided to adopt several assumptions related to the measures that were used. The organizational communication system has been described by indication to the overwhelming presence of competing characteristic across five pairs of selected alternative statements. Due to the equifinal character of the relationship shaping process, the description of the shape of cooperative relations is based on the level of beneficialness of the relations' shape with different types of co-operators. Four levels of beneficialness were proposed – 1) very unbeneficial, 2) unbeneficial, 3) beneficial and 4) very beneficial. It should be noted that none of the respondents pointed to unbeneficially or very unbeneficially shaped relations with recipients, which can be explained by the fact that the mere existence of relations with customers can be perceived by respondents as a sufficient condition for their beneficialness. Moreover, the answers pertaining to the level of beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships with suppliers and competitors that described them as unbeneficially shaped or very unbeneficially shaped were grouped together, because of small numbers of these answers. The beneficialness in this case is understood as the difference between the effects of a given relationship and the costs associated with it.

The study was conducted in early 2016 on a sample of 97 Polish companies, i.e. companies that are based in the Republic of Poland. The survey questionnaire was sent to 493 companies, of which 114 were returned. In the process of verification of the consistency of the received responses, 17 of them were rejected due to inaccuracies and other defects.

The collation of values of the chi-square independence tests between the characteristics describing the organizational communication system and the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relations was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Collation of chi-squared independence tests values between the characteristics describing the organizational communication system and the beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations of the examined enterprises

Characteristics of organizational communication system	The beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations with		
	suppliers	customers	competitors
unilateral – bidirectional	2.97 (0.5624)	2.31 (0.3146)	6.21 (0.1840)
symmetrical – asymmetrical	3.40 (0.4936)	0.53 (0.7683)	10.45* (0.0335)
formal – informal	1.93 (0.7485)	0.78 (0.6757)	3.43 (0.4886)
supportive – defensive	3.15 (0.5336)	5.04 (0.0804)	3.08 (0.5449)
persuasive – informative	10.10* (0.0387)	5.58 (0.0614)	3.10 (0.5416)

Note: The statistically significant chi-squared independence test scores (with a standard significance level of 0.05) were bolded and marked with asterisks (*).

Source: own study based on empirical research.

When analyzing the data compiled in Table 1, it should be noted that only two values indicate the existence of statistically significant relationships. First of all, there is a significant correlation between the indication of one of the alternative statement in the pair of “symmetrical – asymmetrical” communication and the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relations with competitors. Secondly, there is a statistical relationship between the indication of one of the alternatives of “persuasive – informative” communication and the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationship with suppliers. Moreover, there are two dependencies that are not statistically significant at the standard significance level of 0.05, but have a relatively low p-value. These two dependencies refer to the choice among “supportive – defensive” and “persuasive – informative” as overwhelming characteristics of communication in correlation with the level of the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships with customers.

The outcomes of the survey gave an in-depth insight concerning the level of beneficialness of the cooperative relationships. Almost 70% of enterprises with very beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with competitors use asymmetrical communications within the organization. The rest of them characterized their

organizational communication as symmetrical. In the case of enterprises with very unbeneficially shaped relationships with competitors it is quite the opposite – almost 70% of respondents indicated symmetrical communication and more than 30% characterized it as asymmetrical. In the case of the beneficially shaped cooperative relationships 45% of respondents answered that communication in the organization is asymmetrical and 55% chose “symmetrical” to describe the communication. This much higher percentage of companies with asymmetrical communication within the organization amongst firms with very beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with competitors could be explained by the need to enforce discipline among employees. This discipline that relies on “following the orders” coming from the management provides a transfer of clear message, effective actions and quick outcomes – values that impact the beneficialness of the cooperative relationships with competitors.

All enterprises with very beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with suppliers had informative communication within the organization. Also 73% of firms with beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with suppliers had informative communication and only 63% of companies with unbeneficially shaped relationships had communication characterized as informative. The observed phenomenon could be explained by the fact that people work more effectively when they are informed about expected results of their work, not when they are persuaded to do something. It is particularly important in the case of suppliers, because employees informed about expected outcome strive to achieve it regardless of the means.

The collation of values of the chi-square independence tests between the instruments of the organizational communication system and the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relations was presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Collation of chi-squared independence tests values between the use of instruments of the organizational communication system and the beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations of the examined enterprises

Instruments of organizational communication system	The beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations with		
	suppliers	customers	competitors
direct conversation	0.20 (0.9041)	0.07 (0.7954)	1.67 (0.4337)
newsletter or newspaper	2.64 (0.2669)	1.65 (0.1996)	1.60 (0.4483)
e-mail	1.29 (0.5239)	0.00 (0.9573)	0.90 (0,6388)
employee discussion forum	0.09 (0.9576)	0.40 (0.5279)	5.00 (0,0820)
helpline	2.80 (0.2460)	0.58 (0.4471)	4.66 (0.0974)

Instruments of organizational communication system	The beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations with		
	suppliers	customers	competitors
intranet	1.48 (0.4761)	0.36 (0.5460)	1.39 (0.499)
social media	0.89 (0.6404)	1.54 (0.2143)	1.37 (0.5031)
newsletter	2.80 (0.2460)	0.58 (0.4471)	1.06 (0.5892)
scripts and manuals	0.67 (0.7164)	0.56 (0.4542)	8.65* (0.0132)
reports	0.18 (0.9153)	0.06 (0.8023)	3.87 (0.1446)
billboards	0.36 (0.8351)	0.39 (0.5301)	0.81 (0.6658)
meetings	2.21 (0.3305)	6.45* (0.0111)	3.00 (0.2231)
opinion and employee attitude survey	0.22 (0.8961)	0.19 (0.6604)	2.84 (0.2412)
management consultation hours	0.39 (0.8223)	0.01 (0.9043)	6.16* (0.0461)
trade unions publications	0.71 (0.7018)	0.47 (0.4940)	2.45 (0.2943)
ideas and complaints box	0.89 (0.6404)	0.30 (0.5854)	5.30 (0.0707)
integration events	3.35 (0.1871)	2.24 (0.1347)	0.06 (0.9712)
management by walking around	2.09 (0.3519)	1.75 (0.1854)	10.45* (0.0054)
unofficial meetings after work	1.02 (0.6004)	0.00 (0.9573)	3.17 (0.2046)
informal relationships between employees	0.59 (0.7441)	1.12 (0.2905)	1.14 (0.5658)
gossip and rumors	2.56 (0.2782)	3.19 (0.0740)	1.28 (0.5262)
supporting staff initiatives	2.92 (0.2323)	0.66 (0.4158)	9.74* (0.0077)
working teams	0.53 (0.7656)	1.57 (0.2095)	0.15 (0.9283)

Note: The statistically significant chi-squared independence test scores (with a standard significance level of 0.05) were bolded and marked with asterisks (*).

Source: own study based on empirical research.

When analyzing given chi-square independence test scores and p-values, it should be noted that only five dependencies are statistically significant, and two, despite the lack of statistical significance, are characterized by a relatively low p-value (the influence of presence of the employee discussion forum and the ideas and complaints box

on the beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relations with competitors). Memos and P.A. system (business radio) were not indicated by any firm.

It should be noted that there is no significant correlation between the use of presented instruments of the organizational communication system and the level of beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships with suppliers. Hence, it can be assumed that these relationships are not dependent on the use of particular communication instruments. There is a statistically significant correlation between the use of meetings as an instrument of the communication system and the beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relationships with customers. However, this dependency should be analyzed carefully. It turns out that the meetings are used by more than 42% of companies with very beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with customers and more than 70% of firms with beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with customers. It means that the use of meetings potentially undermines the relationships with customers. The possible explanation for this fact is that meetings are ineffective form of communication – they take excessive time and dilute leadership.

Judging by the data presented in Table 2 the use of certain communication instruments influences the most the cooperative relationships with competitors. There are four statistically significant correlations between the use of those instruments and the level of beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships. The first one pertains to the use of scripts and manuals. No firms with unbeneficially shaped relationships with competitors use scripts and manuals. Only almost 2% of companies with beneficially shaped relationships with competitors and 20% of those with very beneficially shaped relationships use this instrument. The implementation of codified organizational knowledge, especially in the area of cooperation with competitors, is important to build long-lasting relationships with them, because of complexity of such a situation and the requirement of the standards in contacts with cooperating competitors. The nature of the dependency between the use of the management consultation hours and the level of beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships with competitors is unclear. It is used by more than 17% of firms with unbeneficially shaped relationships, more than 3% of those with beneficially shaped relationships and 80% of organizations with very beneficially shaped relationships with competitors. The presented evidence is not conclusive considering correlation between the use of the management consultation hours and the level of beneficialness of the relationships with competitors. The use of the management by walking around influences the beneficialness level of the shape of cooperative relationships with competitors – it is used by 40% of firm with very beneficial relationships with competitors, almost 5% of those with beneficial relationships and more than 3% of companies with unbeneficially shaped relationships with competitors. The management by walking around intensifies staff's efforts and suppresses problems before they reveal themselves. The cooperation

with competitors is very often transient in character, hence the need to resolve all problems while they are latent without engaging members of the operational staff. The last of statistically significant relationships concerns the act of supporting staff initiatives as an instrument of communication in the organization. Less than 7% of firms with unbeneficially shaped relationships with competitors, more than 14% of those with beneficially shaped relationships and 60% of companies with very beneficially shaped relationships with competitors support staff initiatives. It could be explained by the fact that staff members are very often the source of improvements and optimizations. They potentially can propose some changes that could raise the level of beneficialness of the cooperative relationships.

The evidence presented above leads to a conclusion that the organizational communication system and its instruments could potentially affect the shape of cooperative relationships.

Conclusions

The results presented in this study indicate that the organizational communication system and its instruments influence the beneficialness of the shape of cooperative relationships. However, this effect is quite limited. Only the indications within the two alternatives pairs out of five influence the level of beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships of Polish companies. The more the communication in an organization is informative rather than persuasive, the more beneficial the relationships with suppliers are. Communication based on transfer of information allows for better dissemination of facts and knowledge. The more the communication is asymmetric, the more beneficial the organizations' cooperative relationships with their competitors. This characteristic of the communication is conducive to maintaining effective work environment.

Only 5 out of 25 identified communication instruments have shown statistically significant impact on the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships, particularly with competitors. Companies that did not use traditional meetings as a communication instrument had better-developed cooperative relationships with customers (in terms of beneficialness). It should be explained by the fact that there are more effective ways of communication that appear to affect the beneficialness of cooperative relationships with clients. The firms using scripts and manuals, management consultation hours, management by walking around and supporting staff initiatives had more beneficially shaped cooperative relationships with competitors. This set of instruments proves to be effective in developing and maintaining relationships with competitors, because most of them are proactive in character and allow for an effective flow of information.

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CHARACTERISTICS AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to indicate a relationship between the organizational communication system of Polish companies and the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relations between these companies and particular kinds of cooperators. The theoretical part of this article was devoted to identification of the role of cooperative relations in the contemporary economic environment and a brief description of the concept of organizational communication system, including its influence on cooperation between companies. The empirical part of this paper was devoted to description of the conducted research and its results. The survey used the respondents' indications of prevailing characteristics of the organizational communication system and its instruments used in the organization and the indication of the beneficialness of the shape of the cooperative relationships with suppliers, customers and co-opetitors (competitors in the framework of coopetitive relations). The chi-squared tests for independence were used to demonstrate dependencies. In conclusion, it turned out that there are characteristics that describe firms with beneficially shaped relationships and instruments that are used or avoided by them.

KEYWORDS: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEM, INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS, COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS, BENEFICIALNESS

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES: L14, M10, M12, M14

ORGANIZACYJNY SYSTEM KOMUNIKACYJNY I JEGO INSTRUMENTY W KONTEKŚCIE RELACJI KOOPERACYJNYCH

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wskazanie relacji między charakterystyką systemu organizacyjnej komunikacji polskich przedsiębiorstw a korzystnością ukształtowania relacji kooperacyjnych z dostawcami, odbiorcami i konkurentami. Jego teoretyczną część poświęcono identyfikacji roli relacji kooperacyjnych we współczesnym środowisku gospodarczym i opisie koncepcji systemu komunikacji organizacyjnej, w tym jego wpływu na współpracę między przedsiębiorstwami. Część empiryczną poświęcono opisowi przeprowadzonych badań i interpretacji ich wyników. W badaniu wykorzystano wskazania respondentów na temat dominujących cech systemu komunikacji organizacyjnej i jego instrumentów stosowanych w organizacji oraz wskazania na poziom korzystności ukształtowania relacji spółdzielczych z dostawcami, klientami i konkurentami (w obszarze relacji kooperacji). W ramach metod statystycznych wykorzystano testy niezależności chi-kwadrat, aby wykazać występujące zależności. Podsumowując, można stwierdzić, że istnieją cechy, które opisują organizacyjne systemy komunikacyjne przedsiębiorstw z korzystnie ukształtowanymi relacjami oraz instrumenty, których wykorzystanie lub brak ich implementacji wskazuje na większe prawdopodobieństwo utrzymania korzystnych relacji kooperacyjnych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: ORGANIZACYJNY SYSTEM KOMUNIKACYJNY, RELACJE MIĘDZYORGANIZACYJNE, RELACJE KOOPERACYJNE, KORZYSTNOŚĆ

KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: L14, M10, M12, M14