

Corporate Communication to the Challenge of Organizational Ethics for A Sustainable Company. the Case Of Cameroonian Smes

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ABSTRACT: *This study focuses on the contribution of communication in the development of organizational ethics. Indeed, the reality of Cameroonian SMEs remains at this problematic level in the sense that they present a deficit on the various levels, human, managerial, organizational and communicational. Consequently, the negative impact of the environment as well as the operating logic of these SMEs have not allowed the implementation and value of organizational ethics in its managerial sense, the quest for meaning and identity.*

KeyWords: *Communication, Management, Organizational Ethics, Identity and the quest for HR meaning, Production of values, Change management.*

I. Context and research problem

Our scientific interest in studying the theme of corporate communication as a response to the challenge of organizational ethics lies in its capital importance in the dynamics of organizations. Today, the company becomes a space of communication, production of values, meaning and ethics in order to meet the new imperatives imposed by the increasingly complex and globalized environment. The search for organizational ethics is closely linked to the ability of managers to train, disseminate and constantly communicate to human resources the value systems sought, in order to be able to build the ethics of the organization. The latter requires the development of behavioral, individual, collective and organizational skills. The literature review in communication and management has focused on these concepts, because they constitute the hard core of the change management of the corporate citizen, communicator and producer of meaning. Our contribution consists in presenting a reflection on the experience of SMEs in the industrial and construction sectors in Cameroon. This issue remains topical and requires the study of the prerequisites for the development of organizational ethics. We plan through our intervention to show the importance of the concepts of communication and organizational ethics in terms of management and organization through a systemic vision. In addition, we will try to decipher the reality of the context of SMEs and the gaps between the discourse of top management and the perceived reality. Finally, we will highlight the importance of communication in the development of organizational ethics, within the company. Our axes of problem consist in wondering about the part of contribution of the corporate communication in the research of the organizational ethics. In addition, we will situate the efforts made by the actors and managers of the SMEs covered by our case study, in the search for organizational ethics. Regarding our research method and our investigation techniques, we will use in a first phase the documentary analysis related to the evolution of SMEs in Cameroon. In-depth interviews were carried out with the owners, actors and managers of these SMEs, to situate and decipher their perceptions. These respondents shed more light on our interview guide by personally answering questions relating to our study. The anonymity of the responses was assured by us. The observation technique will constitute a complementary

scientific contribution in our study. It remains important to emphasize that given the sensitivity and complexity of the subject treated, we were not able to study in depth the behavior of the partners of these SMEs.

II. REVIEW OF WRITINGS

2-1- The concept of ethics and its requirements

2-2-1- Elements of definition of the concept of ethics.

The concept of ethics is gaining momentum in the life of organizations. This concept has a deep meaning and symbolizes the existence of man's life and his interactive relationships with others. Certain authors such as Samuel Mercier show that "ethics therefore makes it possible to develop a certain number of rules governing the conduct of individuals to distinguish between the right and the wrong way of acting"[1]. This concept is more of a managerial act of leading people and change. Other authors such as Fabienne Cardot [2] write that: "Corporate ethics is ethics in action, and therefore, most often, behind the enactment of values or principles, the firm chooses to identify a manager responsible for developing the various missions that will make respect for ethics a daily reality for the group: explaining the fundamentals and pethics policy, steering them by business, organizing an ethics function, raising awareness and training staff, setting up risk prevention, promoting the ethics approach, ensuring reporting and publicizing the company's achievements and results". For Jean François Claude [3]: "Ethics as we understand it in reference to a tradition of reflection embodied by Aristotle and currently by Paul Ricœur, starts from the individual. It differs from morality, insofar as it consists in acting according, no longer to external standards, but to a projection of what we consider good. It consists of building your own point of view on life, based on the development of the best of yourself. It thus encompasses morality by contextualizing it. It is complementary to business ethics by personalizing it. Ethics has been, to our knowledge, can be approached in this light in the company. It comes, in addition to our technicality, to raise the level of requirement of our conduct. Based on the work of Paul Ricœur, we propose an operational approach in a work situation whose definition is as follows: "Action which consists, in a work situation, of building and improving one's relationship with oneself, with others and with company, with a view to personal and collective development. It has three components: First, the ethical relationship with ourselves, in which we personally appreciate what we do. Its common thread is the construction of our self-esteem. Second, the ethical relationship with others, by which we are concerned with the influence of our conduct on others. Its operational common thread is to give confidence. Finally, the ethical relationship with the company, through which we seek to match our personal project with that of the company. Its common thread is the production of meaning".

2-1-2- The importance of ethics in business

The concept of ethics according to the different definitions presented carries in its content a deep meaning linked in particular to the human. The latter is and will be the driving force behind any business and change management project. Ethics in this sense is built upstream of any project by the top management of the company. It should be noted in this sense that the investment of the human being is determining in particular by efforts of management, communication and continuous training. These elements constitute internal and external means of response and listening. Jean François Claude underlines in this sense: "We must build a representation of the desirable company. This is what we call the company as an institution. It corresponds to a company which brings together the conditions of a social life such as one can hope for in a democratic society. It justifies that we can engage in it, not by taking it blissfully as such, but by wanting to make it evolve for our interest but also for the common good. To serve the promotion of the company as an institution, the ethical actor relies on its values. To guarantee that its values correspond to the collective interest, it is necessary to confront them with the domains of the values of the company as an institution, which are those of duration, cohesion and distinction. But also to the areas of corporate values operating in a democratic society. Finally, to the areas of values of the act of entrepreneurship and which are those of responsibility, exchange and questioning [4]". For her part, the author Fabienne Cardot [5] illustrates three forms of ethics. She emphasizes to this effect: "Through the choice

of values and principles, three forms of corporate ethics emerge, more or less ambitious: an ethics of governance, a deontological ethics and an ethics of values. The first focuses on compliance with the law and transparency; it leads to informing all the shareholders, but also the public, with rigor, on the situation, the strategy, the main figures, the locations, the suppliers, the working conditions, in reports and detailed websites; it stems from good governance but also from sustainable development, since the law requires more and more information on the environmental and social impacts of business activities. Deontological ethics are detailed in codes of conduct; endeavor to take into account all risky situations in the conduct of business beyond. ". This element of analysis allows us to highlight the contribution of the organization in terms of ethics and the search for values. The organization of today's company is characterized by significant changes, particularly on a human, behavioral and socio-cultural level. The organization is more a space for learning, for producing meaning and hidden meaning of men. For O.Vassel [6]: "At the collective level, values are supposed to fulfill an identity function, constitute a factor of integration and contribute to the socialization of individuals. At the individual level, they allow a symbolic or even affective investment without which no social group manages to form and endure. They are supposed to create "connection" between individuals and constitute an additional motivating factor; they justify action models, they give them meaning. The classical organization has long focused on the technical and material aspects of its activities where even the human factor has been objectified and perceived as an accessory of the technical system. Indeed, the management of the organization has long denied the specificity of the human being and the need to understand it in order to better integrate it and make it adhere to the objectives of the company". In this same sense, the same author highlights the project of the organization as a space for the production of values and meaning. He explains to this effect that: "The expression of a project begins with the translation of the founding elements that constitute the *raison d'être* and the vision and is embodied concretely through three elements: an ambition, a will, and a strategy. As such, it is at the origin, because stemming from a vision, the project fundamentally expresses an ambition. Affirming an ambition does not mean setting a few major objectives, however "ambitious" they may be. is to encompass in a coherent whole the *raison d'être* (what I am, what I exist for, what I believe in) and the vision (how I see the world). to federate that we judge the value of an ambition. Also the project constitutes the operational organizational translation, and economics of the couple vision / reason ". The analysis of the words of this author remains decisive because it allows us to situate the importance of a project within the company. The latter is above all perceived as a space for the construction of a common project, or even a space for interaction and the production of values and symbols in line with the development of organizational ethics. It should be noted that the research and construction of organizational ethics cannot be bureaucratized and cannot be improvised. Thus, HR becomes a strategic act. Jean François Claude[7] puts the accent in this context on management by values, he underlines, moreover, that managing by values allows the realization of a permanent synergy resulting from the collective dynamics created within the organisation: "Explaining and bringing values to life means bringing out a whole range of preferences, voluntarisms and ideals which constitute common references for employees. Can we cooperate without first finding what "makes us live together", that is to say an agreement on certain values, norms and rules? This backdrop of common landmarks, once established, is it not able to reinforce the desire to work together? Will it not encourage everyone to act in the best interests of the company? For his part, R. Reitter explains [8]: "what one wants to be depends on what one is..., what one is also depends on the daily context of the action..., the company produces symbols: its rites, its myths or its stories, its taboos, its values, its social norms, its models and its heroes, its codes of dress, language, layout or use of space. Moreover, no company is independent of its national culture of origin or of the language it uses. All these marks of collective identity form a system that has its own logic. This same author adds that "the production of values is also an evolutionary process, but it carries within itself powerful forces of inertia resistant to change and preferring the comfort of habit". He thus underlines that: "the company, like the individual and the nation, has specificity and continuity. It is a human system capable of engaging in virtuous circles or vicious circles making it unsuitable for its markets. But, if it has to change, it lacks this awareness of itself. It can only change through the action of people, and people, if they stay in the company, often have good reasons not to risk the adventure of asking the fundamental questions again: what is we are ? What are we together? What do we want to be? Like any project that concerns the construction of a great work, the production of organizational identity emanates from

interactions with the surrounding environment and from the interdependence of internal actors, it is the result of these two factors that gives it a meaning and which constitutes the compass of the different stakeholders". The same author concludes his article thus: "To live is to change. It is not the change that is unacceptable; it is the change that would only be programmed and not meaningful".

2-2- The contribution of communication in the development of organizational ethics

As we have analyzed previously, the search for ethics is a very serious matter within companies, it is a complex and multidimensional process which requires from the actors efforts in all directions and in particular on the communication level. The ability of actors to communicate and animate HR in the company's project has become a determining act of management. In the same sense, the author "Thierry Wellhoff"[9] shows the interest of communication in the company's project: "values are not a series of words to be 'mixed up' and this It is by repeating them over and over again that the values will have the chance to be a lived reality both internally and externally. It is not a question of imposing but of federating and convincing. Communicating means transmitting as much as sharing. The communication of values, in particular, therefore involves both formal communication using the various communication techniques available and less formal, even interpersonal communication, where it will be a question of exchanging and sharing values. . Often, we prefer to talk about deployment rather than communication, as it is important to emphasize that this phase must be handled with great finesse and the ability to adapt to different audiences. The deployment in the first phase can also be considered as part of the formalization. The deployment of values comes in two main directions: The first being to provide a platform that can be used in management and acts of communication both internally and externally. The second is to raise awareness and encourage the appropriation of values by the company's employees in order to share a common vision and federate the company's discourse. These directions will be carried out successively or in parallel, depending on the companies and their contexts". For Philippe MALAVAL [10] and others "communication in companies is growing and becoming global". These authors emphasize the concept of corporate communication. They specify in this sense "the organization generally emanates from General Management or from the communication department directly linked to General Management. The place it represents varies greatly depending on the size and organization of the company".

2-3- Formalization of ethics in the company

After having analyzed the content of the concept of ethics, its multiple dimensions and its link with the company's project, we will try in this point to shed light on how the company can formalize and make ethics concrete? The concept of ethics must find its place on the ground of operation and this on the various levels in particular that related to the human, organizational, etc. The author Samuel Mercier [11] emphasizes to this effect: "it was from the 1980s that ethics codes and committees appeared. Ethical formalization appears to be the most obvious sign of an organization's commitment to good conduct. It is therefore essentially a process of reaffirming leadership which finds there the means of clarifying certain problems and of realizing the old dream of convergence of goals in the company. The formalization of ethics requires above all the development and enhancement of a code of ethics for change which will consist of an act of conduct allowing all of the company's HR to have a language and a common culture and behavioral standards of conduct".

2-3-1- The roles of actors and HR in the formalization of ethics

The involvement of HR in the business project is of great importance in order to ensure the implementation of ethics in the field and therefore its legitimacy on the various levels. The efforts made by corporate actors in terms of ethical research condition their survival in this new world which requires listening practices to meet the demands of consumers, investors, etc. Samuel Mercier [12] emphasizes in this sense: "The definition of an ethical and deontological code should not settle the question. These steering, management and management systems must also help employees to build a behavior that lives up to what is expected of them. A whole field of reflection on management is thus opened up. The development of an ethical competence shared between the

employee and the company should make it possible to reduce the gap between the companies as it represents itself and as it is experienced by its employees. This requires employees to consolidate their ethical resources and their conduct as subjects. They will draw from it an offensive way of being that reconciles personal development and business performance. Aren't there candles to light in the dark night? The company must assume to put itself into perspective in order to configure work situations in the service of promoting the quality of conduct of their actors. Is this not an increasingly strategic aspect of its operation? "

2-3-2- The new roles of corporate communication in the construction of ethics

Patrick D'HUMIERS [13] shows for his part that communication in its global approach responds to the new challenges faced by modern organizations and companies. Among these new roles we note: "1. Employees are the base of the image. The intern took a decisive role in the production of the image/2. The nature of the need for information within companies has changed. Employees want real, informative and fast media. Media pressure makes it necessary to manage internal information in coherence and in real time with external information/3. Leaders are required to spend a maximum of 10 to 20% of their time explaining themselves and meeting staff and the media". The leading managers of today's business are no longer the managers who act like technicians. The latter are more producers of meaning and constructors of the company's project. What Stephen R. Covey [14] shows in this regard: "The Chinese bamboo cannot be planted until the ground has been prepared for this purpose, and for four years the tiny shoot appears on the surface. Then during in the fifth year, the bamboo begins to grow.../... Our company culture is an advantage that the competition cannot imitate. Technology can be copied, knowledge acquired, but the ability of your company to collaborate effectively, to devoting to the activities of the cadre, to prioritizing priorities, is a plus that cannot be bought, transferred, or installed. A culture in which trust reigns and latent strength is stimulated is bound to be a culture" home" "

III. METHOD

The field survey was conducted by us on the basis of a qualitative study using the interview survey. To this end, an interview guide was developed containing questions that meet the needs of our study. Indeed, we organized interviews with 20 Chief Executive Officers of SMEs, whose distribution by sector of activity is as follows: 10 (industry), 05 (services), 05 (construction).

IV. RESULTS

Among the answers provided to the questions in our interview guide relating to the role of communication in the company, we retain that all the actors interviewed show that communication represents for them the circulation of the flow of information relating to the functioning of their businesses. They add that the communication is limited to the transmission of the information necessary for the realization of the activity of the company. The dominant logic in management remains traditional far from the principles of qualitative and universal management. With regard to the answers provided to question no. 3 relating to the orientation of communication in the direction of the production of values and the construction of ethics, the majority of respondents indicate that they make efforts in this sense, but without calling for coherent and formalized policies. With regard to question n° 4, which essentially concerns the level of contribution of communication in the reinforcement of ethics, among all the surveys observed by us "06" actors invest in the search for Organizational ethics refers to efforts not supported by clear and formalized communication policies. The other respondents only react to the constraints of their environment, practicing myopic daily management. Question "n° 05" remains complementary to the previous one, because it allows us to explain that the effort that these players are currently carrying out is more linked to the search for efficiency in internal and external communication channels. The search for construction of the corporate citizen of tomorrow remains a necessary need, except that these companies do not yet have appropriate policies in this direction. Question "n° 06" enlightens us that despite the deficit faced by these companies in terms of management and communication oriented research of

organizational ethics, we note that 06 respondents believe that they have a code of ethics for their company, but without an orientation framework or a clear, coherent and adapted policy. These codes are more administered and not managed or animated. Question "n° 07" also remains relevant because it allows us to situate the perception of the actors on the close link between recruitment, the choice of HR and the search for organizational ethics. The majority of respondents clearly show that they value the link and consider it decisive, with little management and communication effort. The objective of question "n° 08" is to situate the framework governing communication and the search for ethics with the environment globally. The answers provided to this question, that is most of the respondents believe that they invest efforts with their environment without having any strategic effort and orientation policy. The environment of these SMEs constitutes a handicap constraining the efforts invested by these SMEs.

It is necessary to underline at this level that the current environment is characterized by a culture of distrust and reluctance. This state of affairs is closely linked to the lack of communication as well as the absence of transparency. Indeed, among the difficulties inherent to Cameroonian SMEs [15] (financing, innovation, productivity and competitiveness) we quote: "-Local governance, land, cumbersome administrative procedures, /-Mastery of banking engineering is non-existent and administrative corruption is increasingly widespread". We add at this level, that the state of the current Cameroonian economy is dominated by informal circuits which weigh negatively on the functioning of these SMEs. The informal takes precedence over the formal. Thus, whatever their efforts in communication and management of their daily activities, they find themselves in a situation of reaction to the phenomenon of the informal economy. These elements testify to a lack of valuation and support for private initiative, which negatively affects the functioning, the state of mind and the development of the fabric of Cameroonian SMEs. On the other hand, following the various missions accomplished by us for the upgrading of SMEs within the framework of the programs acquired for this cause in the country and for several years, we have retained some elements of observations relating to the framework of functioning of the organization of the latter: -The behavior of the actors and bosses is dominated by a family state of mind which sometimes remains paradoxical because it does not favor the modern managerial and organizational culture, namely participation in decision-making ./This state of mind is not open to the business world and modern management and marketing techniques./-The dominant logic today in these companies is based on charismatic criteria of the boss, the logic of honor, and increased centralization./The confusion of the prerogatives and missions of the actors for lack of a modern and professional HRM./-The logic of skills remains deficient and less present./-The system procedure thus constitutes a major handicap leaving room for informal management./-Human resources management is limited to simple administrative management of personnel./-Training and change management are not major concerns of SME owners ./-The notion of organizational ethics in its managerial sense thus remains deficient.

V. DISCUSSION

These elements of analysis allowed us to open the debate on the crucial importance of the intangible aspects of the functioning of the organization; such as the system of individual and collective representation, the sharing of values, the production of identity as a driving force in the search for organizational ethics. However, these intangible elements can neither be bought nor transported like goods, because it is a construction of a social and cultural project in relation to the organization which must forge it through the exercise of a management centered more on the human and its multiple dimensions. This constitutes a relevant axis of problem based on the permanent concern for listening and observation on the part of the top management which, from the dissemination of a clear vision, is in search of synergy by the implementation of practices managerial centered on valuing the other and thus making it possible to show the way to employees and to produce meaning and coherence in the direction of all the company's human resources.

What are the ways and means that allow the success of the process of change management and identity reinforcement through the enhancement of organizational ethics? As M. Crozier [16] rightly points out, change

is not a one-off voluntarist operation, it is a managerial approach applied to the launch of a decisive project with the aim of carrying out planned transformations. Indeed, the success of a programmed change is subordinated to the implementation of a methodical approach which results in a process of socialization, education and training of men involving the enhancement and production of meaning, of the human as well as the construction of real SME project going in the direction of the organizational ethics. Thus, we believe that the use of training management and support for HR in SMEs is now becoming a decisive act. Training is more an act of driving change, both behaviorally and related to management, development skills in all areas. Rethinking SMEs is a strategic act allowing the transition from traditional management logic to management that conveys meaning, value and the search for organizational ethics.

VI. CONCLUSION

SMEs today constitute the hard core of the development of the economy and of society in general. The use of management and communication techniques is essential today to enable the management of change and the modernization of the management processes of SMEs in Cameroon. The search for organizational ethics is not simply a discourse but it is more a matter of efforts to invest in clear, coherent policy and adapted to the projects and the requirements of the reality of SMEs. Management is the art of practice; it constitutes the response of the actors to the requirements of the evolution of the increasingly complex environment of SMEs. In the Algerian experience, despite that accumulated today in this field, the ambiguity of the industrial strategy weighs heavily on these companies. It still remains very difficult today to create and manage an SME, because it is a perilous and difficult journey, where the PESTEL environment remains as heavy as it is constraining to the dynamics of the latter.

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