Socio-emotional skills and business communication

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes three cases of successful business companies which were born in the Spanish panorama, and which seem to have an international presence and leadership style. Later, we will propose another leadership style that they could hypothetically develop as a totally speculative but useful game for leadership theory researchers – this is not intended to criticize or damage these companies at all, as we consider them to be successful in their determined sectors. The topic of this text has an original approach as there is little material available in which reality is looked at with both emotional and social skills, or describing with concision the benefits of socio-emotional competence from the communicative point of view in relation to participative leadership styles, even within a multicultural context which expects to be intercultural.

Keywords: socio-emotional skills, business communication, intercultural climate

1. Analysis of three business cases study

We chose this sample of three companies taking into account several factors: first, they were of Spanish foundation and some travel in time; second international projection had proven; third, who had business success; fourth, because of advanced leadership styles continue. It is instrumental case studies because they have been chosen for their peculiar to deepen the styles of leadership and effective communication for intercultural coexistence characteristics. The qualitative approach is through reviewing the information on-line that the company itself was on internal communication strategies as well as forums, blogs where the view was reflected by workers or customers.

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Inditex began its business in 1963 as a clothing manufacturer. In 1985, Amancio Ortega Gaona founded Textile Design Industry: INDITEX S.A. as the holding company of the group; by January 2015 he had 137,054 employees. The eight commercial formats of the Inditex Group operating in the main markets are: Zara, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home and Uterqüe.

Santander is a Spanish Bank Company incorporated in 1857 by a union of traders from Cantabria. Santander has become the leader in the Spanish banking sector thanks to the decisions taken by Emilio Botin, and is now led by his daughter Ana Patricia Botin. Currently, the company has 185,405 employees and is the first bank in Spain to operate in ten countries.

Telefonica S.A. is a Spanish multinational telecommunications company headquartered in Madrid, recognized as the largest telecommunications company in Europe and the fifth in the world. The company operates under three brand names or divisions: "Movistar" for Spain and Latin America, "O2" for the rest of Europe and "Vivo" for Brazil. This company operates in more than 20 countries in Europe and America and, as of June 2014, has 119,880 with respect to 315.7 million users.

2. Diagnosis of the leadership style of these companies and internal communication tools

The leadership style of Santander Bank, acknowledged on its website, is Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership (1982). This style is based on the attitudes observed in workers of the company in which the management indicates the rules or tasks to the group – this is a one-way task. However, they also listen and get involved in decision-making, and this part is bidirectional. The will of the group to face its goals has a significant influence on their ability and willingness to do so.

In our research, we have identified some actions within the internal communication where events can be seen with this kind of leadership:

a) “Santander a day” is a virtual platform for all employees (180,000 worldwide) informing them of daily news about the company, creating a pleasant intercultural environment and international company’s projection, publicity about new products, latest developments regarding the change in strategy, earnings and any other corporate information, wherein a one-way communication is established.

b) “Santander ideas” is a social network through which employees are able to exchange ideas and interact with each other, and this contributes to the continuous improvement of service quality. This is an instrument of intercultural interaction. Anecdotally, with the first item that is created on this platform, 8,000 contributions from its employees are achieved. Communication is bidirectional.

With this strategy, Santander Bank actively involves its employees and creates an intercultural environment; however, the problem that may arise through this kind of leadership is that the objectives are unrealistic and it is very complicated to achieve goals, which can frustrate the employees.

We think that Inditex carries out a participatory group leadership according to the Rensis Likert model (1961). The large ascendant communication the Inditex group has makes all the departments comprising it have confidence in it and intercultural coexistence is easy. This makes the decision-making of each of the workers easier, in particular that of the departments in general. Thus, employees are more motivated and this way increases their productivity. This is the reason why they can also evaluate their activities and receive the opinion from the head of each department quickly.

The group has very good internal communication when needed, and when a lack of materials or doubt relating to any aspect in any department arises it is communicated to the person they depend on, who in turn communicates this to the senior management. This type of leadership is directed to employees, and is based on the effective functioning of groups closely linked to the structure of the organization; that is, the great communication of the Inditex group generates confidence in all departments and makes it easier for decision making to happen between them. Thanks to this, they can evaluate their activities and quickly receive an opinion from the head of each department, who is a leader who supports their subordinates and assumes a position of dictator. However, the final authority on matters of importance is still in their hands.

On the Telefonica website, it is stated that the transformational leadership model is used. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) is a common process for workers and leader to advance to a higher moral and motivation level. It is a transformation that makes significant changes in the company and the people who belong to it where intercultural interaction is facilitated. It could be said that it is a more motivating push for the worker and a more important exercise...
in the transmission of company culture and goals than other leadership styles. Hence, it is also known as charismatic leadership.

Among the advantages of transformational leadership are: the development of social skills in an intercultural environment; the leader is an example to follow; increased self-esteem of the workers, which means higher productivity and higher profits; lower costs because it is not necessary to rotate or replace workers; the greater likelihood of coming up with new and better initiatives; and corporate learning. The estimated disadvantages are: it can only be assumed to motivate workers; the results are visible only in the long term; not all leaders can be transformative; the application lacks detail; there is a high potential for abuse; and it is not always used morally.

Transformational leadership improves the staff of a company and changes the way they act, innovating in how employees think and feel. This type of leadership requires mental focus on a new perception to have a radical change in behavior, to motivate and make permanent changes. Transformational leadership is the best way to make a change in the company without affecting employee motivation and establishing intercultural relationships.

3. Theoretical bases of communicative socio-emotional skills

We can find some references that have shed some light on the components that influence the development of the organizations’ and employees’ potential and makes us better understand these three cases. Increasingly, Bisquerra and Escoda expose that we are aware that in the labor framework implemented in companies, along with its emphasis on flexibility, the work groups and the great orientation towards services, emotional skills are increasingly critical to reach the superior quality in any kind of job and in any country in the world (2007). According to R. Bisquerra, the competition concept includes "the set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes necessary to perform various activities with a certain level of quality and efficiency" (2003, p. 22). Some years later, Bisquerra and Escoda reviewed and updated the construct according to emotional skills and related "interpersonal intelligence" (Gardner, 1983) to "social competence" as the "ability to maintain good relationships with other people. This involves mastering social skills: the capacity of establishing an effective communication, respect, pro-social attitudes, assertiveness, etc." (2007, p. 72). The benefit of the development of social competence in the professional world is very clear because of the effectiveness and performance that it implies (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2004; Saarni, 2000). We define Social Communicative Competence as that specific ability to establish an appropriate communication and promote social relationships such as assertive style, empathy and consensus or democratic participation. In a cooperative situation, individuals seek to obtain those results that are beneficial to themselves and all the other members of the group. This happens more when these companies are in a situation of multiculturalism or achieve, thanks to this, interculturalism.

4. Proposal for an alternative leadership style

Inditex would improve in all the aspects related to internal communication if it carried out a transcendent leadership. This kind of leadership allows the company leaders to get involved with the workers, and they will feel that are more active and appreciated by the senior management. This way, new leaders are chosen from the group of workers, establishing different links between collaborators and leaders in an intercultural environment, while this relationship takes on an ethical character that reflects the behavior and values of a leader.

The leadership style suggested to Telefonica would be another evolved model, i.e. the transcendent one; it is the human developmental system that helps to change the way of achieving goals. The transcendent leadership program is based on three principles. First, be aware; acquire knowledge through reflection, observation and interpretation of what one perceives. Second, be coherent; be consistent with what is said and done. Third, be responsible; take control of the aim to be achieved. The main pillar of transcendent leadership is the approach it has on the human being and its creational power through language, which allows it to create and transform itself, generating new possibilities for the achievement of goal and in which human wealth in an intercultural coexistence and different views is power.

Santander Bank’s alternative leadership style, that we propose speculatively, is Rensis Likert’s (1961) participatory and group model. With this leadership style, internal communication would increase and therefore the decisions and goals established will be more realistic (always with a minimum requirement that encourages and motivates
employees). We estimate that this model would improve the intercultural coexistence and the productivity of the company.

To sum up, the leadership styles of these three companies take into account evolved leadership styles whose main value and strength are employees' motivation and involvement in improving processes, and these issues directly affect the intercultural understanding and productivity of these companies. We believe that the leadership styles that take care of the human fabric of the business and which serve human needs and matters are those with the potential to ensure that companies grow.

5. Conclusions

Regarding the communicative emotional benefits of the leadership style of these case studies, the transcendent leadership at Inditex would improve the team members' social skills, fostering intercultural understanding and empathy. The Rensis Likert style in Santander would strengthen the intercultural cooperation and links between collaborators. In the case of Telefonica, the transcendent leadership style would strengthen the employees' potential through the recognition of their emotional capacities in an intercultural environment.

The leadership communicative styles benefit the social climate and coexistence of the case studies. In the case of Inditex with the transcendent style, each communicative social aspect would improve the agreement, empathy, and assertive style. In the case of Santander with the Rensis Likert style, agreement and empathy would strengthen at first, as would the assertive style, eventually. In the case of Telefonica, transcendent leadership style would also have direct benefits on social communicative competences, since they are first-order competences intended to encourage empathy, assertive style and consensus in the same way. The suppression of schemes of cultures and people, respect and the broadmindedness to accept other points of view and ways to do things would all improve cross-cultural matters.

Good working climates and corporate cultures benefit the company. In the case of Inditex and Telefonica, where the transcendent style is recommended, enterprise culture would have some benefits for giving in an intercultural environment the ethical level a greater reward, and because this attitude is politically correct within the company. Actors would work more honestly, behave better with other actors, and know how to work together; furthermore, the social fabric would be more consolidated, the working environment, demand and treatment would be optimal, and therefore the actors would be respected and more satisfied. In addition, they would know each other better, establish stronger emotional affective ties greater confidence towards others, and there would be more security at work.

In the case of Santander, the Rensis Likert style would encourage teamwork; this would result in the acquisition of communication skills as the assertive style, empathy and consensus. The greater interpersonal communication would also improve teamwork and efficiency in production processes, create greater consolidation of the intercultural business network and its actors, improve emotional affective ties and, in the long run, provide for greater staff involvement.

Profitability benefits in the short and long term. The participative leadership style is democratic, in which communicative socio-emotional competence perceived as empathy is favorable, and the assertive style and consensus participation – and other even more evolved leadership styles – make the employees more involved in the decision making. All the dynamism and contribution of this intercultural cooperative work-culture are still perceived with greater certainty to push performance, innovation and the company creativity.

The transcendent leadership style attracts a higher profitability since those processes based on actors' communication and coordination become more effective, more innovative, and thus more productive. On the other hand, conflicts and ultimately cost judgments will be avoided, as will internal and external corporate image exhaustion.

Since the Rensis Likert style is more participatory, it will affect production, quality, profitability and innovation, and also serve as prevention against the spending that creates conflict in the company cause.

Therefore, we conclude that the difference of each company consists of the leadership culture that is promoted in a strategic and intelligent way in the internal communication that has an impact on the effectiveness of working teams – more so if they are intercultural – and therefore on profitability, product quality and service.
Acknowledgements

Thanks to Rafael Bisquerra Alsina, K. Petrides, Mauricio Haas, Maria Garcia Gomez, Maria del Carmen Fernandez Vidal, Rosario Gomez, Soledad Delgado, Magdalena Gomez, Isabel Jimenez, and Isabel Fuster Rapezza, because their sharing of their research on emotional intelligence and meeting them were how we discovered to live it.

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