

Integrated CSR Communication of NGOs: The Dilemma to Communicate and Cooperate in CSR Project Partnerships

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Abstract Integrated communication has expanded as a concept during the last 10 years. It is not about tightly controlling communication tactics any more, but instead it involves the strategic integration of stakeholders. On the other hand, CSR has become a common part of management practice, and CSR communication is an ongoing challenge that needs to be embedded in an overall integrated marketing communication (IMC) framework. The chapter describes the development of the recent IMC discourse, discusses the chances and challenges that IMC holds for NGO communication—and applies the IMC framework to the CSR communication of NGOs. The chapter lays out the role of NGOs in relation to businesses and focuses on the intersection of NGOs and CSR—and how this affects the communication aspect. It systematically unfolds what CSR means to NGOs and proposes a communication-collaboration challenge for NGOs in cooperating with businesses.

1 Introduction

Looking at the CSR concept from an NGO perspective has recently become more and more important. The scholarly discourse on Stakeholder Theory generally focuses on corporations at the heart of the discussion, arguing that they are dependent on a wide range of stakeholders influencing their success (Den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Freeman, 1984) and, that CSR is a way to interact with these stakeholders and therefore to offer feedback or even participation models. In contrast to this well-known discourse structure, we put NGOs at the center of the discussion and ask what intersections exist between NGOs and CSR when businesses are considered as NGO stakeholders. We examine this relationship from an integrated communication perspective to describe the various aspects of what we call the communication-collaboration challenge in managing for CSR.

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In the first step we explain the role that integrated communication has played in recent years and reflect this development in relation to the progress of the recent CSR discourse. Next, we describe the role of NGOs in relation to businesses and focus on the possible intersections of NGOs and CSR—and how both affect the communication aspect. Finally, we consolidate the discussion under the communication-collaboration challenge.

2 Integrated Communication as a Challenge and Chance for NGOs

2.1 *From Classic IMC to Postmodern Concepts of Integration*

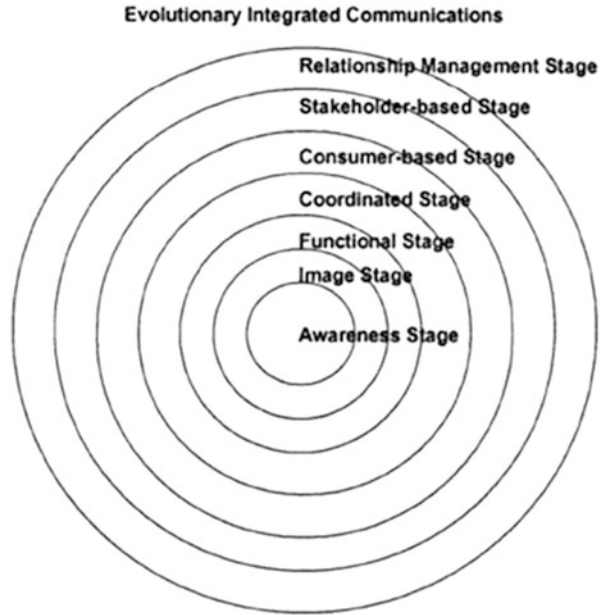
Integrated Communication has been discussed for more than 30 years. While the terminology within the German discourse varies mainly between Integrated Communication, Integrated Corporate Communications and Integrated Marketing Communication, etc., the English-language literature sums up the dominant discussion roots under the term of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC). Among the referred concepts are those of Schultz, Tannenbaum, and Lauterborn (1993, 1996) and Duncan and Caywood (1996), who generally start with the observation of a medial transition where advertising in traditional mass media loses its edge, i.e. its effectiveness (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999, p. 21). In these times, IMC is a modern way to enhance effectiveness and has become a new paradigm to handle the fast evolving media technology and to keep pace with the ever-changing customer needs.

While the basic understanding is that IMC “may be defined as the coordination and integration of all marketing communication tools, avenues, and sources in a company into a seamless program designed to maximize the impact on customers and other stakeholders” (Clow & Baack, 2011), alternative traditions such as Duncan and Caywood (1996) transcend the focus on tools and sources and extend the claim to integrate far beyond this instrumental limitation. They have developed a model of integration stages ranging from awareness stage to relationship management stage—one stage encompassing the stage below (see Fig. 1).

Kirchner (2001, pp. 180–182) takes up the idea of integrating beyond communication products, tools, and routines and transfers it into a five-step-model with the following stages (own translation) that represents the outcomes of a broad meta-analysis of current integration theory:

1. Tactical and image integration
2. Functional integration of products, divisions, and regions
3. Customer-oriented integration (radical client perspective) of all touch points
4. Stakeholder integration
5. Strategic integration

Fig. 1 Integration stages according to Duncan and Caywood (1996, p. 22)



The first three steps represent—in Kirchner’s view—the traditional IMC discourse, whereas stages 4 and 5 mark the evolution into a wider integrated corporate communications approach. The final stage encompasses not only the question of output evaluation and financial performance; strategic integration according to Kirchner also means “allocation of resources and adjustment of the organizational structure according to corporate strategy. (...) This means that every aspect of the organization (...) needs to be brought in line” (Kirchner, 2001, p. 182; own translation).

The model is quite advanced, since it opens up numerous possible interfaces to questions that have concerned corporate communications and CSR departments in recent years, such as social dynamics, demographic change, climate change, diversity issues, etc. Furthermore, it is open to the evolution of media technology, to new ideas on organization, innovation and management. Although most of these questions arose later, Kirchner’s system is flexible enough to cover these new problems. However, possibly due to the early publication date, Kirchner’s work did not generate a lot of following research. It may have overexerted the academic discourse at the beginning of the century and neither English-language literature nor the influential German school of Manfred Bruhn (2014) has taken advantage of more progressive thinking, e.g. Kirchner’s synopsis or the like (Rademacher, 2015).

That could have been different a few years later. In recent years, the postmodern discourse has spread rapidly in management and in communication studies. While postmodernity was popular as a management concept only for a short period of time in the early 1990s—and yet again around the year 2000—it was rediscovered around the year 2005 and has been flourishing since then (Christensen, Torp, &

Firat, 2005). Concerning Integrated Communication a postmodern perspective argues that the idea of controlling channels and, thus, the image of an organization as a unified body has expired. A corporation is perceived as “a body with multiple voices” (Christensen, Morsing, & Cheney, 2008, p. 192)—contrasting the “one-voice-policy” that had been the aim for many years. The former idea was to create a consistent image in all relevant target groups. And postmodern authors like Christensen, Morsing & Cheney (2008) simply ask: is that a realistic goal? Corporations are complex organizations that cannot be reduced to a single opinion or to one voice.

In postmodern terms, integration is merely a heuristic construct that only exists for the sake of its orientation function. Christensen, Torp & Firat (2005, p. 424) describe integration as “alignment of symbols, procedures and behavior” without having a fixed goal to reach. Instead, they assume that integration is always “necessarily partial and incomplete, tempered by buffers and loose coupling and counteracted by processes of differentiation” (Christensen, Torp & Firat, 2005, p. 435). This means, in fact, the rejection of the control & consistency paradigm; may it be visual or content-based. Instead, integration is conceptualized as a co-creative process that involves both: the corporation or brand rights owner and their audiences.

So, the brand and other mental representations that go with it like images or reputations are co-created constructs. The brand is created by brand managers and audiences, which interact in creating a flexible and moving brand image. That makes branded interactions a concern of integrated communication: the brand works as a kind of frame in which brand interaction takes place (Spies, 2012). A creative idea in branded interactions needs to be bound at “common starting points” (van Riel, 1995) e.g. brand values, core ideas, etc. Moreover, new interactions are tested to see if they create a flexibility that can be represented across all possible touch points that users may have with the respective brand. To enhance these contacts, brand-owners seek to offer co-creative interaction in brand communities (Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013) and create a range of owned media (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2013).

With the postmodern turn, integrated communication as a concept changes into a logical way of arguing why and how an interaction roots in the brand core. Consistency is no longer a function of harmonizing instruments or aligning messages, but is produced through logic and argumentation. Control is only present in the sense that users sharing the same brand community react to one another—and produce feedback that interaction designers can use to initiate the next interactions (Ind et al., 2013). The brand is co-created and constantly changing over time. Moreover, it is becoming democratic and tangible, which fosters the integration and strengthens the relationship of users with the brand.

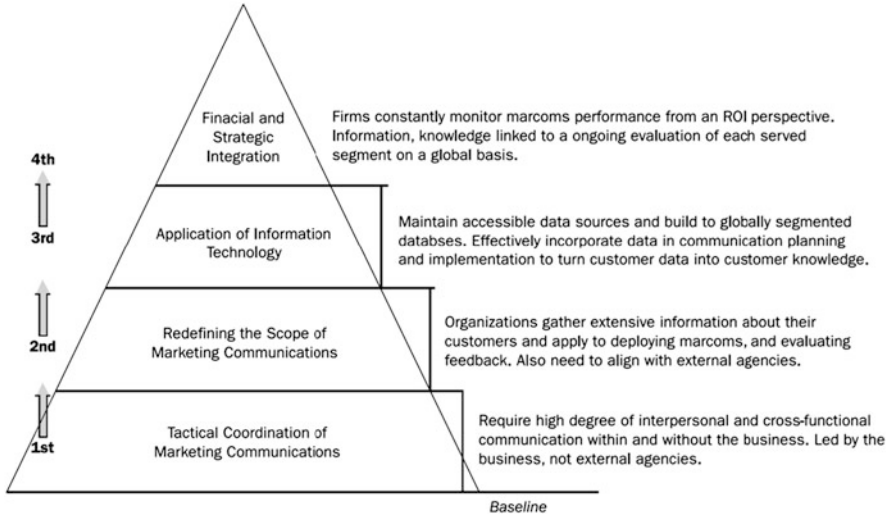


Fig. 2 The integration stages according to Schultz and Schultz (1998). Source: Kitchen, Brignell, Tao & Jones (2004, p. 26)

2.2 Locating CSR in Integrated Communication

Taking up this new way of understanding integrated communication, we want to ask how to locate CSR in the discourse and vice versa. We start with looking at the concept of Schultz and Schultz (1998) that Bruhn (2014, p. 110) describes as the mayor inflection point of the discussion, since it changes the perspective from integrating marketing communications to developing a management process model for integrated communication: the authors suggest four levels: starting with tactical coordination on the first level, proceeding with redefining the scope of marketing communication on the second level, describing the application of ITC on the third level and ending up with financial and strategic integration on the fourth and last level (see Fig. 2).

This has been celebrated as a breakthrough, since a client-oriented outside-in perspective has supplemented the classical corporate perspective. In addition, developments like big data accumulation to generate user profiles, etc. are already anticipated by Schultz and Schultz (1998). The key role of employees in transporting and living the brand is acknowledged. Finally, a financial perspective of integration that keeps an eye on the ROI of marketing communication complements the model. But still, a consumer-oriented perspective continues to dominate the IMC discourse. Kliatchko (2008, p. 153) developed his “pillar”-concept, where stakeholders like suppliers, authorities and employees are considered as relevant pillars to form a reliable basis for integrated communication (see Fig. 3). The idea is to build and maintain strong relationships with all of these stakeholders.

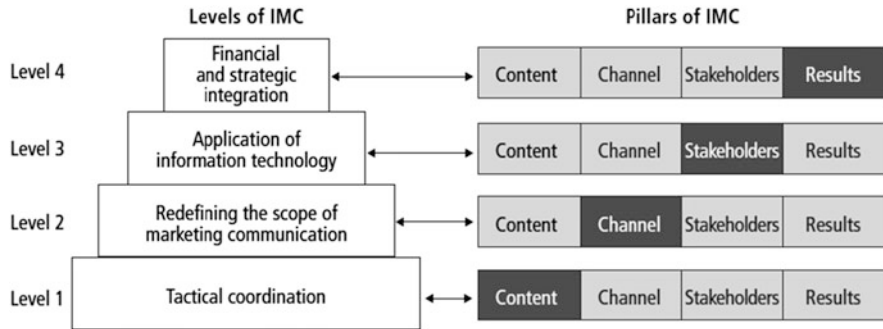


Fig. 3 The levels and pillars of IMC according to Kliatchko (2008, p. 153). Source: Kliatchko (2008, p. 153)

So in fact, we are facing a modern and advanced IMC theory that integrates various stakeholders, has a strong focus on tactics as well as on technology, and longs for a measurable ROI. In Kliatchko's (2008) terms we are talking about content, channels, stakeholders and results. This gives the impression of a lookalike of the latest discourse in communication management. There are still hidden barriers to reach a discussion stage where business studies and communication studies could refer to a common starting point in reconstructing integrated communication.

Bruhn (2014, pp. 114–116) explains that the media and communications sciences open the discourse with the statement that communication outcomes cannot be predicted—since the way in which recipients operate media information is not predictable. They are individual cognitive systems. Bruhn marks the terminology as differentiator: while marketing scholars talk about recipients, communication scholars talk about users—to underline their individuality. He summarizes his position (Bruhn, 2014, p. 116), when he finally declares that from a management perspective it is not satisfying to accept that integration is something that “happens” autonomously (meaning: without direct influence of the corporation). This means, in fact, that Bruhn chooses to ignore significant findings of communication research of the last 30 years.

Not to overcome this barrier signifies a blind spot in the development of IMC theory that marks a huge challenge when it comes to NGOs. Applying the IMC paradigm to a NGO means in the first step that the whole concept is redirected: from the NGO perspective, corporations become stakeholders (or clients). But what effect does that evoke, if these corporations try to apply integrated communication themselves? This seems to indicate that a systems theory approach, where stakeholders are environment to one another and the roles are interchangeable, is the most promising one.

Taking stakeholder theory seriously means, in our case, to accept that a possible business success is dependent on the stakeholder activity (or inactivity). And that obviously means that these organizations work to their own agenda and follow their own strategy. This opens up a new perspective for the theory of IMC: the

management discourse of IMC (Bruhn, 2014; Kliatchko, 2005; Schultz & Schultz, 1998) envisages a classical non-organized consumer. But, in the case of NGOs, consumer interests are accumulated and organized. They represent an abstract type of consumer who—due to the individual’s organizational network—acts like a mature counterpart instead of being a client or first-level consumer. This leads to the question of what NGOs can actually expect from the IMC concept.

2.3 Identifying Hidden Chances in the IMC Discourse for CSR and NGO Communication

Looking back at what we have already analyzed, we can point out several insights on IMC that will guide us through the following chapters:

- We no longer define IMC as a methodology to control and design communication processes on behalf of corporations. Instead, we assume IMC to be a discourse catalyzer that offers common starting options and a frame to co-creative processes of interpreting an organization, its values, strategies, products, services, legitimacy etc.
- We assume that IMC discourse is open to stakeholder theory and has multiple interfaces with it: Kliatchko’s (2008) pillar concept describes stakeholders as one of the four pillars of IMC; Kirchner (2001) assumes the fourth level of integration to be the level of stakeholder integration. And already Duncan and Caywood (1996) were talking about a “stakeholder-based stage” (although not yet in the wider sense that we have in mind today).
- Higher stages of advanced integration concepts transcend the mere communication stage: Kliatchko (2008), Duncan and Caywood (1996) or Kirchner (2001) talk about the development and maintenance of ongoing relationships, about strategic integration (into the business model), an ROI-perspective and the adjustment of the whole organization. All this means relationship development, dialogue, and acceptance of the critical role of stakeholders for business success.
- We assume that in communications, integration is a co-creative process that happens when communication partners interact: when communication products are used and commented, when they are discussed and revised or rewritten and, thus, transformed by interaction. Once this is accepted, the discussion focus shifts from the question of how to organize integration to how to create new and more flexible interaction issues (Spies, 2012).
- We believe that integration is not restricted to communication or business matters, but belongs into the wider context of social integration (Zerfaß, 2004). It is about situating a corporation, a NGO, a product, a public person in society, about integrating these entities and arguing their relevance and legitimacy.

- This involves both, sense making and sense giving (Morsing & Schultz, 2006) as forms of connecting CSR action (and other issues of a management agenda) to the core business process.

Applying IMC to CSR and NGOs defines a number of chances: if you take the IMC framework as common starting ground for co-creative processes of developing an organizational shape, products and legitimacy, this leads to arguing an organization's social role. It is possible to situate the organization, here: an NGO, in society and lay out the complex network of stakeholders that need to be integrated from an NGO perspective. This is the basis on which successful collaboration and cooperation with businesses is built.

3 Relations and Communication Approaches Concerning NGOs and Businesses

As previously explained, we place NGOs at the center of our argument. This holds a number of consequences, if you look at NGOs from a stakeholder relations' perspective (Karmasin, 2015). From a business' point of view one can value NGOs as (primary or secondary) stakeholder that has an impact on other stakeholders at the same level (e.g. suppliers or authorities) as well as on stakeholders of a higher (or more distant) level (e.g. general public). This is a central reason for the existence of several NGOs.¹

Since the term NGO is still an open one in the academic discussion, we would like to introduce some basic distinctions to clarify the boundaries of our understanding. Along with Arenas, Lozano, and Albareda (2009, p. 179), we see NGOs as "free-standing entities that sustain the collective action of the social movements from which they often emerged. They can be called 'social purpose NGOs', such as environmental groups, human rights organizations, organizations that fight against poverty and underdevelopment or provide medical assistance in emergencies." The necessary descriptors in our definition are (1) independence and a (2) social movements' heritage of (3) relevant social or environmental purposes. Arenas et al. (2009, p. 179) also name a fourth element that we support, which needs a bit more explanation: "Their 'clients' (beneficiaries) are different from the people who contribute time and resources; as such they are also called non-membership organizations." This aspect is to differentiate "social purpose NGOs" from "club NGOs" who mainly represent their members' interests, such as trade unions, business associations. We want to clarify that in most cases NGOs serve a purpose that is beyond their membership interests (like environmental or social issues,

¹Looking, for example, at anti-Corporate Campaigns it is quite easy to figure out that the most active NGOs in these conflicts would lose their edge and of course cease to exist, if the corporation itself or the critical aspects of their behavior would have vanished (cf. Baringhorst, Kneip, Niesyto, & März, 2010).

human rights or other fields of, so called, order politics). However, on the other hand, organizations like Amnesty International are also membership organizations; they serve a universal social purpose as well as serving their membership. And thereby, we need to stress that these organizations are not free of interests. According to general systems theory (Luhmann, 1984), an organization always seeks to secure its existence and to enlarge its power. And if you are a social purpose NGO, your own interests are in line with the society's expectations in the respective field: e.g. reducing inequality or poverty. On a second level of observation, however, the same organizations that seek to reduce inequality would destroy their own mission, if they accomplish their ultimate goal. Looking at it from an organizational theory point of view one may say: a social purpose NGO needs inequalities, poverty or other problems in the field of order politics to legitimize its very existence. Without these fundamental issues it would lose *license (or reason) to operate*. This is an important twist that we have to keep in mind while further examining the relation between NGOs and business entities.

Bearing in mind that NGOs have several formal or informal ways of impacting the success of corporations, there are a number of ways in which NGOs can approach corporate action (see also Toker, 2013):

- **Research, Consulting and Advising:**
Many NGOs are experts on social or environmental questions and can offer a wide range of expertise in their fields of activity. They are often referred to as experts by supra-national entities like the UN, by corporations or by the media. They produce reports, hold press conferences, and speak publicly at conferences, in hearings or parliamentary advisory groups. Businesses observe their behavior or even try to profit from their expertise and change behavior marked as critical.
- **Call to Action:**
In recent years NGOs have gained a public role as advocates of the public or as representatives addressing the common good (advocacy). Using this public role, NGOs can demand changes in deplorable states of affairs they detect and privately or publicly utter criticism.
- **Organizing Protest:**
If even public criticism does not lead to significant changes, NGOs can call for public action and organize protests against corporations, start a media campaign or organize alliances to put more pressure on the respective organization.
- **Cooperation and Development:**
The opposite way to reach a change in behavior is that of cooperation, which NGOs can also try. If they chose to cooperate, this can help the corporation to achieve more progress in less time; it can help the NGO to obtain additional funding or at least to gain publicity and to achieve public proof of concept.

These four roles that NGOs show in their relation towards businesses also mark different communication patterns that are dominant in the approaches (see Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, the listed communication patterns such as personal/impersonal, general/individual or rational/emotional are connected to the role that an

Table 1 NGOs' communications patterns towards businesses (own composition)

| NGO roles | Dominant Comms pattern | Less dominant Comms pattern |
|---|--|--|
| Research, Consulting & Advising (advisor) | (Impersonal) Mass (and Soc.) Media; general; rational argumentation | Personal communication; individual consulting; dialogue |
| Call to Action (advocate) | Personal Communication; individual; rational argumentation; dialogue (offer) | (Impersonal) Mass (and Soc.) Media; individual; rational and emotional argumentation |
| Organizing Protest (organizer) | (Impersonal) Mass (and Soc.) Media; individual; emotional argumentation | Personal communication; individual; forming alliances; negotiations; dialogue |
| Cooperation & Development (partner) | Personal Communication; individual; rational argumentation; negotiations; dialogue; agreements | (Impersonal) Mass (and Soc.) Media; general; rational & emotional argumentation |

NGO is playing in a situated context; we may say that these communication patterns are context-sensitive.

In an advising and consulting role, NGOs use mass and social media to demand changes (e.g. in climate politics); they address governments or business on a more general level. Some corporations ask for assistance or rely on NGO information to change their behavior or adjust e.g. production processes to make them more resistant to public criticism. Calling to action is usually—often as a first step²—tailored to organizations themselves asking for change. In organizing protest, the communication style is also impersonal via mass media, but more aggressive, emotional and often individual in the sense that a specific target group is chosen to concentrate on (e.g. an anti-corporate campaign; cf. Baringhorst et al. 2010).

The role that offers a variety of possible touch points to the idea of CSR is the cooperation and development role. In this role, NGOs play the part of an active partner instead of staying outside the process—observing and criticizing. This leads us to the question about the possible access ways NGOs have towards the social phenomenon called CSR. We have to explore this field before we can discuss the role of NGOs in CSR communication.

4 General Perceptions of NGOs

When it comes to the increasing relevance of CSR in businesses and across sectors, NGOs are usually seen as one of the main drivers of this development (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 182; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). It is also widely accepted that NGOs are among those institutions that enjoy the highest credibility in society. This trend has

²When Greenpeace asks for a change, they usually address the company itself. If they do not agree to enter into a discussion with Greenpeace (like in the Kitkat campaign against Swiss food company Nestlé), the next step is a public campaign.

only recently slowed, as the 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer proves: NGOs' credibility is slightly lower than in previous years. Especially in Western Europe, the perception of NGOs seems to be changing, whereas their perception in Asia or in the BRIC countries is still climbing, or has reached the highest credibility rates of all organization forms named in the poll (Marell, 2016).

However, if you look more closely at NGOs' perception—as Arenas et al. (2009) did in a groundbreaking study gathering perceptions of 57 professionals from for-profit organizations as well as from NGOs in Spain—the scenery is a lot more complex and can be traced to various sub-perceptions. What we can learn from their contribution is that a lot of concern rises regarding the legitimacy of NGOs, their demands and tactics. The self-perception of NGOs and their self-confidence in being a legal and trustworthy representative “only partially coincides with the perception” of market participants (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 190). Their findings support the following reasons:

- NGOs believe they are justified by showing “coherence in their mission and commitment to social change” (ibid). But that might not be enough, because NGOs are also seen as business partners who seem to be “strongly motivated by a desire to gain access to business resources” (ibid).
- A reason for the sometimes divergent perceptions lies in the sheer number of NGOs that provokes the question who and how many people they represent—and if they are free of third-party interest.
- Another reason is the handling of their different roles of NGOs, sometimes being e.g. a consultant or trainer for corporations and receiving compensation for that, “while other (or the same ones) put pressure on companies and blame them for bad conduct” (ibid).
- The question of handling of roles is continued when it comes to defining the attitude towards stepping into CSR cooperation: while some NGOs stay behind and are merely open to consultations on senior management or top management level, others are willing to engage in advisory boards or even boards of directors (ibid.).
- Finally, NGOs seem to lack an understanding of business concerns and what the rules of business are. They are considered as utopian and partly unrealistic. This is, of course, legitimate; but on the other hand, having knowledge of the business world is necessary, if you want to build a joint project with businesses (ibid.).

The authors close with the conclusion that NGOs “are and continue to be essential for the progress of CSR, they are not always aware of the stereotypes that they generate and the problems caused mainly by what is seen as their ambivalent role. (. . .) An important task is to explain their double role and manage it wisely” (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 191).

NGOs are at a higher risk of losing legitimacy than any other organizational form: they themselves have to fulfill every expectation and standard that they demand from others. Even minor misbehavior can lead to dramatic consequences like distrust or a sudden gap in public support. And since the NGOs' realm is quite

complex and unclear, NGOs cannot expect to be trusted anyway. They have to give proof of concept and legitimacy like any other organization.

5 What CSR Can Mean to NGOs

To further explain which different ways of perception between social structures like NGOs and social practices like CSR exist, we refer to the four public roles of NGOs that we explained earlier: advisor, advocate, organizer, and partner. The dominant perceptions of CSR (from the perspective of an NGO) are—according to these roles—at least the following *perception modes*:

- *Rating agent*: as public advisors and advocates of public interest NGOs are target groups of corporate CSR communication. CSR reports or CSR programs are designed as an answer to the public call for action or reports on corporate behavior. They seek to convince NGOs in terms of legitimacy, transparency and openness by simultaneously addressing the public good. NGOs who comment on CSR initiatives or are influenced in their evaluation of corporate activities by CSR reports give credibility to businesses and serve as rating agents in the arena of public legitimacy (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 189).
- *Protest agent*: if a discourse between an NGO and a corporation has reached the stage of public conflict, CSR communication is often used against a corporation either to blame the organization for greenwashing or justifying their activities, or deflecting and blinding civil society's observing eye on them.
- *Development agent*: finally, if corporations seek to collaborate with NGOs CSR becomes a way to report on their collaborative activities. In using corporate resources and NGO intelligence as well as reputation, CSR programs can reach a new stage and make significant contributions. Subsequently, in NGO-business-collaborations CSR becomes an entity of its own that is backed from both sides: from the corporation and from a civil society representative.

In addition to these three modes that describe the possible alternatives of interventions and perceptions of CSR and its communication, we see a fourth perception mode that is obvious in the relation of businesses and NGOs from the second order perception:

- *Business partner*: taking up the idea (previously explained) that NGOs systematically need inequalities, environmental problems and other disparities that can be connected with problems of social order, collaborative projects between NGOs and corporations can be seen as business partnerships in quite a traditional sense, opening up benefits for both sides. So, CSR can develop into a field of business for NGOs. We will get back to this in the next section.

Finally, we have to ask what is meant if we apply CSR as a concept to NGOs themselves: what does it mean to be socially responsible as a NGO?

- *Self-regulation*: asking what CSR means to NGOs' behavior can only mean self-regulation in terms of how to deal with funding and membership fees, who to cooperate with in order to maintain a good reputation or how to behave in the arena of public conflict (Arenas et al., 2009: 181). Everything that is able to damage or harm the good reputation of an NGO or to harm its legitimacy as advocate may end up in putting its own *license to operate* in question.³

6 Cooperation Between NGOs and Businesses

Taking the outcomes of the presented literature review on integrated communication and combining them with what we have gathered on the various roles that NGOs play with regard to businesses, and bearing in mind which communication approaches they use and which perception modes they represent, it is easy to guess that cooperation between businesses and NGOs is one of the most common ways of putting CSR into practice.

According to Seitanidi and Crane (2009, p. 413), partnerships between businesses and NGOs are “an increasingly prominent element of corporate social responsibility implementation”. This implies benefits for both sides: business executives seek a broader basis for their performance evaluation “from a short-term financial focus to include long-term socio-environmental impacts and value added. (...) more corporate executives are willing today to consider an alternative view to strategic management integrating social responsibility considerations” (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009, p. 278). NGOs on the other hand are interested in promoting “more ethical and social responsible business practices” (ibid.). The reasons to engage in these kinds of cross-sector alliance for businesses can be diverse, ranging from reputational effects or increasing social status or recognition to learning in the field of CSR, up to risk prevention (Fombrun, Gardberg, & Barnett, 2000) or corporate foresight. NGOs are generally motivated by increased competition for limited funding, escalating societal needs or serious sustainable concerns. While businesses have the respective resources and managerial efficiency to promote significant changes, NGOs have “expertise and knowledge in what is needed to be done in the field” (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009, p. 279).

Partnerships between businesses and NGOs can be described as co-operations that can be beneficial for both sides. Seitanidi and Crane (2009) describe the creation of a business-NGO-partnership as a complex management task that starts with a (1) selection process where the form of partnership is decided upon and

³Identifying CSR of NGOs with self-control in terms of safeguarding the reputation and legitimacy or being transparent is only one way of applying the CSR approach to NGOs. Other authors like Waters and Ott (2014) seem to offer a broader interpretation; but if you look at the findings of their study (interviews with 17 communication managers of the San Francisco Bay area) the only descriptions for what CSR means to NGOs are “doing something for community good” and “demonstrating that the organization is accountable” (Waters & Ott, 2014, p. 13).

different options are valued against possible risks. At the second stage the (2) partnership itself is designed in terms of experimentation, adaption, and operationalization. (3) Institutionalization of the partnership follows as third and final stage (along with an exit strategy that represents a hidden fourth stage). The listed stages are accessible from both sides: the business and the NGO's side. This is because risks exist likewise, as well as the need to adapt to each other's expectations. And as already mentioned, Arenas et al. (2009) stressed the fact that up to now NGOs have rarely been seen as qualified partners when it comes to understanding the logic of business.

Jonker and Nijhof (2006) developed a "questionnaire for assessing expectations in order to shape dialogue and collaboration" as an instrument to be used in the above described adjustment process. Samii et al. (2002) and Kanter (1994) collected success factors like resource dependency, commitment symmetry, common goal symmetry, intensive communication, individual excellence, investments and many others that may influence a successful partnership setup.

In these models CSR communication plays a key role as success factor that is also a "delicate" one (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010, p. 17). We are going to comment on this role before we reintegrate the case of CSR into our previous discussion on integrated communication.

7 The Communication-Collaboration Challenge in Managing for CSR

The problem of communicating CSR is quite similar to the legitimacy question of NGOs that we explored earlier: once communication on CSR is too explicit it can harm the good deeds beneath. "Corporate social responsibility communication can have a backlash effect, if stakeholders become suspicious and perceive predominantly extrinsic motives in companies' social initiatives. Hence a key challenge of CSR communication is to overcome stakeholder skepticism and to generate favorable CSR attributions" (Du et al., 2010, p. 17).

But there is more than this basic logic. In a multi-variables approach Du et al. (2010) have presented a framework for the effectiveness of CSR communication that has been highly recognized in recent years (see Fig. 4). The framework shows an input-stage on the left side, where it presents the two major elements of CSR communication: the message content and its various channels. On the right side it displays several internal and external outcomes like awareness and trust or purchase, loyalty etc. that can be found throughout the discourse on effectiveness and communication ROI (Ragas & Culp, 2014). In the middle they place a range of intervening variables that they call "contingency factors"—since they are able to impact the possible outcomes.

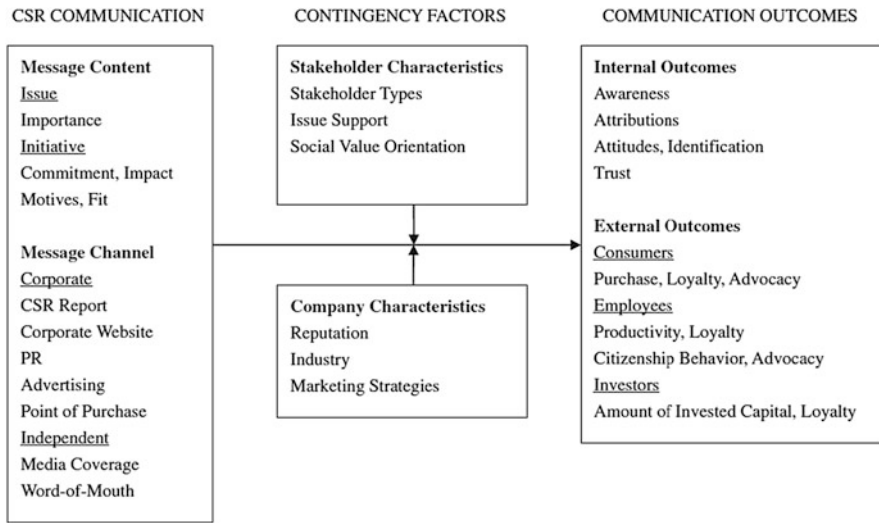


Fig. 4 Effectiveness framework for CSR communication by Du et al. (2010, p. 11)

As much as this merely represents a general generic framework that only gives a very basic overview,⁴ it still shows that CSR communication is placed in an extremely complex setting and has a lot to take into account, if it deals with the question of how to impact business returns of CSR initiatives. The framework is designed with for-profit businesses in mind. Nevertheless, the generic structure can easily be transferred to an NGO setting. Waters and Ott (2014) used it in the same way when exploring CSR attitudes in the nonprofit sector. One of their research questions focuses on the communication strategies of NGOs with regard to CSR. Their findings illustrate that NGOs try to avoid the term ‘CSR’, intending to not label their initiatives as such. The moment that donors or supporters believe that the NGO resembles a business (which even the involved staff believes), the respective NGO starts to lose support.

We describe this contradiction as “communication-collaboration challenge” in CSR communication. Hence, we assume that the context for CSR communication of NGOs is not the question of how to generate communication effectivity in terms of sales or donations, but to secure the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of the NGO by delivering proofs of concept of their efforts. They have to prove that they can impact the world of business in a way that does not corrupt them. NGOs have to show they are able to influence others and, at the same moment, they have to communicate that they remain uninfluenced by others and stay away from

⁴The framework is similar to other literature on communication affectivity that is already more developed, namely Coombs’ (2006) SCCT model for crisis communication that has already been empirically tested and could have been a good model in terms of dealing with attribution theory. Also, the question of the interplay of variables and how they impact each other remains unmentioned.

becoming a business themselves. Therefore, we assume the context of integration is not just about integrating CSR communication in the frames of IMC or of corporate communications, but in the sense of social integration (Zerfaß, 2004, 2008). Social integration means “the linking-up of different social actions or elements so as to form a shared context of action, one in which the conflict-potentials inherent in the division of labor and the distribution of resources among different agents are overcome. Social integration is thereby a normative concept—integration can be successful, or fail, in different degrees” (Zerfaß, 2008, p. 72).

Moreover, this is in line with stakeholder theory as Karmasin (2015) explains: organizations are referenced as a communicative construct, as a community of sense and shared values whose boundaries are also of communicative nature. “The normative goal is the integration of the organization into society resp. the re-integration of society in the organization (and not only the re-integration of markets). (. . .) Public Relations is the recursive and self-organized constitution of a public sphere and—as a process—the production and reproduction of specific organizational identities and legitimacy” (Karmasin, 2015, p. 347f.; own translation).

Zerfaß (2008, p. 72f.) describes three different dimensions of social integration:

1. *Conflicts in respect of means and (following this) the coordination of action.* In this case the means necessary for a certain action are not yet available. So, the company has to adjust its action to the intentions of others.
2. *Conflicts in respect of ends and integration of interests.* Actions that need to be integrated turn into a problem when the goals of agents are incompatible. Communication is needed here to explicate the various interests and find a compromise.
3. *Definitions of situations and interpretation of actions.* If no consensus is reached or a problem remains unsolved it is often unclear who to blame. The agents (e.g. NGOs and corporations) interpret the reasons differently. “The creation of a common interpretative framework represents a cognitive challenge in itself” (Zerfaß, 2008: 73) that only a process of communication can develop.

In a wider sense integrated communication is about re-integrating an organization into society. This is a challenge in general and for every type of organization. But for NGOs and other non-for-profit entities, this is the ultimate challenge, for they need to prove in every given situation that they are in a position of legitimacy. They are generally insecure organizations in the sense of being driven by a strong mission but weak in terms of structure, resources and the ability to reach set goals. From a business point of view they are more “stakeseekers” rather than “stakeholders” (Arenas et al., 2009, p. 184).

As a conclusion with regards to integrated communication (see Sect. 2.3 above) this means: NGOs are part of the co-creative challenge to integrate (or re-integrate) society into the business world and vice versa: to integrate businesses into society. As partner of CSR projects or as judge/rating agent and target group of corporate CSR communication NGOs play a key role in rating and promoting the legitimacy of profit-organization in society. In doing so, NGOs always have to behave in a way

that supports their own legitimacy (i.e. integration) in society and must maintain the distance to and the distinction between business and the non-profit realm. As we have seen, integration into society is always a communicative challenge. But communication of CSR matters needs to be balanced in order not to harm the reputation and status of an NGO. Hence, a NGOs communication-collaboration challenge in managing for CSR is to communicate their own impact, expertise and success in collaborating with businesses, while at the same time communicating their independence, where the boundaries of the cooperation are, what else they expect from partners, where they disagree with the partnering corporation, etc. This covers issues, impacts and motives, and it also involves clearly pointing out where the ends, commitments and social values of both partners lie (Du et al., 2010). It means to describe the fit—and the gap (where necessary).

8 Exercise and Reflective Questions

1. What is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)? Give a ‘classic’ definition.
2. Which other fields and stages of integration can be found beyond instrumental integration?
3. The concept of IMC also stirs negative emotions about hindering variety and being over-controlled. Please explain.
4. “NGOs represent the public good—not the interests of members.” Discuss this statement with regard to systems theory.
5. NGOs enter the public discourse in various roles. Explain the four prominent roles.
6. The general perception of NGOs in the public and among business is ambivalent. Please explain why.
7. There are different ways NGOs can approach the concept of CSR. Please name and differentiate the perception modes that NGOs can choose when it comes to CSR.
8. Explain what it means to be “socially responsible” as an NGO.
9. Discuss risks of cooperation between NGOs and businesses.
10. What is meant by the expression “communication-collaboration challenge in managing for CSR”?

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