IF IMC IS SO GOOD, WHY ISN'T IT BEING IMPLEMENTED?

Barriers to IMC Adoption in Corporate America

By Loyd S. Pettegrew, Ph.D.

Loyd Pettegrew asserts that, despite IMC making “good sense,” corporate America has still not fully embraced it. In his article, Pettegrew provides a structural-functional analysis of the barriers to IMC adoption and offers six recommendations for combating those barriers.

Introduction

Since its inception, Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) (Schultz, Tannenbaum & Lauterborn, 1992) has received considerable attention in both the academic and practitioner communities. The widespread attention paid to IMC is largely a function of its strong intuitive appeal - it makes good sense. Despite its appeal, more than a decade has passed since the concept was first introduced, and most major U.S. corporations have yet to fully implement the foundational ideas contained in IMC. In fact, Schultz, et. al. (1992) state that acceptance of IMC hasn't been as rapid as they had hoped. Proponents of IMC are left with a compelling question, a variation of a rhetorical question that has hounded economics (McCloskey, 1990), marketing (Fortini-Campbell, 1992) and IMC (Schultz, et. al., 1992): If IMC is so good, why isn't it being fully implemented in corporate America?

Intuitive appeal notwithstanding, the theory of IMC fails to take into account the way most corporations are structured and function or their unique culture. From its origins (Schultz, et. al., 1992), there has been much more emphasis given to the implementation of an IMC program than to the organizational barriers that mitigate against its initial acceptance by a given corporation. In fact, in the Schultz, et. al. (1992) and Percy (1997) books on IMC, only 33 of 441 pages address the problems with establishing an IMC program in a modern organization. Percy admits that his book on strategies for implementing IMC is not concerned with many of the organizational problems in trying to implement IMC within a given corporation. This essay argues that the theory of IMC, while theoretically pragmatic, ultimately fails because of significant structural-functional barriers to its implementation.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to implementing IMC in a given company is the absence of direct support from the CEO. In the absence of CEO support, there is an operational threshold past which IMC cannot be fully or effectively adopted.

The value of IMC to corporate America lies less in which companies have adopted it and more in the competitive advantage it can provide, and the fact that the complexity of human communication requires tenacious integration in order to be consistent and effective. Many companies that are held up as exemplars of IMC, fail to uphold IMC standards on a company-wide basis. Subsequent examination of Nike and Proctor & Gamble will reveal that until recent crises, neither of these companies structurally or functionally integrated public relations and employee communications with their marketing functions. In fact, these two companies have consistently failed to follow the advice of public relations legend, Arthur W. Page, who, in 1984 wrote, “Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it.” If IMC is to become truly a theory-in-use (Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985; Van DeVen, 1989), a substantive analysis of organizational barriers to the adoption of IMC and strategic actions to overcome them must be advanced. Only then can there be widespread implementation of IMC by U.S. corporations.
Necessary Conditions for IMC Success

There are a series of necessary conditions that must be present for IMC to be adopted effectively by a company. Based on these conditions, six recommendations for optimal adoption of IMC are offered:

- IMC is a concept that must be implemented systematically and simultaneously at all levels and functions of a company. One program in which the public relations and marketing functions are integrated does not qualify the company as an IMC exemplar.

- The CEO must voice direct support for adopting IMC, because without this critical element, IMC efforts are doomed.

- Beware of companies with strong marketing cultures, because issues like corporate reputation will take a back seat to the provincialism of brand management.

- Structural and functional issues must become a critical component of any effective IMC program. Of particular importance is establishing a communications czar who will become the evangelist and conscience of the IMC implementation effort.

- Any IMC program must be adapted to the unique character of a particular organizational culture. A "one-size-fits-all" IMC program does not exist. For an IMC program to work effectively, it must reflect the unique culture in which it must operate.

- We must look beyond narrow IMC successes in traditional businesses for exemplars. Many of America’s most venerable corporations do a few aspects of IMC well, but fail to exemplify company-wide integration.

IMC Defined

An excellent historical review of the evolving conceptualizations of IMC can be found in Duncan & Caywood (1996). No attempt is made to critique that essay, rather, I focus on the developments that have taken place since the Duncan & Caywood piece. Borrowing from the fields of law and social science, I offer "conditions" which must be met in order for a corporation to accurately reflect the practice of IMC. These conditions should be considered "necessary," but not sufficient conditions of IMC practice.

1. It must speak to all stakeholders with a "single," consistent voice.
2. It must assume the consumers’ point of view.
3. Its strategic communications disciplines must be internally integrated.
4. It must have a clear and consistent message that is more efficient and effective than competing messages.
5. Its messages must cut through the increasingly cluttered commercial landscape.
6. It must foster a two-way dialogue between consumers and itself.
7. It must build bonds that lead to long-term, consumer-to-brand relationships.
8. It must not place excellent marketing ahead of corporate reputation.

Duncan and Caywood discuss three components of IMC that emerged from early IMC literature. First, in order to be fully integrated, corporations must integrate all of their internal communications groups along with the various communications agencies that work with them. Second, corporations must integrate both internal and external communication functions. It is critical for a corporation to communicate with its employees in a manner consistent with the way it communicates to the public and other external stakeholders. Third, communication itself must be viewed as the process by which relationships between the corporation and its many stakeholders are built and sustained.
In 1997, Percy expanded the definition somewhat to include "a common set of communication objectives, or more particularly, to support a single 'positioning.'" Percy believes that the IMC process "is realigning communications to look at it the way the consumer sees it, as a flow of information from indistinguishable sources." A year later, Harris (1998) advanced the idea that IMC was not about marketing taking over all communications functions within an organization, nor was it simply another name for database marketing. Rather IMC could be characterized by four specific outcomes: 1) A clear and consistent message is delivered that is both more efficient and effective than competing messages; 2) The clear and consistent message cutting through the increasingly cluttered commercial landscape; 3) Communication that fosters a two-way dialogue between consumers and companies; 4) An interaction that builds bonds that lead to long-term consumer-to-brand relationships (Harris, 1998). At the heart of Harris' notion of IMC is the assumption that when multiple messages from a company to stakeholders become consistent across time and targets, the credibility of both the company and its brand(s) is increased.

Surgy (1998) advances the idea that IMC "recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines--for example, general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations--and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum communications impact."

Taken together, these ideas form the foundation of the eight "IMC conditions" offered above and the six recommendations for optimal adoption offered at the beginning of this section. Using these eight conditions, we can now examine how Nike and Proctor & Gamble live up to IMC ideal in their communication practices.

**IMC's Underwhelming Success**

There is little substantive evidence that IMC, according to the definitional components mentioned above, is widely or effectively practiced among major corporations in America. A study by Duncan (1991) revealed that nearly a decade ago, nearly 60% of corporate marketing managers were familiar with the term IMC. Hamel (1997) reports a more recent MCI/Gallup survey of American corporate CEOs revealing that fewer than one-in-three (31%) believe success is attributable to better execution of communication functions. A large percentage of CEOs said that success in business today is a function of newcomers who have changed the rules of the game. Perhaps most telling is the fact that many corporations cited as exemplars in IMC literature turn out to have fairly narrow marketing communication programs that, on closer scrutiny, may not represent IMC well at all.

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**Nike - The Quintessential Marketing Company**

Nike, the athletic footwear and apparel manufacturer, has been cited as an exemplar of marketing and IMC excellence. In a cover story from Fortune, Hamel (1997) poses rhetorically: "Ask Nike CEO Phil Knight what he likes to do best, and he doesn't hesitate a beat - he likes to break things...Then in the 1980s, he transformed his successful athletic shoe company into a marketing machine, saturating the airwaves with radical commercials that emphasized emotion rather than product." Schultz, et al. (1992) tout Nike's success in their IMC book: "The thinking behind IMC is that every communication - price, label, logo, promotion, distribution-should be created to help persuade the target of the competitive benefit." Duncan and Caywood (1996) also include Nike among several companies "that have been extremely successful and, based on observation, are doing excellent jobs of integrating their communication efforts."

Nike's breaking the marketing rules of the athletic footwear industry has come at a price paid by its worldwide corporate reputation. Given these setbacks, one could argue that Phil Knight's strategic wisdom for Nike is more akin to innovative advertising and horizontal integration than true IMC. Nike is fundamentally...

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ments and sexy advertising – not integrated communications. There is little evidence that Nike's success was achieved by the "strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value" (Keegan, Moriarty & Duncan, 1992).

A closer examination reveals that at least part of Nike's fall from grace, however, can be attributed to not following the precepts of IMC. While some experts (Sellers, 1998) lay blame on fickle fashion trends and heightened competition, there are other missteps that suggest Nike's marketing communications may not be so seamless or exemplary. For example, in 1997, Nike followed its patent bold and brash "in your face" marketing recipe in an attempt to gain market share in international soccer (Thurw, 1997). In Spain, an overwhelmingly Catholic nation, Nike introduced a commercial of Satan and his demons playing against a team of Nike endorsers. Spain refused to allow the commercial to air during primetime. Nike also placed an ad in Soccer America magazine saying: "Europe, Asia and Latin America: Barricade your stadiums. Hide your trophies. Invest in some deodorant [emphasis mine]. As Asia and Latin America have been crushed. So will Europe...The world has been warned" (Thurw, 1997). And finally, Nike ran an ad on British TV featuring a controversial French soccer player who detailed how spitting at a fan and insulting his coach had won him a Nike contract. Far from having an insight into the soccer market from the customer's point of view and gaining ground against rival Adidas, Nike garnered a scathing editorial in the International Federation of Football (soccer) Associations' newsletter.

There is other recent evidence that Nike is hardly the quintessential IMC company. Nike fumbled and allowed allegations of child-labor sweatshops in Asia that subcontract the manufacturing of Nike shoes to fester. When a team of journalists came to document conditions for themselves, Nike shut the factories down (www.nike.com, 1999). Prior to this series of incidents, widely published news stories detailed incidents in which poor children in the inner-city were robbing, stealing and seriously injuring peers to obtain expensive Nike shoes such as Air Jordans. Publicly Nike ignored these charges for years. Considering these two incidents, there was a bona fide public relations crisis any company engaged in legitimate IMC could have anticipated before it became a crisis. Instead, Nike just kept on marketing until crisis overwhelmed it.

Nike's power as an IMC exemplar is, at best, overstated. Harris (1998) contends: "That master marketer of our times, Phil Knight, likes to point out that while an ad page in Sports Illustrated costs $150,000, no amount of money can buy the front cover where swoosh-bearing athletes appear with great frequency. The omnipresent swoosh has a 90 percent-plus awareness among consumers, enabling it to stand alone." Many seasoned public relations professionals are quick to admit that companies that live by extraordinary market exposure can also die by the same token. In a recent effort to distance itself from its public relations problems, Nike first tried to eliminate its swoosh from its marketing campaigns and replace it with a "kinder-friendlier" marketing approach that emphasizes fair labor practices, the global community and environment. After three decades of riding high-powered marketing, Nike has finally gotten some public relations religion.

**Procter & Gamble - The World's Great Consumer Products Company**

Procter & Gamble is considered by business scholars to be a world-class marketing company. Like the Nike brand, Procter & Gamble possesses some of the most recognizable brands in the world including: Tide detergent, Crest toothpaste, Jif peanut butter, Cover Girl cosmetics, and Duncan Hines cake mix. It also has dominant market share with many of its premier brands. But is Procter & Gamble an IMC exemplar as described in the literature (Baldinger, 1996; Harris, 1998)? If beginning with stakeholders and speaking to them with one voice across all communications channels is an important criterion of IMC, the answer must be "no."

Despite Procter & Gamble's marketing preeminence, it has a history of internal and external communication blunders reminiscent of Nike. Procter & Gamble publicly mishandled both the Rely Tampon crisis and allegations that their packaging symbol documented the company's satanic links. Recently, Procter & Gamble lost face publicly and alienated employees when it was revealed that the company had phone-tapped three employees they suspected of leaking company information. This was followed by a botched job of dealing with some of the physiological effects of its new fat substitute, Olestra. Without considering public reaction, they allowed their scientists to term the discharge of Olestra, "anal leakage" (Henkoff, 1996), raising another wave of
public controversy. Lately Proctor & Gamble shot itself in the
corporate reputational foot again. The Chief Financial Officer
(CFO) announced to the financial media that Proctor & Gamble
fully expected to meet its earnings forecast for the end of the
quarter. Two weeks later, new CEO Dark Jager was forced to
announce to the same media that they had badly overestimated
their quarterly earnings and that the company would fall signifi-
cantly short of its quarterly earnings forecast. Over the following
week, the company’s stock fell precipitously as shareholders and
financial markets lost faith in the venerable company. The Proctor
& Gamble Board of Directors subsequently fired Mr. Jager. New
CEO A.G. Lafley must now try to regain market share and end
the defections of many of the company’s best and brightest to the
hi-tech industry. Despite Harris’ (1998) characterizations to the
contrary, these examples illustrate just how far away Proctor &
Gamble has been operating from the necessary IMC condition of
speaking to all stakeholders with one voice (Schultz et al., 1992).

The Problem with Implementing IMC

In the previous section, we revealed that scholars, in their
enthusiasm to make their case, have picked exemplars that are not
true practitioners of IMC. While Nike and Procter & Gamble do
an excellent job with the marketing side of marketing communi-
cations without integrating their public and employee relations
functions, their corporate reputations have suffered. IMC theory
has given short shrift to the organizational barriers that often pre-
vent companies from implementing IMC completely or effective-
ly. As we shall see, in nearly 100 articles and books about IMC,
there are only three essays address cultural and structural-functional
barriers, and one resource focuses exclusively on organizational
barriers from the communications agency perspective. In the few
essays that do address organizational barriers to IMC, the most
important barrier, the need for support of IMC by top-level man-
agement, particularly the CEO, is ignored. If IMC scholars are to
address the criticism posed in the title of this article, “If IMC is so
good, why isn’t it being implemented more by corporate Ameri-
cans?” the issue of “CEO support” for IMC must be placed on the

Organizational Barriers

I have argued that two companies, Nike and Procter & Gam-
ble, touted by IMC scholars to be exemplars, fall far short of the
IMC ideal. Neither company has comprehensively or effectively
integrated its many communications functions seamlessly or spoken
to their stakeholders with one voice. Both companies are
very strong in marketing, but remain weak in public relations,
employee communications, or both. The question remains, how
do great companies like these miss the IMC mark? The answer to
this important question lies, to a great extent, in their respective
organizational structures. Both Nike and Procter & Gamble are
marketing organizations, organized around product marketing.

Procter & Gamble exemplifies a “brand management” organi-
zer where both line and staff functions are situated within a
company’s various products or brands. While Procter & Gamble’s
organizational structure has evolved over the years, staff communi-
cation functions such as public relations and employee communi-
cations are organized around and directly support each brand or
group of brands. Brands receive the greatest resources and exert
huge internal influence. Beginning in June, 1999, Procter &
Gamble undertook a new organizational initiative that created a
unit called “Global Business Services” providing a centralized staff
support service across all of its Global Business Units (GBUs).
Prior to this initiative, each brand unit had its own communica-
tions staff functions with little company-wide centralization and
control. Despite this change, the heart of Procter & Gamble’s
organization revolves around product groups (GBUs) and a huge
amount of control exists at this level (www.P&G.com, 1999). It is
also clear by looking at the organizational chart that marketing
dominate Procter & Gamble’s top management levels.

While Nike uses another form of organization, its structure and
functions still emphasize marketing its products and services.
CEO Phillip Knight is Nike’s marketing chief and, until its recent
reputational woes, exemplified its bold and brash approach to the
market (Thurow, 1997). Below the CEO level are business units
that include athletic footwear, watches and eyewear, clothing, outdoor and auto racing clothing and equipment, upscale dress shoes
(Cole Haan), special events and sponsorships. Most marketing
decisions are made by the heads of these business units without
the kind of collaboration and central planning required by IMC.
Staff communication functions such as investor relations, public
affairs and human resources have traditionally played support roles.
Structure, Function and Culture

I mentioned earlier in this essay that with the number of articles, reports and books on the subject of IMC nearing one hundred, there are only three essays that deal in any substance with barriers to implementing IMC. These essays include Chapter 9 in Integrated Marketing Communications: Pulling It Together & Making It Work (Schultz, et. al., 1992), Chapter 9 in Strategies for Implementing Integrated Marketing Communications (Percy, 1997) and "Integrated Marketing Communication: An Organizational Perspective" (Prensky, McCarty & Lucas, 1996). Of these three, the latter essay deals almost exclusively with organizational problems between the client organization and its many communications vendors.

Schultz, et. al. (1992) argue that there are three organizational issues that must be resolved before IMC can be implemented: marketing planning systems and basic marketing thinking, organizational structure, and capabilities and control. They believe that because functional specialists within an organization try to keep the various communications programs separate, they are a major hindrance to IMC implementation (Schultz, et. al., 1992). One of the authors' programmatic solutions is to establish a "communications czar" who has control of all communication functions and presumably would ensure that all communications programs are effectively integrated (Schultz, et. al., 1992). The authors fail to consider how, structurally and functionally, a communications czar could come into being in the modern organization. Also, as I have shown with both Proctor & Gamble and Nike, in strong marketing cultures, most communications heads are subordinate to the chief marketing officer. So, an initiative establishing a communications czar is very unlikely to come from any of the three or more functional heads that risk losing authority and responsibility in the process of integration. Perhaps the most logical and effective way for the position of a communications czar to be established is by the CEO of the company. Unfortunately, the literature neglects the power of the CEO as a barrier or enabler to implementing IMC.

The Importance of CEO Control

The importance of the CEO in implementing IMC has been largely ignored. Schultz, et. al. (1992) devote a four-sentence paragraph to the subject observing: "The CEO must actively support IMC. He or she must remove the many barriers that will prevent the implementation of IMC." This token nod notwithstanding, there are numerous ways CEOs can undermine IMC. Without their active support or stewardship, IMC will likely never get off the ground. But even when they support IMC, there are numerous examples of CEOs acting against its principles. This is because many CEOs have a great deal of power and control and egos that come along with these forces. CEOs often act in self-interest or according to their predilections, instead of advice from their communications czar.

One of the more recent examples is the controversial series of full-page ads for CrossWorlds, a Silicon Valley software company. These ads appeared in leading business publications such as Fortune and the Wall Street Journal and showed CEO Katrina Garnett in a revealing black dress, despite public relations advice to the contrary. While the ad garnered a great deal of publicity, it also spawned critical articles like the one in Fortune titled: "Tech-no-Cleavage" (Bass, 1998). This ad prompted a series of parodies by competitors including one by arch-rival Active Software, where its CEO pulls a CD-ROM from his pocket and says: "Software, not evening wear." The fact is that CEOs have the power to market their companies any way they want, with or without the guidance of IMC.

Another example of CEO control over advertising comes from the mandate of the CEO of Nissan U.S. to breathe new life into its commercials. Beatty (1997) recounts the famous Nissan commercials featuring toys instead of actual people with cameos by Mr. K, the iconoclastic former head of Nissan U.S. who brought the first Japanese sports car, the 240Z, to America. While the commercials produced by Chiat/Day were a hit with TV critics, they were a miserable failure with customers. Nissan dealers, after more than a year of declining car sales, finally had the commercials halted. One dealer said: "I thought it was a great commercial, but they were trying to advertise a car they don't make anymore. It didn't sell cars" (Beatty, 1997). The fact is that many CEOs want commercials that get rave reviews among their close circle of peers and notoriety from the public, no matter what effect they have on consumers or the company's bottom line. A CEO may decide to make or keep a commercial whether or not it speaks with a seamless voice to the organization's stakeholders or begins with consumer research data (Percy, 1997). To minimize the influence of
the CEO on company marketing is naïve, but to exclude the CEO in any substantive discussion of IMC adoption and implementation is simply deficient theory building.

**Putting Organization and Culture into IMC Theory**

If structure, function and CEO support are given short shrift in IMC theory, culture is virtually ignored. The issue of corporate culture is dealt with in two lines in an essay by Prensky, McCarty & Lucas (1996). The authors state: "[The process of integrated marketing] addresses the organizational and managerial issues that will ultimately relate to likely success of the integrated communications effort. Process is not only the question of the organizational structure, but the issues of organizational culture, power and manager's decision processes." As I have pointed out before, these authors are addressing the organizational aspects of communications firms serving a corporation and not the corporation itself. Percy (1997) spends two paragraphs dealing with the issue of organizational culture in implementing IMC. His focus is equally narrow. Referring to the work of Prensky, McCarty & Lucas (1996), he concludes: "While that culture will not completely determine an individual manager's way of doing things, it will certainly have an impact upon its development. This leads inevitably to such organizational feelings as 'this is the way we do it'; 'we've always done it this way'; 'it works for us'."

There are several important elements missing from the IMC literature's treatment of culture. First, culture is treated as a determinant of organizational behavior. While we know culture affects behavior, it is also true that behavior has a reciprocal impact on culture (Daft & Weick, 1984). This mutual influence has been established between organizational culture and organizational communication (Pacionowsky & Trujillo, 1983; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Second, some cultures (Kennedy & Deal, 1981) are so strong and directed away from centralized control of communication that implementing IMC would be impossible. For example, regulated monopolies like AT&T (before the 1996 divestiture) and electrical utilities have developed cultures where marketing has not been an important requirement while public relations has been seen as critical. When AT&T was first divested in 1983, the biggest challenge was overcoming the "utility culture" and becoming a market-driven company (Temin & Galambos, 1989). Most of the communication power and resources rest with the public relations department and its chief, who likely has the ear and confidence of the CEO. Contrast these cultures with those of Nike and Procter & Gamble, where public relations has significantly less structural power and fewer resources than marketing. Whether a company has a service or a marketing culture will have a great impact on how and whether IMC gets implemented.

Third, in some organizations there is so much competition for resources that the amount of cooperation and collaboration required by IMC is virtually impossible to achieve. In the case of mergers and acquisitions, resources are scarce and competition between departments great. The areas first to suffer are employee communications and public relations (Caywood, 1992).

Fourth, some cultures have very narrow views of the communications function. For example, Microsoft, despite its size and influence on capital markets, did very little public relations or government relations until the federal government indicted them for unfair trade practices (McKenzie, 2000). Most high technology companies have a similarly narrow view toward communications and are unlikely to spend much effort or resources "experimenting" with IMC.

Finally, in companies where there is a strong or even egomaniacal CEO, IMC may be either impossible or likely to be circumvented at the whim of the CEO. For example, Sunbeam Corporation, under the leadership of Al Dunlap was unlikely to engage in the IMC process given his desire for strong operational control. A similar case can be made for Levi Strauss and its CEO, Robert Haas (Munk, 1999).

**Recommendations**

This essay has attempted to explain some of the reasons why IMC has not been widely adopted by corporate America. Critics might argue that in the absence of data to the contrary, we should assume IMC is now a staple in the corporate world. Unfortunately, a closer examination of some of the companies held up as exemplars of IMC reveals less rather than more IMC is the rule, not the exception in corporate America. An isolated campaign that coordinates several media and multiple communications and marketing functions does not prove the practice of IMC. Many of these same companies, especially during crisis, fail to speak to
stakeholders with one voice. Additionally, they do not routinely engage in "the strategic coordination of all messages and media used by an organization to collectively influence its perceived brand value" (Keegan, Moriarty & Duncan, 1992). In fact, despite some of the definitional disputes about IMC (Duncan & Caywood, 1996), we should assume that the success rate of implementing IMC in U.S. corporations has not reached its full potential.

This essay offers additional rationale for the corporate neglect of IMC. First, existing IMC theory gives considerably more emphasis to implementation than adoption of IMC. The books on IMC (Harris, 1998; Percy, 1997; Schultz, et. al., 1992; Thorson & Moore, 1996) emphasize how to make it work, not how to ensure it is adopted. For IMC to be a reality in a corporation, adoption must precede implementation. This means the IMC proponent must negotiate his/her way through the maze of corporate politics, get CEO and other top-level management buy-in before the first implementation step can be taken. The first target of IMC's persuasive communication ought to be the CEO, followed by others in top-level management. In some cases, the character of the CEO may precede the adoption of IMC, and the wisdom of this program will have to wait until succession at the top. This said, there is a great deal of persuasive groundwork that must be done on top-level management before the CEO steps down. These issues deserve a great deal more attention than they have received in the IMC literature.

Second, once top-level buy-in has been achieved, an implementation plan must be developed that can be reconciled with the organization's existing structure and functional realities. In some instances, a "communications czar" (Schultz, et. al., 1992) is out of the question, but a team of structurally equal marketing and communications executives might work. Rather than a single IMC organizational ideal as proposed by Schultz, et. al. (1992), IMC proponents must first understand the structure and culture of the target organization and develop an adoption plan that works for it. This will necessitate flexibility and variety in building IMC models that work for particular organizations. For example, IMC would look very different in a large, international holding company like General Electric than it would in a smaller, high-tech company like Cisco. It is critical to understand that IMC stands a much higher probability of success when it is customized for a particular organization than when a "one model fits all" approach is taken.

Third, organizational culture must be dealt with in a substantive way in future IMC adoption models. This means placing the communication process itself alongside organizational culture (Weick, 1983). It also means looking at organizations historically to see how they have developed and evolved over time. A substantive consideration of culture also means carefully examining the roles both the communication and marketing functions have played over time, and where the political and financial power lies. Just as the IMC process must be built around the customer, so to an IMC operation must reflect the culture of the organization in which it is being implemented.

Finally, IMC scholars and practitioners may have been looking for IMC exemplars in all the wrong places. Better exemplars of IMC may exist within new technology companies rather than more traditional ones. For example, the vice president of e-business and Internet operations at Qwest Communications International, Inc, Maha Ibrahim, recognized the telecom company had "no overarching strategy of governing body existed to rationalize these efforts [various lines of business] and to limit redundancies and conflicts" (Wall Street Journal, 1999). Her solution was to first enlist the buy-in and support of the company president who legitimized speaking to all stakeholders with a single, consistent voice. Ms. Ibrahim sees her job as being an evangelist for seamless communications across all Qwest's staff and line operations. It is both ironic and instructive to note that Ms. Ibrahim's background is not public relations or marketing, but economics, for which she earned a Ph.D. from MIT.

Only by strengthening IMC theory in the ways described above, can we provide a compelling answer to the question: If IMC is so good, why hasn't corporate America effectively implemented it? The proof of IMC is in the organizational putting. To date, there is little proof, and good reason for doubt. IMC theory must be made flexible enough to accommodate the variety of organizational and leadership structures that exist in American corporations today. Only then will it receive the credibility it needs to become a legitimate theory in practice (Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985; Van deVen, 1989).

References


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<www.nike.com>

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