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Agricultural Sciences

Making sense of strategic communication from an organizational culture perspective

– A case study of a French NGO dedicated to water
protection

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Abstract

Problem statement: According to Hansen and Cox (2015), there is a current need to comprehend the underlying reasons why strategic communication is interpreted the way it is by environmental practitioners. The present thesis is an attempt to answer to this knowledge gap by offering insights on an NGO informing and educating people to protect water.

Aim: The aim of this research was to understand how environmental practitioners from a French Non Governmental Organization (NGO) make sense of strategic communication, and how this sense-making might be influenced by organizational culture. To that end, two *research questions* have been answered: How do the organizational members make sense of strategic communication? and, How does this sense-making towards strategic communication relate to the culture of the organization?

Research design and method: A social constructivist approach has been applied due to the focus on sense-making of members - who are both a source and result of their work culture. Using open-ended interviews, all the members of the organization (nine in total) have been interviewed to collect a large and complete range of understandings regarding strategic communication and organizational culture and thus enrich my findings. In addition, a content analysis has been carried out to study the consistency or inconsistency between how the members talk about strategic communication and how they apply it. Hence, reports of activities, institutional brochures, leaflets, web pages and others communication tools have been analyzed.

Theoretical framework: Two key concepts, namely strategic communication and organizational culture, serve as theoretical framework for the present study.

Findings: The data analysis pointed out that the sense-making (meanings behind actions) of the NGO members are reflected in their way of implementing strategic communication. They talk about strategic communication as a transmission process for conveying information and design it accordingly. Moreover, the research revealed that the strategic communication carried out by the NGO was not only based on transferring information from a sender to a receiver (linear model) - therefore not adapted to current societal and environmental issues - but seemed also unstructured and undervalued. This predominant finding can be explained by the lack of internal cohesion and common vision present in the NGO, which is the reflect of the organizational culture. Thus, the relationship between what is going on within the organization (its culture) and the way strategic communication is applied was found to be of great importance in this study.

Research limitations and implications: The fact that the data have been collected from and analyzed by a single source (myself) can be considered as one. Additionally, although the results of this research cannot be replicated to others organizations due to the uniqueness of organization culture, it might motivate others research to empirically reveal the link between work culture and strategic communication.

Keywords: Strategic communication, environmental communication, sense-making, organizational culture, environmental NGOs

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Abbreviations

Non-for-profit organizations = NGOs

Organizational Culture Profile = OCP

1 Introduction

1.1 Environmental NGOs and strategic communication

In this age of globalization and of environmental and social crises, the rising number of non-government organizations (NGOs) testifies to the importance of Human rights and environmental protection. An increasing number of European and more precisely French citizens have lost their confidence in politicians and in the industry, which have led to an increase of support for NGOs (OECD, 2014). NGOs claim to represent the general interest, defend the large causes and refer to people as citizens and not as consumers. The difference is that a consumer is considered as passive whereas a citizen makes conscious choices and is aware of the consequences of these choices for herself/himself, the others and the environment. Nowadays, NGOs are having some weight in public debate and succeed in modifying the political agenda in favor of the environment and the society (Paul, 2000). This increase in power is a result of the evolution, adaptation and professionalization of NGOs (Lebourgeois, 2013).

In a globalized society where New Technologies of Information and Communication (NTIC) are essential, strategic communication becomes an important tool in terms of visibility, power of influence, fundraising and advocacy. The image given by NGOs to citizens through their slogans, logos and actions is of high importance and should be nurtured. There is a need to differentiate themselves from the 'competition' of other NGOs but also to diversify the funding sources by appealing to a maximum of donors. Indeed, in a society where communication and media coverage are ubiquitous - even saturated by advertising aiming at selling products - NGOs have to adapt by making appeal to and engage citizens with innovative and adapted communication activities, even if it was not their primary function before. Because of the rise of competition, the urgency to fight current environmental problems and the need to raise funds, strategic communication became essential. This is a good way to promote sustainable development, to advocate towards politicians and to attempt to change citizens' behavior.

Having a coherent communication strategy can participate in the reach of the three main objectives that NGOs have, namely an increase of visibility and notoriety, an increase of donations and finally a change in attitude and behavior in favor of the environment (Lebourgeois, 2013). Therefore, strategic communication is a vital tool to properly fulfill the missions and objectives of environmental practitioners.

Environmental NGOs, as part of the civil society, are increasingly considered by citizens as powerful and much needed actors within the sustainable development field (Paul, 2000; Lebourgeois, 2013). Their communication is primordial and differs from other institutional actors due to the specificity of their goal and purpose (Lebourgeois, 2013). Nevertheless, the way NGOs engage with citizens varies; there is not a consensus on how things should be done to reach the objectives. For instance, some organizations such as Green Peace have chosen to be more claiming, whereas some like WWF distinguish themselves by their intention to engage in dialog. These different strategies pose the issues of efficacy and efficiency. Indeed despite an increase of awareness regarding environmental challenges, responsible lifestyles are not yet the norms in current Western societies. One can wonder if

strategic communication is ineffectively employed or unsuited to the specificity of the environmental field?

As argued by Hallgren and Ljung (2005), what is hindering the resolution of environmental problems is "faltering communication" while the lack of scientific or expert knowledge is often considered as the central obstacle. According to them, improving the quality of communication notably through cooperation and collaboration goes hand in hand with dealing with environmental issues. Communication is a social phenomenon and thus is crucial when it comes to understand and explain society and its evolutions. Indeed, there is no society without communication and conversely - society is created, sustained and changed by and through communication.

Hallgren and Ljung (2005) define environmental problems as "questions about how human activities affect that which surrounds us: the environment." The point is that the environment is considered both as constraining and enabling citizens to take actions. Indeed, the environment influences the actions of actors (their interpretations and perspectives are "situated" - correlated to the situation) but the actors can also change it and consequently impact the perspectives and conditions of actions of others. Therefore, this particularity of people to be able to influence the environment through their actions made them actors. From this viewpoint, NGOs have a consequent role to play by empowering, bringing together and showing citizens that they can exert a positive impact on their future.

We have seen that NGOs have a key role to play in bringing our society toward sustainable development and in facing current environmental issues. To do so, engaging in communication is crucial. Nevertheless, as implied by Hallgren and Ljung (2005), it is not enough to communicate (through a website, leaflets, newsletters, events, etc.) to achieve the initial objectives - communication is an art and has to be reflexive, relevant and efficient (Lebourgeois, 2013). The issue at stake for environmental practitioners is therefore *how* to communicate effectively in a context of environmental crisis. This implies the design and implementation of a strategy that resonates within the culture of the organization and within the needs and expectations of the society.

The specificities of NGOs (object, model of funding and governance, uncertainty, etc.) make their strategic communication complex and multi-faced. Indeed, there is not a single model of communication nor single communication processes. This is notably due to the public and means used that differ in function of the situation but also according to the way members of an organization think and behave (i.e.: assumptions on what is communication and how it should be done). Communication and especially environmental communication, which is a quite recent academic field, can mean different things to different people. It is likely that environmental practitioners consider environmental communication as communication and design it in regards to their assumptions - whereas environmental communication is dialogue based and communication is transmission based (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005). This sense-making behind the conception of strategic communicative actions is often shared among organizational members and has to be studied to help improve the way environmental communication is conceptualized and executed. The process of sense-making is called culture and is created and maintained by social interactions (Watkins, 2013). Hence, it appears to me that in order to have successful environmental communication strategies, NGOs have first to focus on their culture to see if it is constraining or enabling them to move forward.

One of the major focuses of this study is on communication. Since this notion is broad and can hold divergent meanings - such as organizational communication or non-verbal communication - it needs to be defined. The term is here referred to as strategic communication, which is directed towards people outside the NGO (i.e.: the communication used to convince people to change behavior).

1.2 Background

The research took its form due to a job offer as a communications manager in an environmental NGO called H2Eau (the actual name has been changed to ensure anonymity) based in the South of France. The NGO recognized by the French government as of general interest (Law 1901) is committed since 2009 to preserve water quality. H2Eau is composed of members who consider water as a common good of humanity that must be respected and protected.

The reason why I was given the opportunity to become a member of this NGO was because of the rising interest of managers to improve their ways of communicating. Through this professional experience, I hope to contribute to this organization both with an internal and external perspective. As a newcomer, I will be able to point out the issues they are dealing with in a daily basis and offers ways to overcome them. Improving and developing their strategic communication is for me a challenge and an opportunity to practically apply the theories learned during my Master program.

Despite their multiple and innovative actions, H2Eau is struggling to gain public engagement and financial support to sustain its activity. According to a report about the notoriety of the organization, external people who look at the NGOs' means of communication (including the website, Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts) do not clearly understand what is the object and the goal of the organization. To illustrate this fact, below is a quote from one of the co-leader of the organization;

”We need to refocus ourselves. We have already been criticized because there is a lack of guideline and homogeneity between our actions. We have a lot of famous persons who are ready to help us but they do not know what we are doing exactly - we are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. People are not aware of what our organization is about.”

Some questions have emerged; what is preventing them to move forward? How can their way of interpreting communication and their ways of doing be divergent? Where does this sudden need to structure their communication come from? After several others meetings, I came to realize that two central notions namely sense-making (how people think and how it relates to their actions) and organizational culture ("what is going on" within an organization) were the lead for answering to these interrogations. Therefore, the organization appeared to me as a rich and valuable case to study.

I decided to do my research project on this particular NGO because despite its vital message and innovative actions, their communication is undervalued. It seems like the members of the organization are so embedded in what they are doing (mainly educational actions) that they tend to leave aside communication - whereas the latest is source of recognition, legitimation and funding (Lebourgeois, 2013).

Additionally, H2Eau tries to engage every citizens, whatever their age or knowledge skills by showing that simple everyday actions can positively participate in the decrease of human impacts on earth. The organization also works in collaboration with others entities related to water including Government agencies and organizations. These partnerships have notably participated in the development of R&D projects such as the "H2O Assessment@", a tool that evaluates the impact on water of companies and public institutions. Due to the success of this innovative tool, they have decided to expand their offer and expertise by helping economical, social and environmental actors to create and implement eco-events. Therefore, the NGO seems wanting to create constructive dialogues with citizens and organizations in the manner that Hallgren and Ljung (2005) argue for. Through this research project, I wish to understand the meanings these environmental practitioners have on communication. Uncovering how the members interpret strategic communication is likely to be the first step for the organization to move from transmission-based communication towards environmental communication (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005).

2 Problem statement

According to Hansen and Cox (2015), how environmental practitioners make sense of strategic communication is still to be understood. More precisely, what is not yet known is the nature and importance of these meanings but also what influence them - are they related to organizational culture? The present thesis is an attempt to answer to this knowledge gap by offering insights on an NGO informing and educating people to protect water.

Turiel (1983) and Nucci (2001) argued that people think and act differently if a given situation is or is not controlled by social rules or norms. If one applies this finding to an organizational context, it seems that the choices available to the working members depend on their working conditions. Indeed, from the words of Bartels et al. (2009), the context plays a critical role when it comes to moral beliefs and decisions making. Likewise, authors such as March and Heath (1994) and Amir and Ariely (2007) have shown that rules and norms are important factors in decision-making. These rules and norms generally come from a particular social context, which is ruled by the culture of an organization (Schein, 2011). Cultures differ considerably from an organization to another. Members of a culture are expected to follow certain rules and norms in order to be accepted as legitimate members but also to sustain these particular standards. I believe that an organization can be compared to a reduced version of a system or a society, where diverse and sometimes conflicting perceptions of goals and visions are fitting together. The culture should ensure that these divergent perspectives contribute positively to organizational performance. Organizational culture has the role of maintaining social order, in other words, to keep members together for the good of the organization (Watkins, 2013).

The ontology behind the previously cited researchers (Turiel, 1983; March & Heath, 1994; Nucci, 2001; Amir & Ariely, 2007; Keyton, 2011) seems to refer to the positivistic (or functionalist) theory believing that organizations drive what their members do (Deetz cited in Jablin & Putnam, 2001). However, the social constructivist approach corresponds better to my way of making sense of the world. Thereby, I consider that one should look upon the interactions of members to make sense of organizations. Keyton (2011) expressed the following; "Organizational culture is the set of artifacts, values, and assumptions that emerge from the interactions of organizational members." (p. 1). Organizations are constructed through social interactions, meaning that the co-workers are actually driving what their organization is and what their organization do (Mumby & Clair, 1997). That is to say, members not only co-construct their organization but are, in turn, shaped by it (Barnett & Cronen, 1980; Philipsen & Albrecht 1997).

Therefore, while functionalist theorists are interested in observing members to understand their culture, social constructivists value individuals' realities because they are both the cause and the result of organization culture (Deetz cited in Jablin & Putnam, 2001). Indeed, social interactions of organization members, through their mindsets, perspectives and assumptions, constitute the organization itself. If I apply this reasoning to my research, it seems that interviews with individuals from various levels of the organization are needed to comprehend and interpret their culture and understandings of strategic communication.

As stated by Martins and Terblanche (2003), two of the strongest components of organizational culture are the beliefs and attitudes detained by employees - because it is the people who make up work cultures. Additionally, Stewart (2010) argued that exploring

beliefs reflecting cultural norms such as “It’s pretty cool working in this NGO, you can go surfing in the middle of the day!” or, “There is not settled working hours, you can come and leave as you wish” is needed to make sense of what is going on in the organization. Accordingly, beliefs will be reflected in the performance of the organization (Shahzad et al. 2012). This is an interesting finding that is shared by a number of organizational researchers; nevertheless even if effective communication is needed to ensure productivity, strategic communication does not seem to be of interest in organizational research. In point of fact, while an increasing body of literature focuses on the link between organizational factors and job performance (Lim, 1995; Owoyemi & Ekwoaba, 2014; Shahzad et al. 2012; Ogiamien & Izuagbe, 2016), the relationship between organizational culture and the way strategic communication is apprehended appears as yet to study.

Some existing evidences suggest that the culture of an organization is leading the way and henceforth influences organizational and strategic decisions making. My focus with this research project is on the sense-making behind the actions of H2Eau members, that is to comprehend their interpretation about strategic communication. As previously argued, it appears that the context of action along with the social rules and norms (here deriving from the culture of an NGO) impact the way employees reason and act. Therefore, organizational culture represents a useful concept to investigate in order to better understand how strategic communication is conceptualized.

While researches on organizational communication in relation to organizational culture are numerous, which seem to focus on internal social interactions also called organizational communication (going on within the premises of an organization), little has been said about how members communicate with the external world and if organizational culture has also a role to play in shaping the way this type of communication is understood. Therefore, there is a current need to comprehend the underlying reasons why strategic communication is interpreted the way it is by environmental practitioners (Hansen & Cox, 2015).

In a nutshell, the way environmental practitioners make sense of their organization and of strategic communication appears to be an understudied domain and has to be addressed to enrich the environmental communication field (Hansen and Cox, 2015). In addition, since the context of action strongly impacts sense-making, it is necessary to simultaneously investigate the culture of an organization to better understand what is going on (Bartels, 2008).

3 Aim

As argued in the research statement, it appears that there is a current need to study how organizations communicate that is, to better understand the way environmental practitioners understand strategic communication (Hansen & Cox, 2015). The present research project is an attempt to answer to this knowledge gap by uncovering the sense-making behind the communication choices made by H2Eau.

The aim is to look at the meanings behind the actions - how the members make sense of strategic communication and how this sense-making relate to their way of implementing communication processes. In order to explore the meaning behind the actions, it is appropriate to study the organizational culture. Indeed, exploring the way of being (norms, values, rituals, attitudes, assumptions and inner rationales of members, etc.) of an organization is likely to inform on the choices made by it (Lotich, 2016). I believe that the organization culture "shine through" the actions and strategy of an organization. Through organizational culture theory, there is an attempt to explain the inner interpretations shaping the actions of an organization (operational and strategic choices) (Lane, 2002).

This study is not aiming at accounting all the NGOs within the environmental field but, based on concrete experiences that face a particular NGO (H2Eau), try to draw on axes of reflections useful for its future communicative actions. I wish to contribute to the field of environmental communication by shedding light on the culture of an NGO and discuss how it is linked to choices about its strategic communication. I have chosen to investigate H2Eau as a typical case of an NGO that does not have considerable amount of financial and human resources to put in place a system of effective and perennial communication adapted to its missions. Similarly, H2Eau seems willing to better engage in collaboration both with citizens and others organizations meanwhile it is still embedded in a linear way of communicating (from sender to receiver). Therefore, the way members perceive and understand strategic communication and how this thinking relate to their culture appear as interesting to investigate.

3.1 Research questions

Q1- How do the organizational members make sense of strategic communication?

Q2- How does this sense-making towards strategic communication relate to the culture of the organization?

4 Theoretical framework

4.1 Strategic communication

Communication is a concept that everyone is familiar with. It is impossible not to communicate (Watzlawick et al. 1967). Communication is everywhere and is everything - from verbal to non-verbal interactions (Griffin, 1997). Therefore, this broad notion does not have a single and simple definition as it can mean different things to different people.

When it comes to define and design strategic communication-based systems and activities, there are two schools of thought - the transmission-based and the dialogue-based models. The first one is often represented in a linear way (communication models of Shannon and Weaver, Lasswell or Jakobson) and focuses on the transmitter and the message to transmit (Shannon & Weaver, 1957; Lasswell, 1948). This way of perceiving communication renders the receiver passive and the feedback non-existent. While it is not the model having the best results in terms of long-term relationships and satisfaction, it is currently the most widely used notably due to the advertising and marketing sector. The second model views communication as a more complex system involving the consideration and cooperation of the "receiver" - co-construction of meanings. The latter is no longer considered as a "consumer of information" but as a social being capable of reasoning. Thus, a particular attention is brought on citizens' needs in contrast to solely transmitter's interests. Despite the differences in applications, both models meet saying that strategic communication should be consistent, coordinated, structured, and should have a clear agenda and settled goals (Bennett & Jessani, 2011).

From a semantic perspective, it appears that the dialogue-based model better corresponds to the meaning of communication as the Latin term "*communicatio*" designates the action to share or to put in common. Communication holds therefore a dual meaning - to share information but also and mostly to co-create. It involves at least two interlocutors and implies a relation of giving and receiving. Ideally, these co-constructed relationships should lead to a win-win situation. In the face of current environmental and social issues, the respect and involvement of all citizens are essential. Therefore, if responsible organizations apply this dialogue-based strategic communication, which corresponds to the concept of environmental communication by Hallgren and Ljung (2005), they are likely to increase their efficiency.

Furthermore, as shown by Israelsson (2013), strategic communication demands resources including time and knowledge. Nowadays, it is not sufficient for organizations to have a website or a brochure to reach their objectives. Communication is an art and therefore should be approached in a circular way (in opposition to linear models), through cooperation, feedback and adaptation, to be suitable for current environmental issues (Hallgren & Ljung, 2005). The issue at stake for environmental practitioners is therefore *how* communicate in a thoughtful manner, especially in a high competitive context such as the NGOs community. This notably implies the design and implementation of a strategy that resonates within the culture of the organization and within the conscious and unconscious expectations of citizens.

4.2 Organizational culture

When it comes to explore how an organization functions, one shall look at its culture. Indeed, the culture of an organization influences how its members think and behave, hence how their everyday decisions impact the general structure and the strategic choices of the organization. The belief and values that employees and managers hold can generally be explained by exploring the organizational culture. Tacit level of thinking, doing or organizing deriving from the specific culture might not be verbally expressed by employees, however sharing experiences with them can help uncover them (Watkins, 2013).

Hill and Jones (2001) describe organizational culture as;

”Beliefs and ideas about what kinds of goals members of an organization should pursue and ideas about the appropriate kinds or standards of behavior organizational members should use to achieve these goals. From organizational values develop organizational norms, guidelines or expectations that prescribe appropriate kinds of behavior by employees in particular situations and control the behavior of organizational members towards one another.”

From another point of view, Canon (2001) defines culture as "a communicatively constructed, historically based system of assumptions, values, and interpretive frameworks that guide and constrain organizational members as they perform their organizational roles and confront the challenges of their environment." Despite the numerous definitions of organizational culture, it appears that there is a consensus saying that it is related to the way members of an organization comprehend and act toward what has to be done and how it has to be done. From my understanding, it is a notion that is shared by a community of members, constructed and maintained by them but also constantly evolving along with them. Therefore, how members of an organization interpret and design strategic communication is correlated to the internalized sense-making. From this perspective, it seems fair to analyze the organizational culture to create understanding on how and why the environmental practitioners of H2Eau communicate the way they do.

As stated by Deetz (1982), organizations as well as individuals are in a constant process of self-formation, thus the culture of the organization is not set and is let to evolve thanks to diverse factors such as current environmental and societal trends, new-comers within the organization, change in legal and political sectors, etc.

Literature on organizational culture, especially within the field of businesses, has highlighted that organizational success is dependent of it and conversely - culture can be employed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of a structure. Indeed, it shapes how individuals make decisions, interpret and manage their organization. In other words, the culture of an organization shapes the way working relations and processes such as decision-making and problem solving are executed (Watkins, 2013).

As previously expressed, environmental communication is designed and executed according to the sense-making of members. This understanding is influenced by the social constructions of reality within the organization, which are maintained and reinforced by organizational culture (Berger & Luckmann, 2011; Watkins, 2013). Since I am interested in shedding light on the meanings behind the actions of environmental practitioners working with strategic communication and on the possibility that these interpretations are motivated by organizational culture; a social constructionist approach has been used as framework for this study. In order to explore and make sense of organizational culture, it is right to identify a set of values specific to the studied organization that is commonly called "Organizational Culture Profile" (OCP) (Bauer & Erdogan, 2009). This framework is useful to better characterize and comprehend cultures since they are often not directly observable. OCP has seven dimensions - innovative, aggressive, outcome-oriented, stable, people-oriented, team-oriented and detail-oriented (O'Reilly et al., 1991 cited in Bauer & Erdogan, 2009). The OCP framework has been used as a method to characterize the culture of H2Eau. Nevertheless, considering that it is possible to have several cultures within any given organizations (called subcultures) and that cultures are unique (depending on the context and on the members), not all the seven dimensions will be discussed in the study.

5 Method

5.1 Research design

First, I have conducted a qualitative content analysis to investigate the culture of the understudied organization and explore how it might influence choices about strategic communication (appendix 1). What kind of communicative means and words these environmental practitioners use inform about how they make sense of strategic communication and how the latter should be designed and executed. To this end, reports of activities, institutional brochures, leaflets, and others communication tools have been analyzed. Then, semi-structured interviews were used as core instruments for my data collection. They have enabled myself to appreciate consistency or inconsistency between the culture of the organization and its way of communicating with citizens. Likewise, talking with members alone has uncovered sub-cultures that could be linked to the lack of internal cohesion and shared direction.

Considering that this research is a case study and is agent-oriented, a phenomenological approach (strategy of inquiry or methodology) has been preferred in order to gather a comprehensive understanding of the sense-making hold by NGO members in relation to strategic communication and organizational culture (Moustakas, 1994 in Creswell, 2014). Hence, a qualitative research method using interviews and content analysis has been favored as it offers a deeper understanding of perceptions and interpretations compared to quantitative methods. According to Creswell (2014, p. 3), the "Distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research is framed in terms of using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative) or using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypothesis) rather than open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions)." In the present case, it seems relevant to choose a qualitative approach regarding the quest of deep meanings and understandings rather than figures and correlations.

In order to achieve my aim, semi-structured interviews have been undertaken. I decided to use this specific method of data collection in conducting the tradition of inquiry because interviews offer relative freedom to the interviewee and the researcher (Silverman, 2006). For example, the researcher can ask follow-up questions or adapt the questions regarding the responses given by the interviewee, but also the interviewees can freely and deeply express themselves (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2006).

In addition to the strategies and the methods, philosophical assumptions or knowledge claims are shaping the approach to research (Crotty, 1998 in Creswell, 2014). The philosophical worldview assumptions that I brought to the study is taking from the constructivist paradigm. This philosophical worldviews refers to the belief that there is not one reality but instead multiple and varied realities depending on individuals' perspectives (Silverman, 2013; Creswell, 2014). That is the reason why researchers, including myself, are interested in trying to explore and understand how people make sense and experience the world they are living in (Hansen, 2003). This social constructionist approach has been used as a framework for this study, because I am interested in revealing the meanings

behind the strategic communicative choices of H2Eau's members, and the possible influence of organizational culture on this sense-making.

5.2 Reflection about methodology

Regarding that open-ended interviews usually involves a restricted sample, I had to choose wisely my key informants - the people who are presumed to have the information needed to answer to the research questions. However, since H2Eau is a small NGO, the selection of key informants was simplified. I have interviewed the founder of the NGO, the two co-directors, two employees, two long-term interns and two volunteers. The diverse range of respondents has permitted to get different views on what the NGO is about, that is to interpret the organization culture and its relationships with the way strategic communication is interpreted. The asked questions were thought in accordance with the used theories in order to answer to the aim of the research.

Since I decided to apply a systematic pattern to ensure the credibility of my research, I have developed an interview guide (appendix 2). The interview guide had three main themes, namely background information; communication and strategic communication; and finally the organization and its culture. I have started the interviews by asking personal questions to the respondents such as on their background or their previous experiences with communicative planning or activities. This first theme has allowed myself to create a nice and secured atmosphere for respondents. Then, I have continued the conversations with communication and strategic communication to assess their perspectives, opinions and knowledge on and about communication. Finally, I have focused on the organization to gain concrete insights and understandings on the organizational culture - how the members describe and interpret what is going on. At the end, I took advantage of the fact that people are generally more relaxed at the end of the interview to try to grab more information about how the member feels about the present strategic communication and their organizational culture. The interviews took place within the main office of the NGO. The conversations were carried out in French, as it is the main and only language used in the organization and have approximately lasted one hour not to disturb the pace of work. Indeed, since it is a small size organization, each person has a lot to do including appointments to look for sponsorship or sensitization training in schools or universities. In order to keep a trace of the collected information, I have recorded the conversation using an audio recording device. I also wrote some notes in case the latter ran out of batteries and to keep in mind important statements. The recorded conversations have been transcribed and translated into English to make the coding and analysis of data easier. In addition, I was also counting on more relaxed moments such as lunchtimes or during journeys to go to external appointments to gain more genuine data that will complete the information gathered during the "official" interviews.

5.3 Reliability and validity

In regards to the reliability of the findings, I have chosen to explore and take consideration of each member of the organization despite their role, level of power or seniority in order to collect a large range of viewpoints and enrich my research. Indeed, studies about organizational culture often focus on individuals from a high hierarchical level whereas this research tries to include both parties (top-down) to ensure the validity of the conclusion (Alvesson & Skolderg, 2000). Likewise, from the words of Lawrence Neuman, "reliability means dependability of consistency" (2003, p. 183). I have attempted to make my research project reliable by using scientific methods adapted to the specificity of the qualitative design. For instance, I followed a consistent pattern in asking, transcribing and coding my interviews. Nevertheless, if I had more time and money resources, I could have engage others researchers to analyze the data then to together compare the results for enhancing the reliability of my findings (Silverman, 2006; Bapir, 2013).

As stated by Lawrence Neuman, "validity means truthful" (2003, p. 185). Qualitative study brings the risk of being closely involved with the "study object" because the choices I made

for my research project (such as choosing a subject, a design, a particular theoretical framework, etc.) are the result of my preconceptions of the world, my experience, my values and interests. Even if excluding the actual influence of the researcher is infeasible, it is possible to mitigate this bias by being conscious of it and by trying to use it ethically and productively (Maxwell, 2008). For example, during the interviews I tried to avoid leading questions in order to have a valid understanding of their perspectives and meanings on what is going on within the organization.

In addition, to increase the credibility of my conclusions, I asked the interviewees to read the transcripts of the interviews in order to make sure that the collected data were reflective of their opinions and views (this method is called respondent or communicative validation) (Silverman, 2006). After the collaboration of the respondents, not much information has been changed. Only one person asked to remove a piece of information because it was not accurate anymore as the issue at stake was now solved. I have chosen this method of validity because as Bryman (2008) argued, in a research project the perception of the respondents on a subject matter is the most important in qualitative study (Bryman 2008; Bapir, 2013). Accordingly, "qualitative research is stronger than quantitative research in terms of ecological validity" (Bryman, 2008 p. 34). Henceforth, I wanted to decrease the gap between the reality of the members and my interpretation - that is between collected data and the conclusions of my project (Bapir, 2013).

6 Result and discussion

The sections below are named after the analysis of data; they represent what was the most reiterated and emphasized by the data collection. Each category begins with the views of the employees collected during the interviews and content analysis and ends with an understanding and reflection of these perspectives and insights.

6.1 What is the NGO about?

- The genesis

The origin of the NGO begins with an idea shared by two passionate of nature, a former member of the French professional ski team and a deceased fashion model of international fame. They thought of and realized the first Water Games in 2009 - an event using sport and its values to promote water protection and more generally sustainable development. The first event took place in the heart of the Pyrenees and became the symbol of the association.

Nowadays, this initiative is still active and is present all over the country to trace the path of a drop of water from the mountains to the oceans, passing by rivers. Through sporting and educational stages, this moment permits to mobilize the general public, children, partners and the media around a common objective that of celebrating and creating awareness on water protection. In all of the interviews as well as in all of the communicative means that I have analyzed, I heard and read the same (hi)story. Some of employees argued that knowing how H2Eau has been created and that one of the creators is still active in its development strengthen their common vision of the NGO. Additional narratives indicated that knowing the former professional skier allow people - both employees and the audience - to identify themselves with him and to personify the non-for-profit organization. From the view of the founder, this was a crucial point for H2Eau because having an interesting story that people can relate to encourage them to become a part of it.

Reflection:

This story is very important and known by everyone working in the NGO. Within the organizational culture, it is like a myth that gathers and enable a connection with the still present founder and the members sharing a common passion that of nature and the wish to preserve it. As described, the people who manage the organization come from a sportive background and frequent famous people in this sector reserved for a minority of privileged people. Therefore, it seems normal that the NGO's positioning is linked with an image of "by athletes, for athletes", the general public feels not welcome. Clearly, one of the main messages is "the sport in favor of water protection" but it is not representative of what the organization is today because one of the main purposes of the organization is educating children to preserve water notably by consuming responsibly.

- Here and now

Since 2009, the association has grown and evolved. Today, its object largely exceeds the scope of its Water Games. It is to raise awareness and educate the general public, future generations and professional actors to protect water and their health. But also to accompany them, each at their own level, in efforts directed toward sustainable consumption behaviors. As expressed by the founder during the interview, "Act to preserve a pure water for present and future generations, such is our fight." He also stated that the NGO has built its strategy according to three objectives and three pillars, namely;

"Firstly, to inform people about the state of water resources in the world. Secondly, to raise interest and awareness on the impact of our behaviors and on individual and collective responsibilities. Finally, to ensure a change in attitude in favor of sustainable development. (...) The three pillars consist in highlighting that water issues and responsibilities are shared among people here and now, elsewhere and tomorrow. Meaning that we call upon co-responsibility at the local level, solidarity and international cooperation for current and future generations."

- The reason of being

When I asked what are the objectives of the NGO, all of the interviewees answered that it is to educate and sensitize people to water protection. Some added also to raise awareness on human impact and to ensure public health. From the content analysis, I gathered more precise objectives that can be encompassed in the one mentioned above. Namely; to raise interest and awareness on the state of resources in the world, and on the impact of human behaviors; to inform on the water resource and on the individual and collective responsibilities; finally to act on citizens' behaviors to preserve the water "here and now, elsewhere and tomorrow." I read them during the interviews and ask the individual to tell me their thoughts. To sum up, they found that the description was too broad, it repeats itself and that it could be clearer and thus more memorable for the target audience.

On more recent publications, the role of H2Eau is described as educational and unifying. For example, the following quote from the website illustrates this finding: "Because it helps people understand the water cycle from the mountain to the ocean and because it federates and ensures dialogue and cooperation between entities facing fresh or sea water issues. In this sense, H2Eau helps to apprehend the problem of water in its entirety."

Reflection:

It seems that the 'DNA' (what the NGO is and which directions it should take) of the organization is not yet clearly defined and shared among the working members. The sport initiative Water Games is still largely present on some of their communications and the founder seems highly emotionally attached to it, while it is only a way of communicating about the defended cause and values as well as to gather people around a common passion and interactive moment. The diverse opinions about the role of this event within the NGO should be flattened in order to ensure that everyone share the same vision of which direction they are aiming at. Divergent perspectives internally usually lead to a reduced or even contradicting message's scope.

Likewise, even on the role and on the objectives the NGO does not have a unifying message. Depending on the year of publication but also on the type of media, people will find different information on what H2Eau is about and what H2Eau do. It seems fair that organizations are evolving with their time and that they can choose to have divergent strategies or complement their offer. However, on their website, one can have access to information such as pictures, events' invitations, press releases or newsletters dated of 2014. The subliminal message that this implies is the lack of professionalism, lack of audience's

consideration impacting the overall notoriety of the NGO . People can even think that this NGO is no longer functioning; therefore they will certainly not donate or contribute to its development in any manner.

6.2 The members

- Governance

The operating model of an organization generally comes from its structuring model. In others words, the mode of governance has effect on the life choices of an organization and has a role of supervision. Therefore, considering that the organizational structure is linked to the organizational culture, it has to be paid attention upon (Schwieren, 2008). In 2016, there were a governing body composed of a chairman and five others executives, then the general direction including the founder (dealing mainly with institutional communication) and the two co-directors (one taking care of the Pedagogy division and the other the Partnership division). Finally, the organization chart ended with two additional divisions namely; Administration and Accounting and Event and Membership. The four divisions were divided between the two co-leaders and a former employee still helping them for administrative matters, in accordance with the words of the two leaders.

The responded had slightly different views on what the goal of the governing body is. For the founder and the co-directors, it was clear and important - to set general directions and to ensure the financial viability of the organization. For the employees and the interns, who does not have regular contact with the governing body except for the general assembly once a year, the importance of these people were less valued. From their perspectives, the members of the governing body seem disconnected with the reality of the field and do not answer to the direct needs of the organization, to know structuration and professionalism.

Moreover, during the conversation one leader reflected upon the adequacy of having a vertical organization chart and confessed to me that it was not representing of the actual organizational functioning. The interviewee added that, from his point of view, the organization chart should look like a web, where collaborators equally contribute to projects according to their knowledge and competencies. Nevertheless, he stated that having an organizational chart was already a big step ahead for them because it is part of their structuring approach and that a vertical chart is the way French companies operate.

Reflection:

It is interesting to notice the absence of a member in charge of communication as if strategic communication was not valued as much as the others divisions or as if they consider themselves as expert enough in this field for not needing to have a specific and dedicated communication practitioner. It seems like the members communicate according to their intuitions. Nevertheless, not having skills and knowledge in communication is likely to prevent the implementation of an efficient and effective strategy. Without a thoughtful strategy, members of a organization individually do what they think it is best to do regarding their level of communicative skills and understandings. This part reflects on the strong correlation between the way an organization is structured and the way individuals work within it. The structuring of an organization is far from insignificant and has consequences on the short and long term as well as on its notoriety and performance. H2Eau perfectly illustrates the relation between its structuring and operating models, they are both lacking of common vision and clear objectives.

- From two to six

The organization is overcoming some consequent changes in terms of recruitment. From 2016 to 2017, they have gone from two to six employees. According to the co-directors, this change answers to their need to professionalize and to structure their activity. One of them further explained that while the arrival of newcomers is an opportunity to bring fresh and new perspectives to their way of functioning, it also brings more insecurity in terms of financial resources. The co-leader completed his comments with;

"I'm not worried about the year-end budget balance. What I fear is not being able to pay employees every month. Afterwards with Julia (ed. the other co-leader), it is like we do not count, they come first. For example, we have not been paid since the beginning of February. Hire people can have consequences, we must be financially capable. I hope that the work of each one of us will enable to reach our financial objectives, otherwise it will mean that we have lost our bet."

While having more workforce seems to be a sign of efficiency and expansion, a complementary issue related to the increased number of people was raised during the interview. One of the employees expressed the following;

"I try to avoid going to the office, especially now when we are so many. We walk on each other as the premises are small, we have no place and mostly because we are all the time solicited. I cannot finish what I am doing. I prefer working from home, it's quieter. Well of course sometimes it is important to go, but I try to avoid it as much as possible."

Reflection:

The increasing number of employees is also coming with a lot of stress and adds a workload to the two co-leaders. During the interviews of the co-leaders, one of them seemed particularly under stress, exhausted and overloaded. The interview lasted around 40 minutes but phone calls or employees asking for advices or verifications constantly interrupted us. Such conditions usually affect the quality of the collected data because the respondent is not fully concentrated and receptive. However, since the information given by this particular interviewee were reiterated by the second leader as well as the founder, I have considered the data as valid.

- Sense of affiliation and belonging to the organization

Most of the interviewees expressed that they feel good within the organization, and that there is a nice atmosphere, oneness and entente between the members of the NGO. It seems that a strong sense of affiliation and belonging to the association is present. Other elements informing this finding were the smiling and friendly faces, the kindly way people talked to each other and the fact that they do not count the hours of work. Likewise, one of the interns came to the interview wearing a "corporate" tee shirt with the logo of the NGO. Moreover, it was clear during our conversations that their ways of talking about what they are doing in addition to their non-verbal communication (open body language, sparkles in their eyes) acquainted to their personal connection to the NGO's missions and values.

Reflection:

From a personal perspective, I think that having a job that follows a passion of an individual is resulting in a higher degree of motivation and overall productivity. The members of H2Eau believe that they are doing a work that make sense and is useful for current and future generation. Through their daily missions, they are contributing to a better and more sustainable world. Therefore, it feels like even if the organization is not well structured and perfectly functioning, the reason of being (or what I referred to as 'DNA') of the NGO appears as having more weight for them to stay in this particular organization.

- Positioning of H2Eau, their added-values

There is a significant number of humanitarian or environmental NGOs in France that have a part or the totality of their activity devoted to the protection of water or oceans. Today few organizations deal with the problematic of water from its source and none specifically address the dynamics of the water cycle and the interactivity between the upstream and the downstream actors. For the respondents, H2Eau is an NGO dedicated to the protection of the water locally, which is a strength for local support but a weakness to enhance its notoriety. Likewise, the co-directors made a link with another NGO which European headquarter is situated in the same city. On the national scale, the actions of WaterRiders are, without a doubt, most widely publicized. They added that people often confused H2Eau with WaterRiders, whereas the latter is focusing its strategy on plastic waste (its key campaign is called Oceans Initiatives and consists in collecting waste on beaches).

Reflection:

The fact that the general public often confused the two NGO can be explained by a lack of divergent axes of communication and activities, the similar location of offices or the fact that H2Eau is not well known compared to the other NGO, which might have a jeopardizing effect towards the actions of H2Eau. This finding clearly indicates an issue of visibility and notoriety, the lack of communication experts since the creation of H2Eau has resulted in a fragile reputation.

6.3 Why and how do they communicate?

- An usual definition

In accordance with the collected perspectives, it seems like their interpretations of communication are about informing, conveying a message from a sender to a receiver and raising awareness on a subject matter. Only two respondents mentioned "to engage in a dialogue with". These views on communication are not surprising but inform on the importance given to the audience - the receiver. When looking at the communicative means, the same definition of communication - that is to say a one-way transmission process - was induced. Indeed, whether in the leaflet introducing the organization or on the website, readers can only find information on the NGO and does not have space to engage with it. They do have social media, nevertheless if a person write a comment under a publication the member of the NGO usually do not take the time to answer back.

When asking a definition of communication in relation to their organization, they gave different but complementary descriptions. For the majority of them, the main objective of communication is to educate, thus inform and sensitize individuals. They also suggested an induced objective that is to be more visible by conveying to the general public what the organization is about and what are its activities. Another interviewee made further comments saying that communication is the key to attract donors and adherents thus has a financial role.

Reflection:

It is not surprising to see that the majority of employees hold this particular understanding of communication - that is a transmission process. Since employees seem to currently communicate depending on their personal intuitions and depending on whether they have time, it is comprehensible that the NGO is rarely engaging in dialogue with citizens. Nevertheless, one can appreciate a change towards this direction due to the ongoing aspiration to better include the civil society. In this sense, H2Eau is not unwilling to collaborate with external individuals and be confronted to others perspectives. My interpretation is that it is a matter of knowing from employees; if they are not aware of environmental communication it is unlikely they will know how to apply it.

- Communicative means

Speaking of the tools employed, the interviewees seemed satisfied by the plurality and the pertinence of them. Nevertheless, the majority were not convinced of their proper use as stated below.

"We have everything we need - social medias, content to share, very nice photos of our previous Water Games with sports champions... But we don't exploit them. Is it by lack of time or skills, I don't know, the fact is that we have a lot of very nice information that have never been used."

In regards to the bigger picture, they expressed that efforts have to be made in terms of coherence and homogeneity. Similarly, there is not a conducting line between the different media used. The content analysis highlighted an unprofessional and not rigorous way of implementing communication. The most striking clues indicating this on the website were: spelling mistakes, information not up-to-date, contact persons no more employed, pictures from 2012, etc. It appeared that this NGO does not have a communication strategy, which results in a less structured and efficient way of communicating. The following quote supports the findings derived from the content analysis.

"We do not have a plan, what I mean is that we communicate as we feel, without guidelines, without homogeneity. We improvise being communicators or community managers. On Facebook, as soon as one of us sees an interesting article, we write a little speech and we publish, without knowing too much how to do. It works more or less well depending on the articles, but I'm sure that if we had an editorial line or some sort of schema, we would gain in visibility and likes. For the others social medias, it's more or less the same. We do not have though about elaborating a strategy adapted to the specificities of each media. When we have time, we relay what have been said on Facebook, for instance on Twitter and Google +."

Nevertheless, despite the lack of communicative know-how some respondents argued that people generally have a positive image of H2Eau. To support their words, they talked about the very nice personality of the founder and the co-leaders, saying that they are easy to get along with. In addition, one of the interviewees reflected upon the correlation between internal and external communication as following;

"I think the organization has a very positive notoriety, but it is not well-know by a lot of people. For me, too much is going on and most of all it is not clear who do what and how we do it. We do not have team meetings where each of us shares their projects. I am sure sometimes we do the same thing everyone from our side, for example yesterday I talked to Maxim (ed. the names used have been changes to ensure privacy) and we realized that we have two different formats for the membership form... The thing is, a lack of intern cohesion and organization is felt externally by our audience, it is something to be very careful of."

6.4 The organizational culture

- Management style

Overall, they did recognized positive and negative aspects of the management style. The positive aspects expressed were the fact that the directors were delegating responsibilities and believing in one's capability to succeed. This way, interns and employees could expand their skills and improve their feeling of agency. The later utterance was repeatedly said by interns showing their appreciation of this norm - which is specific to the culture of this organization. The negative aspects mentioned were the lack of settled goals and clear guidance. From an overall perspective, members are too busy to sit together in order to

explicitly outline what is expected, the deadline and what will be done with the results. It seems like an overall strategy is much needed to help members stay focused as it gives definite guidelines and directions on where and how to go (including objectives, means, timeline, resources, etc.).

- Values

According to the respondent and the content analysis, the values shared and defended by H2Eau are solidarity, respect, valorization of good practices and responsible consumption. The founder added that an Olympic champion chaired the NGO and that the association federates more than 150 famous sports ambassadors ranking from skier to surfer. Through their notoriety, they are a mean to enhance the environmental messages by reaching a larger audience and are part of what the founder called the "Water Family". He continued saying that the premises of H2Eau is its Water Games, hence the sport values are important to be mentioned. However, it is interesting to notice that he was the only person mentioning the sport values. The reason could be explained due to its background as a former pro skier, its relationships and its obsolete vision of the NGO. Indeed, what the co-leaders expressed was the difference between the built notoriety and the actual activities of H2Eau.

The main message that came out of the content analysis was the fact that the NGO is focusing on sport. The semantic field of sport can be appreciated in all their communications. For instance, the audience can read words such as; "Olympic champions", "sports events", "the biggest champions are committed with the association", "different types of sporting events", etc. The use of this specific lexical field results in a feeling of elitism, the NGO seems to only be for a particular category of person. Likewise, employed visuals are also depicting athletes, in the same way as the testimonies. From the point of view of an external reader, it appears that one of the central focuses is on the Water Games whereas the NGO cannot be reduced to this sport initiative. In other words, it feels like H2Eau has been created by sportsperson for sportsperson. The fact that the non-for-profit organization seems to specifically target athletes has been raised a number of times by the co-leaders. They said that they are trying to stay away from this image because it is not reflecting the on-the-ground reality of the organization and because it can repel the target audiences they wish to reach (that are; children, parents, schools, universities, NGOs, public and private entities).

Reflection:

The different views on values inform of the lack of common vision within the organization. This predominant finding is reflecting the reasons why H2Eau is communicating the way it is, because a lack of internal cohesion is unlikely to result in coherent and efficient communication processes and messages. This is mirrored in their ways of communicating, as different messages can be found in different media used.

- Feelings of frustration and disillusion

One of the employees confided that there was a lack of internal communication. The interviewee indicated that they had no time to properly talk and share because everyone is busy and hence it is complicated to arrange a team meeting where every employee is present. With this in view, the organizational members are not necessarily up-to-date with what is going on in each department. According to the respondent, it creates a feeling of frustration because it undermines morale, discourages loyalty and hinders a sense of cohesion and belonging to the group. After undergoing the interviews, I realized that this feeling was shared by several other coworkers. One of the main raised consequences of this was the absence of common objectives. Some of the members added that without clear guidelines it is easier to get lost, and it might impact the overall efficiency and productivity of the organization.

- Visionary ways of governing and functioning

Despite some internal issues and from an overall perspective, employees and interns are happy to work in this organization. The reasons mentioned were the feeling of doing something good for the planet and for the people, the good and relaxed atmosphere, the interesting tasks, the location of the office (in front of the ocean) and the unusual and flexible way of functioning. In point of fact, the hours of work are adaptable depending on the needs of the members, there is not obligation to be everyday at the office. The most important being to do a good job in time, the co-directors are not looking at the hours worked. One of the respondents specified the following;

”The two leaders are comprehensive and flexible, meaning that they respect the time we need for example when we have an unexpected with our kids or a doctor appointment in the middle of the day. As long as we are doing our work, we can arrange our hours of work. Everyone is doing that; it is part of who we are and how we function. This way, I feel considered and I can be honest with them.”

Several employees mentioned that the co-directors ask them how they feel and how they like their job on a regular basis. They added that these good relationships were important to them, to feel valued and to keep their motivations up. Likewise, another utterance was added concerning the fact that the employees and interns could talk freely and openly to the managers meaning that there is no code or norm to respect. "It is like they are at the same hierarchical level as all of us, they are just more busy." added an interviewee.

Reflection:

It is clear that the organizational culture has some up and down sides. This management style and the fact that employees can work from home are unusual, especially in France. Usually French companies tend to be rigid and authoritative and to suffer from an exaggerated culture of hierarchy (Dupuy, 2015). Therefore, it seems like H2Eau correspond more to an Anglo-Saxon management style based on collaboration and values creation for employees (i.e.: competences and skills) (Dupuy, 2015). This way of functioning appears as ahead of its time and of its environment, however it supposes to have a defined and thoughtful structure and strategy. Therefore, even if it seems to be a better management style as an authoritarian one, it might induce some challenges for the NGO including in organization and cohesion but also in transmission of organizational culture. Indeed, if members work mostly at home or in remote places, it will be harder to share and maintain a common culture as the latter is mainly transmitted via social interactions and observations.

7 Conclusion and final discussion

The aim of the study was to better understand the meanings behind the strategic communicative actions of a specific environmental organization. Additionally, there was an intention to develop knowledge about the possible link between organizational culture and strategic communication. It is now appropriate to answer to the research questions in order to uncover the sense-making of H2Eau members in relation to strategic communication and organizational culture.

Q1- How do the organizational members make sense of strategic communication?

From a general perspective, it was clear that the sense-making on strategic communication hold by members was referring to a linear transmission process. Indeed, they felt that their aim was to educate people through transmitting information about the consequences on water generated by our lifestyles but also on what individuals can do to reduce these impacts. Respondents also expressed the objective of attracting financial resources. Although, despite the closed link between strategic communication and viability, H2Eau does not seem to value strategic communication in the same way as its other departments, such as education. Thus, their understanding of strategic communication seems to refer to a transmission-based process.

This thinking does not correspond to the definition of environmental communication as expressed by Hallgren and Ljung (2005). However, the way of apprehending communication of this NGO is not fixed as sense-making is constantly changing through social interactions. Considering that H2Eau is starting to better engage in collaboration, for example by creating new educational material with others organizations, there is a chance for their strategic communication to evolve toward a two-ways relationships based on dialogue and cooperation. Hence, even if this new approach of communication is not yet orally expressed, it uncovers the possibility of changes towards a more circular way of apprehending strategic communication. For instance, by including citizens in their actions or by engaging in dialogue with them, which is the current strategy of WWF as seen in the introduction.

In regards to how strategic communication should be implemented, a consensus was clearly asserted toward the need of a clear guideline along with specific objectives. The respondents agreed on the fact that a strategy is needed to ensure coherence and homogeneity between their different actions and media use. A conducting line is primordial for enhancing the notoriety and having a unified and strong message. It appeared that communication is more valued than before as a communication department is starting to take shape. Nevertheless, members of H2Eau seem embedded in their way of thinking and doing; the lack of time, know-how and resources is impacting what could be done. Currently, they are aware of their unprofessional and unstructured way of communicating but all attempts to change their habits are confronted to divergent perceptions on the values and messages that H2Eau should share. Within the organization, several visions cohabit about what things should be done and how it should be done; therefore the lack of internal cohesion is felt through their way of communicating with their external environment. I believe that putting in common the different assumptions, perspectives and thoughts of the

employees about communication and how it should be carried out, could generate new meanings creation. My perspective is that new sense-making about strategic communication could be promising, as what prevents the members of the non-for-profit organization to move forward is notably their linear view on strategic communication. As stated previously, what is presently considered as the ideal state of communication is a communication that is co-constructed between the NGO and the citizens to meet and answer to their realities and needs as closely as possible. This interpretation of communication is referring to the concept of environmental communication by Hallgren & Ljung (2005). Therefore, there is a need to reflect and elaborate on the DNA of the organization to ensure a common vision, clear objectives and means to achieve them. This shared direction is likely to lead to better structuring and operating models, which in turn will presumably improve the overall performance and notoriety of H2Eau.

Q2- How does this sense-making towards strategic communication relate to the culture of the organization?

From the above findings, some important characteristics of the culture seem to emerge. According to the OCP approach, H2Eau appears to correspond to the innovative, people-oriented and team-oriented dimensions of culture (O'Reilly et al., 1991 cited in Bauer & Erdogan, 2009). Indeed, the casual management style with a soft bureaucracy and flat hierarchy emphasizes the unconventional and innovative aspect of this culture since French organizational cultures are generally rigid and authoritative (Dupuy, 2015). Furthermore, it appears that the culture of the organization is egalitarian as proactivity and the fact to have a great freedom for members to make decisions give the impression of being highly valued. Likewise, I would argue that it is a people-oriented culture because of the permissive and empathetic characters of the founder and co-leaders, leading to a positive and fun working atmosphere. A team-oriented dimension is also appreciable in view of the fact that cooperation and collaboration are integral parts of their working habits. In this sense, H2Eau cultivates open and positive relationships with its co-members and managers. Values-oriented and passion-oriented are not parts of the dimensions of OCP, however given the altruistic aspect of the work of this organization, they seem important to mention. The environmental practitioners are driven by the need to create a more sustainable world for current and future generations. They are emotionally invested and feel that their job make sense.

In addition, it appears that two subcultures are present - one involving the executives (the founder and the co-managers), the other involving the employees, interns and volunteers. These subcultures have possibly emerged due to the differences in shared values and assumptions. Since there is not a common understanding on the DNA and objectives of the organization, members assigned divergent meanings on what has to be done and how it has to be done. On one hand, the executives are overworked and expect support from the employees. On the other hand, employees have difficulties taking initiatives without a frame or instructions thus they take decisions in accordance with their personal intuitions. At first glance, the culture gives the impression to be open and sociable but the presence of subcultures testifies to a certain lack of internal cohesion. Indeed, the lack of time for communicating (especially between managers and employees) coupled with a way of working without rules and based on instinct (unstructured and inconsistent) result in a weak organizational culture.

If I translate these findings into theoretical concepts, I would suggest changing from an innovative (adhocracy) culture to a clan culture, which emphasizes consensus and commonality of goals and values (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). The co-leaders and the founder should be more available for employees and exercise some sort of control to unify the culture. For instance, by implementing team meetings twice a month and personal employee meetings once a month that could be used to check what has be done and what should be done next - to make sure everyone agree on the direction the NGO should take. Since social interactions are the foundations for creating, maintaining as well as changing a culture. New meaning creations about strategic communication cannot occur without the gathering of all H2Eau's members.

The research revealed that culture can be considered as one of the many factors (such as personal life history, rules and norms derived from outside the organization) potentially influencing sense-making of organizational members. Indeed, the meanings behind the strategic communication design of H2Eau (driven by instinct and without rules and procedures) appear to be related to how the overall organization functions. Managers should be aware of this relationship to ensure their culture is enabling their organization and their strategic communication to be successful.

7.1 Research limitations and practical implications

The fact that the investigation focuses on one organization and that data were collected from a single source (myself) can be considered as limitations for this study. Nevertheless, since the gathered information came from the members of the organization, the tools and documents I reviewed coupled as well as the interactions I had during work days, they are representative of the members' sense-making. Still, if more time and money resources had been available, I could have asked an external person to simultaneously do the coding and compare the emerging themes chosen to be discussed as results (Silverman, 2006). Moreover, since data analysis in qualitative research usually involves interpretations, I asked members to review the result and conclusion to ensure my neutrality.

In regards to practical implications, I believe that the findings of this research can advise environmental practitioners to consider the importance of strategic communication and its relationships to organizational culture. Other organizations can use this case study as a guidance to help them strengthen their internal cohesion and improve their external notoriety. Making sense of organizational culture and strategic communication can thereby support organizations make informed operational and strategic decisions and move forward toward better environmental practices.

7.2 Implication for future studies

This study looks at how the sense making of members influenced by organizational culture has an effect on the way strategic communication is understood. Little has been said on the role of communication in creating a better culture. Thus, additional studies can help reveal the interdependence between communication and culture by showing that both communication and organizational culture influences one another. Indeed, it appears that they enable, maintain and constrain each other. Hence, the fact that strategic communication can have an impact on organizational culture could be an interesting hypothesis to investigate.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Example of questions used for the content analysis

- How does strategic communication seem to be understood?
- How does strategic communication is applied?
- What kind of word is frequently used? (i.e.: to describe the NGO, its reasons of existing)
- What kind of information is shared with the public?
- Does the NGO transmit information or try to engage in dialogue with citizens?
- How visual and written communication is used? (tone, positioning, visuals, message, etc.)
- What is the overall communication strategy?
- What is the main message of each communication supports?
- Is the communication consistent or inconsistent between the different tools/medium of communication analyzed and with the interviews' responses?
- How does the culture of the NGO is transcribe in these communicative tools?
- What organizational culture's characteristics are implied in these communicative tools?

Appendix 2 - Interview guide

I. Personal questions

- Since how long do you work in the NGO?
- What is your educational and working background (studies, work, etc.)?
- Have you been working with strategic communication or with people working in communication before?

II. Strategic communication

- Could you give me a definition of communication? And strategic communication?
- According to you, what are the roles of strategic communication? (example of follow-up questions : advantages, drawbacks)
- From your perspective, what are the effects of strategic communication on your organization?

III. The organization and its culture

- How do you perceive your strategic communication?
- What do the NGO do to communicate? What means and tools do you employ?
- What do you think of it? If you could, would you change something?
- Since the creation, what have changed in the way you engage with citizens?
- Who is in charge of the strategic communication in the NGO?
- From your perspective, how would you explain the reasons why the NGO is not well-known yet? What would you recommend to overcome these issues?
- How would you describe and define the culture of your organization? Do you feel good in this organization? Can you contribute freely and openly to its development?

Final questions: Would you like to add/say something else? Do you have any comments or suggestions about the interview?