



HoGent

Going Global

Assignment iTalent

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Introduction

As a part of the iTalent course, we (group 33) were assigned the task of contacting two internationally active companies and interviewing them. The topic of these interview is **communication**. What's specifically of interest to us is the way these company do their internal and external communications and the way they deal with difference of culture. We contacted two major companies, **Engie** (Electrabel) and **Siemens** to find out just that! Engie uses French on the work floor and French and Siemens uses English. Before we elaborate on our findings, let's first dive into these two companies, and find out who they are and more importantly what they do.

SIEMENS

❖ Siemens

Siemens is one of the most well-known European Multinationals. Headquartered in Munich and Berlin Siemens, it boasts an annual revenue (2016) of \$79.64 billion and a presence in almost every country and can be counted amongst one of the most successful European companies out there! The conglomerate company is active in many fields, the principal divisions being **Industry, Energy, Healthcare, and Infrastructure & Cities and PLM Software** (since 2007).



❖ Engie

Engie, which operates as Electrabel in Belgium is a French multinational electric utility company, headquartered in La Défense, Courbevoie. They mainly operate in the field of **electricity generation** and are one of the largest **distributor of energy** in Belgium and France. Electrabel operates many power plants using natural gas, nuclear and renewable energy and does projects all over the world.

We asked these two companies the following questions, in their respective language:

- *Is the company active internationally?*
- *How is communication done?*
- *Which tools are used to follow up on Belgian projects abroad.*
- *What's the communication frequency?*
- *Is communication running smoothly?*
- *Do IT specialists communicate directly or is there a special communication branch for that? Are there any cultural "negotiators" involved?*

The following report was made on the answers they gave us. The answers to questions are made **bold**.

How Do They communicate?

Having introduced these two major enterprises, let's now discuss their communication patterns:

❖ Internal Communication

First of all, let's take a closer look into the internal communication. Siemens and Engie both use the rather obvious methods like **email**, **phone**, etc. to communicate internally. If there is a problem, you need help or just need share some information, an email or a phone call suffice.

The first difference we found lies in the software these companies tend to use. While most communication can be achieved by these "standard" methods, each company also has their own way of protecting valuable data. Siemens is pretty big on the latter. They use **tools** like **Slack**, **JIRA** and **Confluence** to communicate (over a private network). Engie (which to be fair is a lot smaller than Siemens) tends to keep to the standard communication methods except maybe for the usage of their **website**.

Another big difference between the two companies is the structure. Siemens has a very strict "rulebook" for everything. No chaos like Engie (they occasionally suffer from flooded communication lines) but structure, to avoid these and other problems. Siemens even has an "Agile" methodology to keep everything running smoothly.

❖ External Communication

The external communication of these company could honestly not be further apart! These differences probably stem from the fact that Engie is mainly active in two countries, with only a couple of projects in South America and Asia. Siemens, on the other hand has to manage running a global network of departments. Both companies do use some of the same methods. These are the standard, traditional methods we mentioned above: **email**, **phone**, **Skype**, **social network**, etc. Which seems to be enough for Engie.

Siemens on the other hand has also worked out a **time zone deferring system** for these methods. They made a global method, and some standards, concerning contacting clients about new product information. Each time zone has their own way of marketing by adapting the global guidelines to local needs or advised limits. They rely on their local field marketers to adapt these guidelines to a more fitting method for each region. As a part of the Agile methodology, they do more than just software development and applying it to marketing and communication. Siemens incrementally reviews, iterates and adapts itself to whatever information is given by their contacts, showing markedly improved results.

Communications Frequency

The frequency at which communications happen within these two companies also seem quite different. From the information, we got from Siemens we concluded that they tend to **restrict the frequency of communication** (towards customer) as much as possible. Their actual policy of communication frequency is really dependent on the location. They do however have:

*“The **global standard** is that no contact should receive more than **two marketing emails per week**” ~ See mail from Siemens*

As for Engie: the trend we’ve seen previously seems to continue here: they don’t really have a well organised system, although it must be said they do have a system. Communicating is done when a project is finished, once every one or two days company news is posted to a private network, two or three times a year a magazine is published and finally they’ve a support center that can be reached 24/7.

Communications between IT specialists

Communication with IT specialists is another topic the two companies handle quite differently. In Siemens one can communicate with the IT-specialist directly as a customer, this of course being because Siemens offers services to its customers which are IT related. For Electrabel this isn’t so much the case, therefore this is something they don’t do. Both companies have a special department or branch that is responsible for international, intercultural communications to ensure these go smoothly.

Both companies definitely take cultural differences into account, Electrabel for instance has found that even between Dutch and Flemish speaking employees there are some considerable cultural differences, therefore even the communication between these very similar neighbouring countries happens through dedicated communications departments.

Siemens on the other hand seems to handle things a bit different: They have one global department of communication which is responsible of ensuring communications between all the different divisions they have over the world. They don’t make use of actual cultural “negotiators” but they do have a specialist in every country where they operate who knows all about the country and works out a way to do things best, specific for the region.

Conclusion

Although there are some small similarities between Engie and Siemens, we found that most of their methods are quite different. They both use normal systems to manage day to day communication, like emailing to clients or co-workers, calling about a certain problem and even setting up Skype conferences.

The big difference lies in the way they organise **a global system**. Engie keeps a low profile by sticking to the main ways of communication while Siemens invented their **Agile methodology** to manage a global functioning communication network.

While stating the similarities and differences is straightforward, conducting a global communication trend with only 2 reviewed companies would be statistically impossible. It's probably true bigger companies need more structured methods while smaller ones like Engie can get away with a bit more chaos, but we'd need more evidence than this to make a conclusion statement that is true in general for international companies.

Furthermore, we were quite surprised, impressed even, when we learn about the things that Siemens in particular does to ensure the optimal communication both internally, in the company as external towards customers, stakeholders etc. We think this is an example of how it should be done, after all communication is of uttermost importance!

Attachments:

❖ Tasks

- Hilda: mail to Siemens in English
- Ismail: call to Engie in French and writing it down
- Ocean & Simon: writing this paper

❖ Sources

<http://www.engie.com/en/group/>

<https://www.siemens.com/history/en/countries.htm>

<https://www.siemens.com/global/en/home.html>

❖ Mail Siemens by Hilda

Dear Daniel,

This is in regard to the IT student's project we talked about for HoGent. We're looking into IT global companies or IT departments with an international culture. If you could spare us a few minutes to contribute to the project, it'd be just a few questions about international environment at work.

Starting with your role in your company..

v Is your company active internationally?

Siemens is active in nearly every country around the world.

v How is communication done?

That depends on the kind of communication to which you're referring. Obviously email and telephone play very large roles for us across all forms of communication, but to be more specific...

- *Within teams, we use tools such as Slack, JIRA, and Confluence*
- *Within the same division, we use email, phone conferencing, and Skype for Business (formerly Lync/Microsoft Communicator)*
- *Within global Siemens, we use Microsoft LiveMeeting and Circuit*
- *For external communication, we use marketing automation tools like Oracle's Eloqua, CRM communication, webinars/seminars, regional/global conferences, and quite often face-to-face meetings with both existing and potential customers.*

v Which tools are used to follow up on Belgian projects abroad.

We very rarely have projects that are specific to a single country, so this is a bit difficult to answer. We have a very structured zone model that tries to provide customer support in the same time zone and language as customers. This support is provided by another division within

Siemens that is dedicated solely to customer and technical support across all divisions. The tools used here vary from phone/email to personal video calls (usually using Skype, Google Hangouts, Webex, or some other customer-specific tools sometimes required by security agreements)

v What's the communication frequency?

Assuming this is referring to potential customers, it depends. Our go-to-market model follows industry solutions, but we also have a few products with a strong enough audience to promote only that single product or product family. These marketing campaigns are all developed at the global level and adopted country by country. Frequency depends on the campaign developers, but our general rule of thumb is to avoid inundating our leads with so much communication that they unsubscribe. This very fine line varies from region to region, so we rely on our local field marketers to advise on frequency for their country. The global standard is that no contact should receive more than two marketing emails per week; this, of course, excludes transactional and contractually required emails. The other forms of communication are mostly pull rather than push and, again, depend on the region; but requiring a prior specific requested action by a contact allays most fears of inundation in this case.

v Is communication running smoothly?

We certainly like to think so. We've tried to adapt the Agile methodology to more than just software development and apply it to marketing (and communications as a whole), whereby we incrementally review, iterate, and adapt to what the contact is telling us, both explicitly and implicitly. This model has shown markedly improved results.

v Do IT specialists communicate directly or is there a special communication branch for that? Are there any cultural "negotiators" involved?

If you're referring to communicating directly with the customers, then yes. As a company with quite a broad portfolio of products, both hardware and software, our IT specialists have to be flexible and knowledgeable in more than just one area. When a customer needs help beyond what standard customer support can offer, the IT specialists interface directly with the customers. I don't know about cultural negotiators, but we have specialists in every country in which we operate specifically for the purpose of providing global support at a local level.

v What would be the main differences you've found between the American and European business office culture?

Europeans are far more direct and less likely to engage in "water cooler" banter; Americans are much more relationship oriented, both within their office and externally, and few topics are taboo when striking up a conversation with a coworker.

Thank you for your help and remember, helping students always brings good karma :)

Sincerely,

Hilda Cabello.

❖ Telephone Call Electrabel (in French) by Ismail

J'ai interviewé Engie (Electrabel). Electrabel est un fournisseur d'énergie en Belgique.

La société est active sur la scène internationale ?

Electrabel opère en Belgique, Engie est le groupe de coordination internationale qui opère également en Belgique. Engie dispose d'autres entreprises qui sont actives en Belgique. Fabricom, Axioma et Maxima.

Electrabel est probablement plus connu du fournisseur d'énergie du pays, mais est également l'opérateur de centrales nucléaires en Belgique.

Comment s'affectue la communication ?

Parce que c'est un groupe international, cela a un impact majeur sur le domaine de la communication ? Mais celui-ci doit être de deux points de vue, l'interne et l'externe.

Externe:

Non, nous utilisons de nombreux outils traditionnels site Web, intranet, médias sociaux, email, publications Magazine (circulaires). Engie a un site web Engie.com (site global), Engie.be associés à la section belge de l'entreprise.

Interne : collègues mutuelles

L'outils : messagerie, intranet et écrans dans les bâtiments, les circulaires dans la langue appropriée. Les principales langues sont l'anglais et Français. Mais importants messages (niveaux politique et stratégiques) sont aussi se traduit par les Néerlandais pour que chacun puisse interpréter cela dans sa langue maternelle.

Quels outils sont utilisés pour suivre les projets belges à l'étranger.

Pour les activités à l'étranger est quotidiennement en contact, nous utilisons les mêmes ressources que ci-dessus. exp. Belgique-Portugal où l'on offshore moulins à vent sont placés, et ingénieur belge est le gestionnaire du projet au Portugal. Ebrahimi Fabricom construit sous-stations (seulement dans le monde) ces sont vendus dans le monde et installés par Fabricom.

Quelle est la fréquence de communication ?

Interne : il s'agit chaque fois selon l'actualité, à la réalisation d'un projet, par exemple, le magazine est publié seulement 2 à 3 fois par an. Chaque 1 ou 2 jours, les dernières nouvelles sur l'intranet. Par exemple, supposons qu'il y a un problème, avec les partenaires extérieurs est là 24/24 7/7 communication possible. Pour intervenir dès que possible en cas de problèmes.

Communication fonctionne bien ? Pas des grandes problèmes ?

Interne : il s'agit chaque fois selon l'actualité, à la réalisation d'un projet, par exemple, le magazine est publié seulement 2 à 3 fois par an. Chaque 1 ou 2 jours, les dernières nouvelles sur l'intranet. Par exemple, supposons qu'il y a un problème, avec les partenaires extérieurs est là 24/24 7/7 communication possible. Pour intervenir dès que possible en cas de problèmes.

Informations communiquent-elles directement ou y a-t-il une branche de communication spéciale pour cela ?

Il n'y a aucune communication entre les différents services IT du groupe, il y a autres ministères le pouvoir la communication entre le service informatique (Bruxelles) et service informatique (Madrid) et les informations nécessaires pour communiquer. Parce que tout le monde doit faire face à son travail. Si il n'y a rien de ce que différents ministères sont concernés, le département « communication ». Supposons maintenant qu'il y a un problème sur le net (réseau), puis c'est le service qui envoie un mail à toutes les parties concernées nous travaillons dessus et résoudre ce problème dès que possible. cela est-il trop, plus que ce n'est pas là. Parce que vous devez toujours examiner si la communication peut apporter une valeur ajoutée.

Y a-t-il tout culturels « négociateurs » impliqués ?

Il doit certainement être pris en compte, beaucoup, même la communication avec les employés flamands et néerlandais est complètement différente. Il nous possédons également le service de communication dans chaque pays. La communication s'exécute chaque fois par le même ministère qui, à sa fonction. Mais tout ce qui doit être communiqué est effectué via le siège social international (Paris) pour communiquer avec l'Amérique latine ou en Asie. Ou au Brésil, par exemple, nous avons maintenant la plus grande centrale hydroélectrique, qui a beaucoup d'habitants y impliquer sur il est donc très important de communiquer avec eux dans le droit chemin.

Vous communiquez là par exemple beaucoup plus direct avec la population locale et à l'échelon local à consulter et à communiquer.