

Languages Lanean

Kongresua

2024.01.18-19

CORPORATE LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT: INSIGHTS FROM SCANDINAVIAN BUSINESS

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CORPORATE LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT: WHAT IS IT?



Corporate language management describes a course of action where language regulation is designed and implemented on the basis of a **strategic evaluation** of the subjective **language needs** of the organization.

Corporate language management involves deliberate control of a firm or business unit's language use based on the assumption that it will affect overall **productivity** and **performance**.

Sanden, G. R. (2016). Language managementx 3: A theory, a sub-concept, and a business strategy tool. *Applied Linguistics*, 37(4), 520-535.

CORPORATE LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Companies make **language management** decisions that control not only their employees' language use, but also affect language use in countries in which they operate.

By engaging in language management activities, companies act as **language managers**.

These activities may be even more **important and impactful** than those of the nation state.

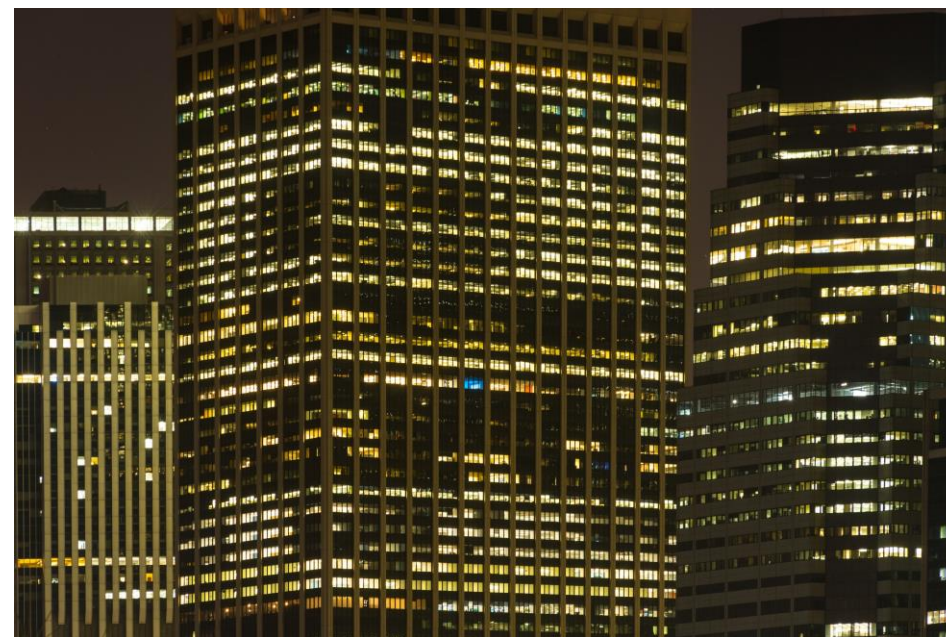


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LANGUAGE POLICY

“**Language policy**” can refer to a **plan** – i.e. laws, regulations, rules and pronouncements or statements of intent – **about language use**.

Corporate language policies are in essence policies that are developed specifically in order to influence **language practices within a company**.



Sanden, G. R., & Kankaanranta, A. (2018). “English is an unwritten rule here”: Non-formalised language policies in multinational corporations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 23(4), 544-566.

EXAMPLE: FINANCIAL SERVICE COMPANY

Finance

LEADING NORDIC BANK

Present in 17 countries, 32,000 employees.

Formalized language policy, common corporate language British English + use of Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Finnish.



Photo by Ibrahim Boran on Unsplash

Sanden, G. R. (2020). Domain loss theory revisited: From multinational corporations to multicorporate nations. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 30(3), 510-529.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN FINANCE

“Our corporate language is English (British English). This is the language we use in cross-border communication. Local communication—external customer communication as well as internal communication—can be executed in the respective local language. Information is also communicated in relevant local languages in the following situations: if it is a legal requirement or is otherwise considered business vital or necessary for reputation reasons or to ensure that the intended message comes across.”



Photo by LinkedIn Sales Solutions on Unsplash

WHAT DO THE EMPLOYEES SAY?

It says in our language policy what we mean by corporate language, which is when it is cross-border communication. If you communicate within the country, then you use your own language.

-Interview with Translator / Finance

If it is a local job, and the requirement is that you have to be good at a local language, then that is more important than English.

-Interview with HR manager /
Finance

EXAMPLE: CONSULTING + MANUFACTURING

Consult

LEADING NORDIC ENGINEERING AND CONSULTANCY

Present in 15 countries, 10,000 employees.

Formalized language policy in DK. Common corporate language English + use of local languages.

Manufacturing

WORLD LEADING MANUFACTURER

Present in 55 countries, 19,000 employees.

Formalized language policy, common corporate language British English + use of local languages.

EMPLOYEES' LANGUAGE-BOUNDARY INTERFACES

Employees make use of a range of front-line communication practices to overcome language barriers, some in line with the language policy, some improvised ad hoc solutions where employees draw on their discretionary power to manage the situation.

In other cases, however, employees choose not to cross the boundary in front of them; instead they choose to avoid it.



Illustration by Koljonen (2010)

Sanden, G. R., & Lønsmann, D. (2018). Discretionary power on the front line: A bottom-up perspective on corporate language management. *European Journal of International Management*, 12(1-2), 111-137.

WHAT DO THE EMPLOYEES SAY?

Danish employees have a tendency to speak in Danish as soon as they find two Danish-speaking people, even if there are English-speaking people next to them.

-Interview with Senior vice-president /
Manufacturing

It would seem weird if we went to [the Danish client], and then we just plunged into speaking English to them. ... The situation just isn't there, and therefore it can seem forced if you say you just have to do it.

-Interview with Engineer and Project
manager / Consulting

LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Language management tools are **measures** or **activities** companies deploy to satisfy their language needs or overcome language related challenges.

Language management tools are **practical**, **hands-on**, and designed to **fulfil a certain purpose**, or directed towards a **specific goal**.



Sanden, G. R. (2016). Language: The sharpest tool in the business strategy toolbox. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 21(3), 274-288.

COMMON LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS



TRANSLATION

In-house or through external
arrangements



INTERPRETATION

In-house or through external
arrangements



TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

Computer-based language
assistance



LANGUAGE TRAINING

Programs to improve
employees' language skills



SELECTIVE RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of language-
skilled employees



LANGUAGE INTERMEDIATES

Strategic use of employees
who act as language nodes

IN SUM: LANGUAGE MATTERS!

Language matters for all businesses, but there is **no uniform solution** to corporate language management.

Language policies should be **flexible** and allow for **different language needs** in the organization.

Facilitate and support implementation of language policies with **language management tools**.

Companies have the potential to act as **powerful language managers** in their home and host markets.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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