

Corporate environmental policy as an image-building resource for enterprises within the nuclear power industry

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ABSTRACT

Mankind is currently faced with the threat of an energy famine due to depleted deposits of fossil fuels and increasingly greater environmental losses in getting electrical energy. Under these conditions, the idea of using nuclear fuel seems to be quite rational. However, considering the possibility of the ruinous impact of radioactive substances on the environment due to misuse, the advisability of building a nuclear power plant (NPP) is often questioned. The reason behind this is the state of environmental stress currently experienced by society, which is grounded in environmental risks and stereotypes associated with mankind's major technogenic disasters, like the accidents at the Chernobyl NPP and Fukushima-1 NPP. This is affecting the image of enterprises within the nuclear power industry and complicating the process of fostering loyalty in the local public. In this paper, the authors try to assess the size of the contribution made by Russia's nuclear power industry to the making of new environmentally-oriented ethics upheld by enterprises, as well as the efficiency of their communication interaction with the local public. What makes the study of this topic essential is the fact that construction of nuclear power sites is directly dependent on public sentiment, and the enterprise's ability to pursue solid environmental policy and establish proper channels of communication with the local public will not only help boost its publicity capital but also contribute to enhancing the environmental education of the population in a climate of environmental risk.

Key words : Ecology, Environment, Environmental policy, Environmental communication, Public relations (PR), Environmental PR, nuclear power industry, Environmental risk, Environmental crisis, Communication technology, Image

Introduction

The significance of corporate environmental policy as an image-building resource for resource-extracting enterprises is determined by a set of components including international standards, the loyalty of the local public, and the level of the environmental culture of the enterprise's senior management.

The greatest relative share in the process of putting together corporate eco-policy at an enterprise belongs to the market's specificity. The international market is imposing increasingly strict requirements

for all entities willing to operate and develop in it. Above all, it is worth mentioning here the ISO 14000 international environmental standardization program, which is grounded in a focus on sustainable development. International standards stimulate large business to implement programs under corporate environmental policy. A strong stimulus in this respect is provided by such actors in environmental policy as environmental organizations, the local population, and mass media. All of them translate a company's image – negative or positive. Consequently, researchers concerned with corporate envi-

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ronmental policy as an image-building resource for enterprises within the nuclear power industry may regard the issue of employing technology for building and promoting an environmentally-oriented image factoring in the system of ISO 14000 standards as essential to further research.

There are a number of studies by Russian and foreign researchers investigating the phenomenon of corporate environmental policy and information support for it (Adam, 2006; Ligadzhieva, 2010; Batrakova, 2007; Vasilenko, 2002; Vinokurov, 2007; Gerasimchuk, 2007; Glavinskaya, 2004; Suzdaleva, 2009; Khudorenko, 2005; Cox, 2010; Sharkova, 2016; etc.). Most of these studies converge in the finding that the environmental factor is becoming the deciding one today and it is hard to form a well-rounded image for an enterprise without the nature-protection component.

Methods

The choice of methodology in this paper is determined by the study's focus and object. The fact that existing research offers insufficient insight into the subject, signals the need to draw upon primary sources in trying to understand the ins and outs of the process of employing corporate environmental policy as one of the key resources for building a positive, environmentally-oriented image for an enterprise within the nuclear power industry.

Corporate documents regulating the environmental and communication policies of an enterprise (in our case, OAO Concern Rosenergoatom and the Leningrad Nuclear Power Plant, its subsidiary), analytical reports, and data from sociological studies conducted between 2012 and 2016 are analyzed in this paper based on principles of objectivity and systematicity and the unity of logical and historical approaches.

Empirical data are analyzed in the paper based on principles of objectivity and systematicity. The paper is methodologically grounded in the comparative-historical method with a view to tracing the dynamics of processes of implementing and effectuating corporate environmental policy and tracing the process of employing corporate environmental policy as one of the resources for building the image of an enterprise. In particular, this method is employed for analyzing the various forms of an NPP's participation in the process of establishing effective channels of communication with the local public to

fight off stereotypes and environmental fears.

Results

Today, corporate environmental policy is an indispensable part of the activity of NPPs, and compliance with norms and regulations in the area of environmental protection is a crucial condition for them to be able to conduct entrepreneurial activity in the sector. Therefore, ensuring eco-security remains a priority area of NPPs' corporate eco-policy. A successful environmental policy is a crucial image-building and managerial resource for enterprises within the nuclear power industry. However, it is hardly possible to achieve this kind of policy without the participation of certain actors. Thus, for instance, the process of implementing the corporate eco-policy of GK Rosatom involves the following participants: global actors (public authorities; international and federal-level nongovernmental environmental organizations; international and federal scientific institutions; social institutions; international and federal mass media; competition; the population of other regions) and local actors (personnel; the local population; local self-governing authorities; local environmental organizations and activists; local research institutes; partners). To some extent, these groups themselves are objects of image influence, since they are carriers of stereotypes (mostly negative) regarding NPPs' activity.

Stereotypes associated with the nuclear power industry are a crucial phenomenon. One of the world's largest disasters, the 1986 accident at the 4th power unit of the Chernobyl NPP, left an indelible mark on the image of the nuclear power industry as a whole. The horrible accident left dozens dead and hundreds wounded as a result of high doses of radiation causing severe radioactive contamination within a radius of 30 kilometers, and no prospects for having the area's environment restored. This, without question, was an irremediable disaster, but it was caused not by machinery and technology but by people responsible for the NPP's safety or by lack thereof (Kalugin, 1990).

Today, it is still a tall order to free people's minds of the deeply-rooted stereotype about the danger posed by NPPs to the environment and people, with lots of effort and time required to alter people's notions. A person who is not a specialist in the area will hardly agree with the statement that power may be generated by NPPs through lesser strains on the

environment and that NPPs are ecologically cleaner than thermal power plants, including those working on natural gas (Dyatlov, 2003). In any case, the accident at the Chernobyl NPP was a lesson for everybody, and now safety is the highest priority among the values of corporations operating within nuclear power industry. Thus, for instance, GK Rosatom has declared that their top priority is to ensure total safety for people and the environment: "There are no trifles when it comes to safety – we know the rules of safety and abide by them, and we are prepared to prevent any violations from occurring" (Rosatom, n.d.). This is a good example of corporations within the nuclear power industry paying a lot of attention today to issues related to social-environmental responsibility.

To assess the present-day image of the Leningrad nuclear power plant, the authors resorted to SWOT analysis, formalized expert interviews and qualitative analysis of corporate documents. Based on the findings, at the local level the enterprise is currently facing the following challenges and threats: 1) stereotyped thinking on the part of target groups within the public against a backdrop of technogenic disasters that took place within the nuclear power industry in the past; 2) growing discontent among the local population regarding the possibility of another power unit getting erected in the area; 3) relations with environmental organizations and movements deteriorating for the same reason; 4) the local population growing resentful and disgruntled at the cancellation of indispensable government-sponsored programs on the construction of social facilities in Sosnovy Bor.

As regards the external public, here the situation is worse than in Sosnovy Bor, as the farther the populated locality is situated from the plant, the less the residents will know about what is going on at the site. And here again we are faced with the issue of stereotypes, which, above all, is associated with technogenic disasters at the Chernobyl and Fukushima-1 NPPs. Based on the findings of a study conducted by the Levada Center, despite the fact that each year there are overall more and more people around the nation opting for the development of the nuclear power industry, stereotypes and even some fear of NPPs are still persisting in the minds of people, including the population of Northwestern Federal District. On the whole, it could be concluded that the image of enterprises within the nuclear power industry is impacted not so much by

their production process as by everything that is somehow related to the historical development of the industry itself.

In the context of what was said above, of the greatest significance in working with negative stereotypes is the social and environmental image of corporations, for environmental policy and social programs implemented under it are of determining significance to the operation of these corporations and are a key image-building resource given the unique specificity of their activity (Sharkova, 2016).

The key priorities of the environmental policy pursued by the Leningrad NPP are ensuring environmental protection, providing environmental security, and maintaining the health of the population and personnel (Pereguda, n.d.). Its primary objective is to ensure a level of security under which the impact on the environment, population, and personnel will not exceed established norms, and the risk of accidents occurring will be minimal.

The implementation of environmental policy in conformance with internal documentation is normally handled by the staff and senior management of enterprises within the nuclear power industry. Thus, for instance, the obligations assumed by the team at the Leningrad NPP include: ensuring acceptable levels of radiological risk for the population; being prepared at all times to prevent technogenic accidents from happening and counter their effects; identifying and systematizing all possible negative environmental aspects of production activity with a view to further assessing, reducing, and maintaining these risks at the lowest practically achievable level; maintaining at a proper level activity on environmental protection and ensuring environmental security using all relevant resources, etc.

As regards work with target groups within the public, apart from developing and bolstering one's partnership with them, it may help to focus on a few other key objectives in implementing one's programs as part of environmental policy. Firstly, it is broadcasting the safety and environmental admissibility of the Leningrad NPP and the nuclear power industry as a whole, building and maintaining a positive image for the enterprise, as well as promoting the attractiveness of the profession of nuclear expert. Secondly, it is fostering and maintaining a positive media profile with respect to issues related to coverage of the activity of the plant and the nuclear power industry as a whole (with key topics including protection of public interests, health pro-

tection, safety, and combating information terrorism in respect of the nuclear power industry and its facilities). Thirdly, it is enhancing the environmental condition of rivers and lakes within and the entire water area of the Gulf of Finland and the littoral area around it, including with a view to making these areas attractive for residents' leisure.

On pursuit of these objectives, starting in 2012 specialists at the Leningrad NPP have organized and taken part in numerous projects and activities oriented at shaping the enterprise's environmental image. The most significant projects include: 1) the meeting between specialists at the Leningrad NPP and their Finnish colleagues (the Fortum company and STUK, Finland's agency charged with oversight of nuclear and radiological safety), where they discussed the outcomes of the institutions' 20-year-long partnership, including in the area of the environmental safety of the Leningrad NPP; 2) the 8th International Public Dialogue Forum 'Nuclear Power, Society, Safety-2013' (organized by Rosatom's Public Council in partnership with Green Cross Russia, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Russian Environmental Congress, the Vernadsky Nongovernmental Environmental Foundation, and the international environmental organization Green Light); 3) the environmental expedition by the interregional public movement OKA (the participants measured meteorological parameters, assessed the radiological situation, and conducted surveys of specialists at the plant and residents, as well as residents of neighboring populated localities); 4) the participation of a Leningrad NPP delegation headed by the director along with a group of experts from OAO Concern Rosenergoatom in the 16th session of the joint Norwegian-Russian commission on cooperation in the area of environmental protection; 5) participation in the Atom-Expo international forum (an international central platform, where by way of symposia and round tables participants discuss the public acceptability of the nuclear power industry and issues related to ensuring environmental protection); 6) conducting, since 2012, public presentations of the Environmental Security Report as part of the implementation of the information policy of OAO Concern Rosenergoatom; 7) the participation of the Leningrad NPP in the regional environmental forum of the Public Environmental Council under the Governor of Leningrad Oblast 'The Future of the Planet is in Our Hands'.

The image of an enterprise within the nuclear

power industry can either form in an unregulated fashion or can be the result of work conducted by specialists in terms of creating it for achieving specific objectives, like fostering loyalty among target groups within the public, working with negative stereotypes, attracting investment, tapping a new market, etc. For instance, there are 3 divisions engaged in cultivating and promoting an environmentally-oriented image at the Leningrad NPP: the Environmental Protection Department, the Rational Safety Department, and the Information and Public Relations Department (IPRD). The first 2 departments draw up environmental reports on quantitative indicators and provide statistics, which makes them holders of information. The IPRD broadcasts this information to target groups within the public in an easily accessible form, thus shaping the image of the enterprise. In terms of broadcasting an environmentally-oriented image, the IPRD performs 3 major functions: making personnel at the division and staff at contractor organizations working under a contract with the division aware of environmental policy and plans on its implementation; carrying out activities and procedures prescribed by the 'Guide on the System of Environmental Management'; the public presentation of materials on the state of the environment and environmental security.

The authors are of the opinion that the process of building and promoting an environmentally-oriented image for an enterprise within the nuclear power industry could employ all of the latest information and event PR techniques. Based on the findings of an analysis of a number of relevant materials, these techniques include: interacting with the press-services of public authorities; regularly informing mass media of the entity's activity; activities for journalists; monitoring mass media; arranging appearances by representatives of the subject of PR activity; putting together and releasing corporate media; putting together content for the corporate website; using blogs and working with bloggers; organizing special events; participating in special activities as an expert or a partner. In addition, the process of shaping an environmentally-oriented image for corporations may employ the use of communication technology in dealing with: federal authorities; local authorities; nongovernmental environmental organizations and movements; local residents; residents of regions across the Russian Federation; mass media (local, regional, and federal).

Thus, for instance, the senior management of the

Leningrad NPP is engaged in well-developed interaction with the authorities at various levels. This partnership involves the conduct of meetings attended by the head of the city's administration, the head of the municipal unit, and their deputies. The IPRD of the Leningrad NPP does its best to facilitate the cultivation and maintenance of the constructive relationship with the authorities across various areas: with the heads of the city's large organizations and enterprises, Members of the Legislative Assembly of Leningrad Oblast from SosnovyBor, and representatives of the plant's Youth Organization (since they are aides to deputies of the SosnovyBor Council of Deputies and represent the Leningrad NPP in the city's Council of Youth Organizations).

In addition, the institution has been actively interacting with: the Government of Leningrad Oblast (organizing and conducting fun activities and creative contests for kids); the SosnovyBor Culture Committee (conducting various cultural and creative activities); the SosnovyBor Education Committee (implementing career-guidance and educational programs for college and high-school students); the Environmental Protection and Nature Management Committee (conducting various environmental activities and special events, like thematic seminars and round tables for representatives and specialists of nongovernmental environmental organizations) (Rosenergoatom, n.d.). Thus, the institution appears to be engaged in regular two-way interaction, with Leningrad NPP specialists taking an active part in mass city activities, particularly environmentally-oriented ones, and the city's residents, in turn, taking part in activities organized by the Leningrad NPP.

An important part of activity conducted by the PR department of enterprises within the nuclear power industry is event PR. Here, the key groups of the public are nongovernmental environmental organizations, social and scientific institutions, and the local population. The PR service is expected to invite environmental organizations and representatives of the public to take an active part in environmental meetings, forums, and public hearings, educational and information seminars, and other activities involving the management team. Thus, for instance, by tradition the Leningrad NPP's Information and Public Relations Department has been engaged, right from the moment it was set up, in interaction with its Veterans Council, the SosnovyBor branch of the Soyuz-Chernobyl nongovernmental organiza-

tion, the city's Council of Youth Associations, and a number of creative organizations – all with a view to implementing educational and awareness-raising activities in the area of ecology (Rosenergoatom, n.d.).

In working on shaping an environmentally-oriented image for the NPP, PR specialists may want to pay special attention to working with the target audience which could be termed 'translators of knowledge' – municipal officers, teachers, ecologists, doctors, as well as high-school and college students themselves. Starting in 2012, Leningrad NPP staff have carried out for high-school students over 40 technical, research, environmental, and creative projects, contests, and other activities, which were initiated by GK Rosatom and OAO Concern Rosenergoatom, public authorities, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, universities, and schools. In that period, there have been over 30 career-guidance visits to the plant arranged for tenth and eleventh graders at schools across Sosnovy Bor. By tradition, participants in all organized events receive special print materials, like booklets and brochures, and get to watch a set of selected documentaries within the 'Encyclopedia of Atoms' series and the educational film 'A Tour of an NPP' (Rosenergoatom, n.d.).

It may help to foster one's positive attitude toward the nuclear power industry as early as possible – i.e., right from an early age. This could be done through various activities designed for children's audience, the trendiest special formats including theatricalized classes, creative contests, championships, debates, scholarly soirées, etc. The first such project by the Leningrad NPP, which comprised a series of theatricalized classes entitled 'Peaceful Atoms are Cool – Ask Any First-Grader!', was held in the run-up to the celebration of the plant's 40th anniversary and the announcement of Russia's Year of Environmental Protection. Students were asked to prepare for these classes in advance and then tell the audience some secrets about atoms and share their knowledge of the plant's environmental safety practices and the profession of nuclear expert. The students were joined by Leningrad NPP staff dressed up as fictitious characters to represent the nuclear power industry in an interactive way that would work for kids. In addition, the Information and Public Relations Department has also organized the following activities: the 'Special Attention Zone' All-Russian Schoolers Debate Championship;

the 'Energy of the Future' contest; the 'We are of SosnovyBor' thematic creative community project, which featured a competition among children for the best art works, which were then showcased at the administrative building of the Leningrad NPP; etc. (Rosenergoatom, n.d.).

Another highly efficient technology is media relations. Having well-developed relations with information agencies and regular informing may be crucial for enterprises within the nuclear power industry. A regular pool of journalists with a command of professional terminology gained as a result of close interaction and no longer likely to mix up or make up information is the result of continual, systematic work with journalists. Note that putting together a regular pool may also be part of noopolitics, the process of manipulating society's attitude toward various issues through the use of mass media (Nikonov, Baichik, Zaprudina, Labush and Smolyarova, 2015; Nikonov, 2013; Nikonov, Achkasova, Labush, Baichik, and Puiy, 2016; Labush, Nikonov, Puiy, Georgieva and Bekurov, 2015).

Among the traditional formats of interaction with journalists are weekly press-releases on the NPP's activity; unplanned press-releases issued in the event of a halt in the operation of the plant's power units; monthly press-releases on the plant's safe activity based on the results of the month's work carried out by the departments; press-releases and information messages prepared and mailed out with a view to covering regularly conducted integrated emergency response drills; daily reports on radiation within the NPP's control area (30 km); booklets on the NPP's activity and programs implemented under corporate environmental policy; various educational brochures, study guides, and films. Another efficient technology related to working with journalists is press tours. Journalists can visit the plant and talk to its specialists in person, i.e. see things with their own eyes – which, indeed, is an efficient way to convince someone that the NPP's image is environmentally-oriented.

Apart from mass media, getting increasingly popular today is the use of blogging, especially the technology of blog tours, which includes excursion tours and trips for bloggers. Thus, for instance, representatives of the blogosphere associated with the Leningrad NPP have been taken to Murmansk to see the Kola NPP, as well as a nuclear ice-breaker (Rosenergoatom, n.d.). This audience also includes directors and editors of thematic public groups on

social networks.

Another technology for building and promoting the environmentally-oriented image of enterprises within the nuclear power industry is public presentation of annual environmental security reports. By inviting mass media to open presentations, NPP specialists will not just get the message out that the plant is indeed environmentally friendly and improves each year in that respect, but may also win the trust and respect of the media, while striving to fully neutralize possible negative attitude on their part.

The next important area for fostering an environmentally-oriented image is interaction with government press services. Thus, for instance, the Leningrad NPP's IPRD has in place a well-developed system of interaction with the Emergency Ministry's press service: in the event of an emergency, the department promptly sends them a press-release, which is then posted on their website and is also distributed across various information agencies. This consideration is quite crucial to the plant's image, for, whilst before a press service could oftentimes publish material written incompetently by a regular duty officer, now the likelihood of panic occurring is minimized through the publishing of official Leningrad NPP press-releases.

When it comes to activity related to appearances by representatives of enterprises within the nuclear power industry, the PR department is expected to regularly engage in the choice and preparation of experts for all kinds of appearances – from attending school classes to taking part in international conferences. The Leningrad NPP is a member of the Ecology and Human and Natural Security International Academy of Sciences (Russian: MAH (1748 (MANEB), associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and is regularly engaged in close interaction with it, with the plant's specialists, acting as experts, regularly taking part in various events and round tables. In addition, activities organized as part of the partnership between the Leningrad NPP and MANEB always feature invited journalists, including those from the local population.

In addition, it may be worth paying special attention to such areas as maintaining the corporate spirit and broadcasting environmental safety among the internal public. Of course, among veterans of the nuclear power industry you will hardly come across

someone who will deny the safety of NPPs, but quite often newly-hired young specialists are not properly informed of all aspects of the production process. To this end, the PR department may need to prepare and release special corporate media, as well as organize special educational activities.

Discussion

Present-day researchers suggest that the image of enterprises within the nuclear power industry forms under the influence of collection of opinions from internal and external target groups within the public. Normally, the internal public is informed more about the environmental policy of their enterprise, the results of its implementation, and activities and programs aimed at preventing adverse impact on the environment. The internal public is always more adaptive and is characterized by lower acceptable risk levels (Batrakova, 2007). In other words, it is, potentially loyal and manageable. Consequently, the objective for a corporation's environmental policy is to mitigate the population's environmental stress, reduce the share of public opinion that forms elementally, and take anti-crisis measures for working with target groups to foster loyalty (Sharkova, 2016).

It is worth noting that a great many enterprises within the nuclear power industry are seeking to ecologize their activity, since today the process is becoming a new significant factor for competitiveness. What is more, ecologization makes it possible for enterprises to reduce their costs and keep down environmental risks in a tough climate of government regulation in the area of environmental protection, as well as save on resources used in their activity, including non-renewable ones. Therefore, when it comes to corporations within the nuclear power industry, increasingly more of them are also making public, along with annual reports, documentation on environmental activity they are engaged in transitioning to sustainable development.

Conclusion

The findings of the research reported in this paper have led the authors to draw the following conclusions. The environmental factor is becoming crucial to any activity, for which reason it appears to be hard to form a well-rounded image of an enterprise without factoring in the nature-protection component. In some cases, historically developed activities

and innovations cannot coexist in the consciousness of target groups within the public. Therefore, to neutralize the population's inflated expectations, it may help, in covering one's activities informationally, to focus more on charity in implementing one's programs as part of social policy.

In the course of work on putting together and promoting an environmentally-oriented image, PR specialists at NPPs ought to be prepared to factor in and preferably try to resolve issues within the nuclear power industry as a whole, for, even if they are not part of the subject of PR activities legally, they may still leave a negative mark on its image. In building an environmentally-oriented image, it's necessary to factor in all strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and threats, and, based on this, to develop image-related strategy and tactics on promoting this image. Building an environmentally-oriented image for an enterprise within the nuclear power industry and promoting it will be a success only if a full spectrum of PR technology is employed.

Building an environmentally-oriented image is quite a topical subject that provides the authors with prospects for the development of their research in the direction of recessional communication reacting.

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