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Techniques and Methods to Improve the Communication Channels in Modern Public Administration

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Abstract

The improved abilities and special methods of public communication become more and more important when you are on a mission or a need to fulfill a goal. Also, the goal is much more crucial when we speak about the citizens' interest in the sense of their interaction with public institutions as part of the public administration system. In offering a new perspective on the communication tools used in public administration, our paper intends to be an alternative to the current public servant code of conduct. This article aims not only to analyze the techniques and the mechanism, used in the public administration process of communication, but, also, to promote new methods in order to improve the relationship between the public administration and the citizens. In this sector, the key element is that there can be no effective external communication if there is not an effective internal communication. Consequently, in this case, the first step would be to develop this area. A basic principle, of communication, is that people are not always emphatics. Our human nature is to believe in what we can hear and see, and to judge the public institutions through the levels of their approaches to transparency.

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1. Approaches for a Modern Public Administration

Nowadays, there are many ways to communicate; however, the ability to communicate efficiently is crucial when you have a mission or a need to fulfill a goal. Without several means to communicate, the organisations become isolated. The objective, of institutional communication in Public Administration, is to serve

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the public interest and, namely, the citizens. A Public Administration, which is in the service of the citizens, must ensure that it has a clear communicative process, written in a simple language which can be understood by everybody.

Within public organizations, the institutional communication is more and more developed. Therefore, departments, which specialized in this field, were formed in order to preserve the public image through sustained methods and activities. (Alexandru & Matei. –*Servicii publice*, Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000 page 176).

Institutional communication represents a form of extra-organizational communication through which the institution, within the Public Administration, aims to enforce its image; and to create, around it, a climate of trust and sympathy from the citizen. By its specificity, the Public Administration depends on the way in which it draws the institutional communication plan which tends to become part of of each institution's organizational culture .

- Communication between various levels of the Public Administration;
- Communication between Political Authorities and Administration;
- Communication on the same level;
- Communication between the Social Executive and the Administration;
- Social communication.

Through the communication process, the Public Authority seeks to establish a relationship of proximity with the citizen; by drawing him / her near and starting a dialogue, it sees the personal requirements and grievances. Like in any communication process, it is normal that interferences and barriers occur and make the communication process difficult. The complexity, of the causes determining the difficulties and the barriers related to the communication process, make compulsory, within the respective systems, the existence of the possibility of regulation; adaptation; and transformation. The main factor, of this regulation, is represented by the feedback which allows the receiver, in this case the citizen, to emit his / her reactions and, the sender, *id est* the public servant or the spokesman of a public institution (prefect, mayor, consul, etc.) to register them. In this process, the received feedback can be used as a remedial measure. The Public Relations professionals have a vital role in earning the audience's trust and sustenance. Without this, there could be uncertainty about the Public Administration institution's existence. The ideal would be to reach a point where both the citizens' interests, and those of the public institutions are met. That is why the institutional communication and the advertising techniques, implemented by them, play an important role in Public Administration. Furthermore, we present the 2012 case study of 6 public institutions and, in this article, undertake only a comparative study of two of them.

2. Research Methodology

The objective, of this research, was to analyse the characteristics of the communication process in Public Administration. This was based on an inter-institutional comparison in order to see if there were common elements between the methods used in Romania and Spain, whether in terms of language and communication; and whether or not there were similarities in the ways of transmitting public messages. The research was carried out during February-May 2011.

2.1. The Establishment of the Research Purpose

This research aimed mainly to determine, in terms of public relations practitioners within the Public Administrations in Romania and Spain, all elements which contributed to the development of good institutional

communication. It analyzed the way in which the institutional communication technique was applied in public institutions in both Romania and their counterparts in Spain. This was done so that, at the end, the oversight included a comparison of the similarities and differences between the two states.

2.2. *The Establishment of the Research Objectives*

In order to determine the success of institutional communication in Public Administration, this research was based on the following objectives:

1. The identification of the peculiarities of the activity of public relations in Romania and Spain;
2. The identification of the decision-making factors responsible for the institutional communication;
1. The identification of the connection between the institution's image and its perception by the audience to which it was addressed;
4. The identification of the factors contributing to the creation of a positive institutional image.
5. The recognition of ethical issues existent in the development of the activity of public relations within the Public Administration;
6. The identification of the importance of the code of ethics and conduit in the practice of the profession of specialist Public Relations;
7. The recognition of the main possibilities to improving the institutional communication;

Based on the above-mentioned theme, the technique of *in-depth interview* was chosen for carrying out this research. This structure was based on a conversation guide verified in advance.

2.3. *The Analysis and the Interpretation of the Results*

With regard to the interviews, conducted in the Pitesti and Getafe Town Halls, the press officer and the Getafe and Pitești town halls' spokesman answered.

Getafe Town Hall was organised and functioned by using, approximately, the same mechanisms as the Pitești Town Hall. However, we present further the following mechanisms applied by the foreign institution in addition to its counterpart in Romania:

- a) It achieved the analysis and synthesis materials requested by the mayor.
- b) It monitored and evaluated the mayor's mass-media image in.
- c) It maintained and developed the liaisons with the mass-media authorised for press activities.
- d) It broadcast news releases and press releases; it organised press conferences; interviews or briefings.
- e) It informed in due time and ensured immediately the journalists' access to the activities and actions of public interest.
- f) It informed the mayor, with the utmost expedition, about the media crisis; it reacted in order to reduce the negative effects.
- g) It organised Public Relations specific actions.
- h) It granted, with no discrimination, within two days from registration, the accreditation of journalists and mass-media representatives.
- i) It informed and ensured the access of the journalists to the activities and actions of public interest organised by the institution;
- j) It ensured periodically or whenever the activity of the institution presents immediate public interest, the issue of news releases and press release; and it organised press conferences; interviews; or briefings.
- k) There was a well-developed Intranet service which enabled the online programming, including the mayoral audience. The Public Relations Department made every effort so that the citizens felt wanted; listened to; and treated with the highest attention by the local public administration representatives.

3. **Techniques to improve the Romanian public institutions communication**

Taking into consideration all these aspects and thanks to the research which we conducted, we propose, in this article, four different but important manners to improve the Romanian public institution communications, and, even more, to make more efficient the relationship between them and their public. We gone enumerate some of them:

⤴ Implementation of the e-Government Concept

The global proliferation, of the Internet, combined with the movement to reforming the Public Administration, generated, for good reason, a new wave of interest in the topic. E-government promises to make public institutions more efficient; responsive; transparent; and legitimate. In recent years and in the sense of a medium of communication between public institutions and the citizens, it was considered to be the most significant development in the provision of public information.

In the sense of public institution communication techniques, the e-government concept aimed to improve collaborations between different public administration organizations and their audiences and it gave the citizens multiple options in order to find out the necessary information or to solve their problems:

⤴ Formulating a strong and reliable Communication Program

A strategic communication program contributes, in a very important way, to the process of Public Administration. Implementing a communication strategy or plan can include news releases; media briefings; news conferences; advertising; speeches; publications; brochures; special events (ceremonies; open house programs); videos; and mass - media.

It is important, also, as part of the communication function, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these activities,. The analysis of news coverage or conducting surveys can be used to evaluate how a communication approach worked.

⤴ Creating and organizing an Information Centre

Every large and important institution requires a professional unit to manage the flow of information to the citizens. Most European states maintain an office in or close to the institution, acting as the first provider of information services and fulfilling the media's general information needs. Here, citizens can consult or buy the institutions' official publications of; they can consult daily or weekly bulletins with a calendar of upcoming meetings and events. Also, they can access news of appointments; new policy initiatives; and legislative action and they can order photographic and video material or receive an answer to a question.

In many countries this office takes the lead in organizing regular meetings which present institutional priorities; events; and possible mass media campaigns. Such meetings help to ensure that information officers, in different institutions, are aware of key initiatives within the administration; that communication techniques and creative ideas are shared amongst all the audiences; and that the institutions' presentations are relatively consistent.

⤴ Creating strategic partnerships and visibility

In order to meet the challenges of the very rapid evolution of communication techniques and technologies, even for the public institutions, it is very important to work in a group. This is an essential approach modality to promote its activities better; to find new ways to be recognized by the citizens; and to fulfill its visibility and communication and PR objectives.

Therefore, there is a very wide range of categories of partners such as other public institutions (such as universities; schools); private institutions; (important local stakeholders; research institutions) or with NGO's.

Most of the time, together with partners, true networks were set up which put together complementary skills and capabilities and harmonized a common communication strategy.

Together with all these aspects, in the process of communication, we consider that a very important basis of each public institution is that several rules are known by and function amongst all the public servants. Several major points, which can be considered to be reference points, are what we called **Public Servant Code of Ethics**. These values are a compass to guiding public servants in everything they do. Institutions are expected to take steps to integrate these values into their decisions; actions; policies; processes; and systems. Similarly, public servants can expect to be treated, by their institutions, in accordance with these values.

The public servant should:

- Acquire; preserve; and share knowledge and information as appropriate;
- Assure the confidence of all their colleagues; never use inside information for personal gain; never offer information or “hint” to a third party, by using their official roles to obtain inappropriately an advantage for themselves or to advantage or disadvantage others;
- Conduct themselves professionally, with truth; accuracy; fairness; responsibility and accountability to the public, and here to generally accepted standards;
- Promote the truth to their own institution's management, engaging in no practice which could corrupt the integrity of the communication channels;
- Not express wrongfully their feelings about the professional reputation or practice of another individual; private organization; or other public institutions;
- Promptly correct false or misleading information or rumours;
- Identify publicly the names and titles of individuals involved in making policy decisions; the details of decision-making processes; and how interested citizens can participate;
- Not participate in any activity designed to manipulate or to confuse the citizens; and
- Conduct their professional lives in accordance with the public interest.

4. Conclusions

Public communication represents a system which functions according to a series of principles and which is influenced inevitably by all evolutions in which the society is involved. It is being exposed to continuous change and, why not, to corruptions. In the 21st century, the peculiar and main characteristics, which should define this system, are represented by evolution; adaptability; and performance since all things, decided by the Public Authority, has consequences over an important number of people in society.

Practice proved not only that good communication skills were not sufficient but, there was, also, a need for a thorough knowledge of the entire issue faced by the institution so that the ensemble communication which sent public messages ought to be a successful one. The climate and the institutional order have become more and more submitted to mobilisation and change and, not all the time, in a good way; by being in permanent effervescency, the need for PR and institutional communication intervention is felt, at least externally. This seems to have connotations of calmness and persistence. Their role is to identify the factors which threaten the organisation and which are the methods of adjustment or remediation of a potential crisis situation.

A good strategy, to improve the institutional image, generally, resides, also, from the way in which the public servant is motivated not only to apply the underlying and statutory principles of administration but, especially, by the way in which its audience communicates what it is interested in. It is not enough to see the communication process as an additional factor of the system but rather a complementary one. It must be seen as a steer of the entire gearing, which put into movement efficiently, could bring extra-value common both to its development and the process of accomplishing the final objectives.

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