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INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICIES - FROM THEORETICAL DILEMMAS TO PRACTICAL DECISIONS

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Abstract

In recent years, the role of internal communications in public-sector organizations has significantly increased their importance. In such a context, good governance is a key instrument in finding effective solutions in public administration. The report focuses on the relationship between the processes of building and maintaining internal communications and their role in composing and implementing effective public policies. The article present good practices of public management at the local level, defending the thesis that there is potential to expand the applicability of internal communications as a component of the contemporary organizational brand of organizations in the public sphere.

Keywords

Internal communications – Public policies – Governance – Administration

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*"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who."
(Rudyard Kipling)*

Introduction

In recent years, the role of internal communications in public-sector organizations has significantly increased their importance. In such a context, good governance is a key instrument in finding effective solutions in public administration. The relation between the processes of building and maintaining internal communications and their role in composing and implementing effective public policies is of major significance to the effectiveness of their implementation. Moreover, it is a component of the realization of the strategic goals of the Public Administration Development Strategy (2014-2020), which document is of key importance to the public administration in Bulgaria. Good practices from local public governance's research and approval show that there is a potential for extending the applicability of internal communications as a component of the modern organizational brand of public-sector organizations.

Nature and importance of the internal communications

In realities today, internal communications are an important element for the functioning of organizations in the public sphere and have a direct link with their management. Each management activity involves a constant communication process, participants where are the separate structural units, as well as the individual categories of staff.¹

Internal communication is that tool by which management influences employees and guides their work. It is also an instrument through which people working in public sector organizations provide information and feedback that management needs in order to make reasonable decisions. It is established that diminishing internal communications demotivates and demoralizes employees. The bigger an organization is, the more necessary are the communications and relationships among its employees.²

Communicating with internal audiences is of key importance to the success of the organization. Communication has an important role to play in motivating, building trust, creating common identities, and strengthening employees' sense of responsibility. Through internal communications, employees working in organizations get important information about their work, their organization, their environment, and themselves. Informing employees about the important decisions and processes that take place in the organization is a manifestation of involvement and responsibility by the management.

Shared information on the internal environment helps to overcome internal conflicts and crises, to achieve clarity and transparency of governance, to increase motivation to work, to strengthen organizational culture, and also gives a sense of belonging to something

¹ Velko Avramov, *Komunikatsionna politika na firmata, Vtoro dopalnitelno i preraboteno izdanie* (Sofia:2003), 9.

² V. Vasilev y D. Stefanova, *Vatreshnite komunikatsii v publichnata sfera i rolyata im v upravlenieto na krizisni situatsii, Mezhdunarodna politika* (2018).

common, to work for achieving common goals, the results of which would be satisfactory for the whole organization.³

In recent years, the role of internal communications in public-sector organizations has greatly increased its importance, but there are still many organizations that do not understand the importance of the communication with employees and often underestimate it. Underestimating internal communications means that employees in the organization are getting scarce or unreliable information, which would lead to many problems. The high turnover of people, the high number of rumors, the misinformation and the lack of staff motivation are indicative of the poor internal communications' management. This is detrimental to the organization because it challenges seriously its sustainability by destroying continuity, undermining employees' loyalty, and leading to a crisis of trust in its managers.

Internal communications are not an end in themselves, but an effective means of implementing organizational policy and impact on employees and workers. Relations between managers and employees are built through them. Good communication and employees' awareness affect their motivation and efficiency. Information that reaches them must be timely, properly addressed, true, complete, and served in an appropriate form.

Specifically for the manager is that through the people he strives to achieve the goals of the organization. The ability to work with people strongly depends on the ability to communicate. Peter Drucker is categorical about this issue: "... your success as an employee will depend on your ability to communicate with people and to reveal your own thoughts and ideas thus so that they can understand and even to be convinced in them."⁴

Excellent staff awareness of the organization and its policy brings additional and serious dividends - informed employees and workers are able to communicate competently and convincingly with different outside audiences. Thus they strengthen the reputation of the organization.⁵

According to the direction of the information, the communication in the organization is:

- descending - from the subject to the object of management, from the manager to the subordinates;
- ascending - from the object to the subject of management, from the subordinates to the management;
- horizontal - between the different structural units of the organization.

Internal communication takes different forms. It includes all notes, regulations, contracts, reports, and statements related with the organization's activities, orders and instructions given by managers to the subordinates, exchange of views between staff members, meetings, etc.

In order to ensure a high level of communication efficiency in the organization, it is necessary to select the appropriate channels through which the information to reach the

³ V. Vasilev; D. Stefanova y Sl. Angelova, Efektivni komunikatsii v publichniya menidzhmant (Sofiya: 2017).

⁴ Avramov, V., Komunikatsionna politika na firmata... 15.

⁵ Z. Raykov, PR tehnologiyata na uspeha (Sofiya: 2003).

employees. The most commonly used channels for internal communication are: information boards, internal bulletin, intranet network, boxes for opinions and suggestions, direct mail to employees, internal conferences, workshops, internal events, etc.

Improving the practices of internal communications management is of key significance to the public sector organizations. This requires a communication philosophy to be set up in order to deliver effective public policies. It should be noted that only theory is insufficient. Good policy is also needed, as well as staff that is aware of the communication process, of the available means and channels, and how they are used.

Relation between strategy and internal communication - a tool for effective public policies

The adoption and implementation of the "Public Administration Development Strategy (2014-2020)" puts a different focus on the human resources management in the public administration.

Strategy development is a process that involves analysis, a combination of intuitive thinking of the organization's management with the results of analyzes and strategic decisions. Strategic are the decisions that set the organization's development in perspective and determine its place. The strategy is characterized by integrity and comprehensiveness. It is built on a long-term basis and is based on planned action, organizational training, flexibility and creativity.⁶

On the other hand, the strategic approach to internal communication must be an integral part of the PR strategy and HR strategy, which are an integral part of the overall organizational program and policy.⁷ It is not an end in itself, it is necessary to solve specific problems and to balance the possibilities of the organization, the requirements of the internal audience and the state of the organizational environment.⁸

During the implementation of the strategic plan, monitoring of short-term and long-term objectives, their review and evaluation is carried out. Monitoring and control indicators are developed to follow-up the achievement of the objectives. Indicators should measure as much progress as possible to the objectives, objectives and tasks set out in the strategic plan. When setting indicators, values are set and how these values will change during the implementation of the activities, what results they should have at the end of the projected period. At the stage of evaluating the PR process, quantitative and qualitative assessment indicators are also included.⁹

The purpose of the internal communication strategy and the principles on which communication mechanisms are based in the context of the design and implementation of effective public policies should be clearly outlined in the organization's policy. What people expect is to have information about how they work, where they work, and why they work,

⁶ P. Todorov, Strategiya na mediynoto predpriyatie, <http://media-journal.info/index.php?p=item&aid=38>

⁷ Dave Ulrich y A. William, Schiemann and Libby Sartain The Rise of HR - Wisdom From 73 Thought Leaders; HR Certification Institute. 2015.

⁸ V. Vasilev; D. Stefanova y SI. Angelova, "Efektivni komunikatsii v publichniya menidzhmant", kolektivni monografichen trud; izd. "Propeler" (Sofia: 2017).

⁹ D. Stefanova, Strategicheski komponenti na PR-planiraneto UI "Neofit Rilski" (Blagoevgrad: 2011).

know their rights in detail, and have the opportunity to exercise them in appropriate ways.¹⁰ Employees aspire to the ability to influence their own professional development, i.e. by improving their skills and expanding their career prospects. And if human resources are sufficiently involved in the organization's activities, people will take responsibility for deciding how to do their own work at a level consistent with the role they perform, they will also give ideas, and managers can make better decisions on the basis of a clear understanding of key issues in the workplace.¹¹ This finding is doubled in the public administration where the management and development of human resources is undoubtedly facing serious challenges.

In this regard, the conclusion that can be made is that each public organization should develop its own strategy, due to the regional differences, the size of the organization, the specificity of the human resource, the motivated models developed and the strategy for the development of the public organization, making the necessary efforts to "knit" it into the public policies implemented and to communicate it to the employees in an appropriate way.

Strengthening the strategic aspects of internal communications is hard to blaze a trail into Bulgaria. This fact can be explained by a number of circumstances (objective and subjective). The lack of strategic clarity is caused in particular by the following circumstances¹²:

- Extremely dynamic external environment, which is a complex and difficult subject of forecasting;
- Lack of adequate management knowledge and skills in strategic management, including in the field of internal communications;
- Negative psychological attitudes to forecasting and planning procedures, widespread in the transition from a centralized planned to a market economy¹³;
- Lack of an adequate research theoretical array on which to build and add new management tools;
- Poor organizational culture in the field of knowledge of applied aspects of internal communications in public administration.

Stage of developing an internal communication strategy

Research stage or study methodology and analysis of components for preparation of an effective internal communication plan.

The analysis of internal audiences determines the attitude of people towards their work and the quality of life, the traditions, the customs that exist in society, the values shared by people, the educational and cultural level.

The characteristics by which they are defined are interests, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, etc. regarding objects and values. Relative indicators for common recognition of

¹⁰ G. Belova, Rights and Freedoms of Non-Citizens in International Law, Conference Proceedings 2: Economic, Social and Administrative Approaches to the Knowledge. Based Organization, "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy Publishing House (2014): 393-398.

¹¹ Harvard Biznes Skuul, Strategiya, Klasika i stil, S, 2008, 34-45; Harvard biznes Skuul, Strategichesko obnovlenie, Klasika i stil, S. 2010. str. 95-111

¹² D. Stefanova, Osobenosti na PR strategiyata i etapa...

¹³ E. Ribarska y V. Vasilev, Upravlenie na choveshkite resursi v publichniya sektor, Bl., 2009. 25-26

mutual interests and situation variables that specifically link certain individuals to a given situation or problem are also included, i.e. audiences are in a certain sense a result of a specific problem or situation, and do not have any permanent generic features. An audience is a group of people that an organization wants to reach in order to influence it in a certain way.¹⁴

The analysis of information and communication needs assesses the level of employee awareness of: their direct duties, organization development plans, mission and goal understanding, information related to people's social benefits. In this way, the partnership principle is implemented, according to which it is important to communicate with others as equal partners and look at them as people¹⁵.

The communication audit involves analysis of the information from the communication test (communication audit), documentation of the communication behavior i.e. the way the organization communicates with its audiences. This requires follow-up and evaluation activities of: vertical communication in the organization - bottom-up (from higher levels) and top-bottom; communication between departments; communications "supervisor-subordinate"; interpersonal communications within the organization; informal communications or the channels for spreading rumors¹⁶. This channel of communication should not be underestimated because it often causes problems (rumors of staff cuts, future downs and ups, etc.). In some cases it can also be used intentionally by professionals¹⁷.

Communication audit has several main objectives: specifies communication connectivity with audiences; the current nature of communications is explored in detail; identifies all communication gaps; tracks the communication channels and the frequency of interaction.

There are several ways to study communications: quantitative research helps us to understand what is happening, qualitative research (extensive interviews and focus groups) tell us why this is happening, and content analysis examines the written material, whether it contains key messages that support the achievement of communication goals.

Another important element is the review of legislation and strategic documents for the development of public organization¹⁸ as well as the analysis of developed motivational models¹⁹ and organizational culture with its system of values, customs, traditions, style of behavior, language, established rituals and ceremonies; it includes also analysis of internal conflicts and their resolution - number, frequency, participants.

¹⁴ J. E. Grunig y T. Hunt, *Managing Public relations*. Harcourt Brice Jovanovich Coll.Pub. 1984.

¹⁵ V. Stoilova, "The art of achieving political goals without use of force: war by non-military means, *Information & Security*", *International Journal*, Vol: 39 Issue 2 (2018): 136-142.

¹⁶ L. Hristova, *Political PR and Citizen Participation in the Democratic Political Process*, Collection of Papers International Scientific Conference (Voronezh, May 18–20, 2015) 2015: 323-327.

¹⁷ D. Stefanova, *Strategicheski komponenti na PR-planirane to UI "Neofit Rilski"* (Blagoevgrad: 2011).

¹⁸ M. Stanin, *The Contemporary Countries in The Conditions of Migratory Multiculturalism*; International conference "Knowledge-Based Organization"; Vol: 23 Issue 2; "Nikolae Balesku", Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania: 2017 r.

¹⁹ V. Vasilev, *Savremenni motivatsionni tehniki i prilozhenieto im v publichnata administratsiya*. Balgariya: YuZU, 2010 g., E. Ribarska, V. Vasilev, *Upravlenie na choveshkite resursi v publichnata Sfera* (Balgariya: Bon, 2009).

Last but not least, it is the usage of a functional analysis of the organization's strengths and weaknesses, i.e. analysis of the current state of the organization; a look to the future - a realistic assessment of the opportunities and dangers that the environment poses in terms to meet the objectives laid down; the specific tasks and the path from the current to the future state in order to reach the objectives and review the mission, vision and values of the organization²⁰.

Communication as a management tool is effective when it impacts the target audiences into which it is directed and reflects complexly both on the organization's goals and on the efficiency of human resources management and development processes²¹. Ensuring commitment to the organizational goals, which leads to motivation and to organizational success, is the overarching goal of any internal communication strategy.

In recent years, many practical examples of solutions can be identified in these areas of expanding internal communication processes and linking them to employee motivation.

For example, in this connection since 2016, the Institute of Public Administration at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria organizes every year a competition for good practices in the field of human resources management, which every year extends its scope with the inclusion of more institutions. There is also an increased practice of applying solutions in the direction of employee motivation and effective internal communications²².

Another excellent practice in this field are the annual professional meetings of experts in human resources management in the state administration. Every year, the focus is given to innovative solutions in the field of human resource development, as well as the relation between research and their application in practice²³.

South-West University "Neofit Rilski" has its place in these processes. In 2016 this university was the first higher education institution that organized and hosted such a professional forum²⁴. A series of good practices from the research of the leading public administration specialists in Bulgaria were presented at the forum. Priority initiatives have been highlighted to improve the quality of the learning process on the one hand and the practical enhancement of efficiency in human resource management in the public sphere, on the other.

A good example of effective internal communications is the example of the Municipality of Blagoevgrad. In March 2018, after a seven-year interruption, the Municipal Council of the city of Blagoevgrad elected an Ombudsman on the territory of the Municipality of Blagoevgrad. Part of the election procedure included a presentation of the institution's concept of development²⁵. A year later, the results of the institution's activities are available, with most of the initiatives and activities fully overlapping with the described internal

²⁰ G. Kresnaliyska y Iv. Efremovski, Strategicheskoto upravlenie v publichnata sfera i organizatsionnata kultura; VII mezhdunarodna konferentsiya "Mezhdunaroden dialog - iztok-zapad", Mezhdunaroden slavyanski universitet G. R. Derzhavin, Sveti Nikole-Tambov, Bitolya, Makedoniya; 2016. 213-219

²¹ S. Angelova, "The Influence Of Social Media On Social Processes", Revista Europa Del Este Unida, (2017): 09-15;

²² <https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/konkursi-za-dobri-praktiki>

²³ <https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/forumi-i-konkursi/godishni-sreshchi/godishni-sreshchi>

²⁴ <https://www.ipa.government.bg/bg/novini/viii-ma-godishna-sreshcha-na-specialistite-po-choveshki-resursi-0>

²⁵ <http://www.blgmun.com/cat3/Ombudsman/>

communication components. The management of the Municipality of Blagoevgrad was nominated and won a prize in a national competition for civil society development, initiative and the realization of public policies at the local level²⁶.

By developing an internal communication strategy, the organization can also achieve the following goals, which are an added value²⁷, illustrated by the above-mentioned examples, namely: a positive organizational climate; the public organization will be able to retain the real talent in which it has invested; creating an employer branding; personal psychological benefits such as identity, recognition, affiliation, and support for the promotion of effective pro-social behavior through employees.

Conclusion

Well-informed employees who are actively involved in policy development create a good image of the public organization. All employees should be aware of the communication plan of the municipality and with their behavior to be able to contribute to its realization. They need to understand the importance of relations with the media and the public for the success of the whole municipality as an institution. In such a context, enforcing the practice of expanding crowd-sourced policies (whose content and information is entirely generated by users) is of utmost importance²⁸.

The work of public organizations is just as dependent on communication as that of corporations, non-governmental and non-profit organizations. Every policy that the organization wants to hold requires public trust and support. These principles imply openness, responsibility and transparency in the process of implementation of public policies. Particularly strengthened should be the communication when reforms and innovations use public unpopularity "unpopular measures of action"²⁹. Often, due to such reforms or misunderstanding between executive power and society, crisis situations arise. Undoubtedly, cases in which public opinion is "neglected" are more common in the state structure and, in this connection, the expansion of internal communications is one of the instruments to strengthen and focus the motivation process in organizations. When the public policies are not communicated effectively, so-called "unpopular measures" appear, which do not enjoy broad public support. Measures can lead to a public dissatisfaction, which also leads to problems in their implementation. In such cases, effective communication and persuasive communication is required to promote measures and solutions and to support their implementation.

This broad context of increased expectations for public administration and its effectiveness and efficiency lead to the search for and implementation of innovative solutions, because without the tools and the will of its application it can fall into "... "organized anarchy" because in a sense it is always felt that we are trying to make cats move in a herd."³⁰.

²⁶ <https://www.kmeta.bg/manolova-nagradi-pobeditelite-v-kmet-na-grajdanite-2018>.

²⁷ <https://www.kmeta.bg/manolova-nagradi-pobeditelite-v-kmet-na-grajdanite-2018>.

²⁸ K. Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. World Economic Forum, NYC. 2016.

²⁹ S. Dimitrova y S. Stoykov, *Challenges of the security environment before the correlation "resources-cabilities – effects; The 23rd International scientific conference-Romania MND"N. Bălcescu"* Land forces academy. 2018. 89-93

³⁰ U. Benis, *Kak da stanete lider na liderite*, Sbornik, Preosmislyane na badeshteto (Ekslibris: 2003).

Big writer Eugene O Neil says, "The real road passes through a rope that is stretched not much high, just a little above the ground. It appears to be as if rather to cause people to stumble rather than to walk on it. " The role of internal communications is to be a guide to effective governance and can be a tool for organizational and personal and professional development. The results are not delayed at the time when policy emphasis is placed on them.

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