

THEORETICAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE FUNCTIONS AND TYPES OF COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Dumitru Mirel POPA¹

¹Prof. PhD, "Apollonia" University of Iasi, Romania
Corresponding author: Dumitru Mirel Popa; e-mail:dupomi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Public communication refers both to changing and sharing public information and to preserving the social binder. Institutional communication is a bilateral process: it involves both the transmission of orders, information and advice to a decision centre and the transmission of the decisions made by this centre to other parts. It also answers to the public organisation's need to affirm its specific role, presenting citizens with the duties they have to assume and the prerogatives they have. Nowadays, institutional communication is more and more developed within public organisations. Communication represents a process which focuses on public management. It is also important from the perspective of the quality of existing relationships within a certain administrative structure. The development of an adequate social policy, the creation and preservation, at all levels, of a transparent atmosphere are, to a large extent, determined by the importance granted to the communication process.

Keywords: *communication space, public information, public sector, institutional communication, administrative structure, communication process.*

The present communicational environment is created and develops according to the specificity of the public domain in which it manifests. The process of human communication from the Romanian space implicitly induces its institutional development through the institutions of the Romanian public administration, both central and local, from the need to create proper communication framework with the public opinion. Therefore, a new segment of communication science appears: public communication.

Public institutions represent legal entities, authorised by a public authority to perform a public service, in order to permanently satisfy a social need, at a local level (village, city), at the level of an administrative department (county) or at the national level. Public institutions are different from the other institutions through a series of characteristics and traits: they were

created to answer to the general needs of societies as a whole, while private institutions serve private interests. The purposes of public institutions are unique, to serve more than to gain. They offer goods that satisfy the interest of a group of people or of the society.

Public communication refers to the more and more visible and better organised usage of advertising and public relations means by the public administrations (MIÈGE, 2000).

Generically defined, the institutions of public administration appear as being "... *objective social constructions, external to individuals, with a intersubjective character, which generate a series of communicational structures capable of generating certain human attitudes and behaviours addressed to the solving and regulation of some concrete situations*" (POP, 2003).

Therefore, communication in public administration works based on a system of rules and norms which intervene in the regulation of different types of situations. This does not mean that they necessarily have to be compatible with one another, but that they can also act independently.

Every public administration institution works based on a set of laws, norms, behavioural rules, traditions and values, criteria which make up "the organisational culture." In our case we speak of Law 544/2001 and Law 52/2003 (THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT, 2001; THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT, 2003).

The communicational connection of different organisational cultures leads to the formation of the so-called "formal organisations." Within them, communication is fluent, the situational networks are permanent and protected by formal regulations, subjected to specific legislations.

Yet, as we live in a world of uncertainty and discrepancies, institutional communication is not always fluent, it has some deficiencies. Most of the times, it is at a standstill, without transparency, creating states of conflict which have to be immediately solved. Often, the serious institutional communication situations which cannot be solved lead towards changes at the institutional level.

When it comes to public administration communication, institutional changes or the changing of some institutionalised realities take place when:

- there is a communicational discrepancy between the attitudinal or behavioural expectations of the individuals (structured with certain social institutions) and the micro or micro-environment that it addresses;
- new situations appear which require a certain institutionalisation, by redefining under a communicational aspect the institutionalisation of human behaviours (exceptions appear: the general institutional change when it comes to taking into account the rights of national minorities).

Institutional changes are due to the evolution of institutional structures, as an answer to the permanent communicational interaction between the individual, situation and institution. Defining institutional communication in these terms allows us identify some of its functions:

- a) the barometer function of social change;
- b) the communication function;
- c) the institutional and organizational monitoring function;

Therefore, we can look at institutional communication under three aspects: rational, social and scientific. The significance of these aspects for the inclusion of social communities in the substance of the modern social systems is highly significant because "they are connected to the most important myths of modernity." Therefore, the public administration institutions have to have transparency. Under an institutional aspect, the state intervenes in their analysis and development through communication. It has to fulfil a series of functions (CHELCEA, 2004):

- *the information function* - through which it collects and monitors both internal and

external information using different communication channels;

- *the influencing, persuasion and guidance function* of employee behaviour (it is related to the internal institutional communication);
- *the information integration and preservation function* - which ensures the efficiency of the activity of the public-administrative institution.

Of course, respecting and applying the principles and rules of communication in a efficient public administration relate to the personality, the specificity of the moment and to the type of strategy adopted. According to various specialists, one of the following types of communication should be used (PIETRARU & SIMIONESCU, 2001):

- communication among authorities - it refers to the type of communication used in emergency situations when severe restrictions and the sanctioning of social actors is imposed. Here, the meaning of communication is unilateral and feedback is used only for clarifications;
- structural communication - it is used in restructuring, organisation or modernizing communicational activities, in order to ensure order and discipline through information, guidance and persuasion;
- dynamic communication - practiced in rapidly changing environments. Here communication is direct and it uses pragmatic messages;
- the participative strategy - used when communication is achieved through a bilateral exchange of information with reciprocal influencing, out of a desire to make decisions by consensus. For example, it is applied in negotiations with employers and trade unions. It is an efficient communication only in small groups, with competent interlocutors;
- acceptance communication - refers to accepting the opinion of the partner who was asked to advise on certain situations;
- the avoidance strategy - it is accepted only in connection with special situations that impose restrictions in offering information.

Taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, we consider that, in public administration, in order to have an efficient and transparent

communication, public administration organs have to meet the following requirements:

- *to be catalytic*, meaning to decide only what has to be done when it comes to a certain problem, but without them performing that particular action;
- *to have a community base*. State administration organs can issue a series of programmes which best function when they have a community base, because they build power-invested capacities, with a low-level of bureaucracy;
- *to be competitive*, in the sense of generating for the benefit of the community a series of improved, innovative, less-expensive services for the community and the citizen;
- *to be led by the mission*. The state organ has to take his mission seriously, to put itself at the service of society and to lead according to the reality existing at a given moment and / or according to abstract rules;
- *to be oriented towards results*. Financing has to be based on results and not on resources;
- *to be enterprising*. Entrepreneurial talent is important when it comes to reducing costs;
- *to be decentralized*. Institutional communication should be mainly participative, unite different governmental institutions and organisations in order to solve various issues that appear and not always take into account the existing institutional hierarchies;
- *to be oriented towards the citizen and his needs*. State organs should creatively think about the way they use institutional communication with the purpose of obtaining some good results in the public activity.

Most specialists in the field of public administration communication identify six types of communication, as following (CRAIA, 2008):

- communication within the system;
- communication outside the system;
- individual communication;
- collective communication (group communication);
- written and verbal communication.

Therefore, *communication within the system* is a form of written communication, compulsory, that has to be performed within a certain timeframe. For example, the decisions of the

local council are communicated to the prefect who can attack them in administrative disputes if they are seen as illegal. In case the action is admitted, the court will rule, upon request, on the legality of the civil acts concluded on the basis of the illegal administrative act, as well as on the civil effects produced.

Communication outside the system represents the communication with citizens who make individual requests. It is therefore a general communication. Basically, *individual communication* is done with a known person. *Group communication* refers to public communication via mass-media or electronic means. *Individual written communication* can give birth to, change or erase legal relations. Written communication, materialized in the form of official documents, engages the legal responsibility of the signatories of the communication. Speaking requires the interlocutors to possess certain skills in order to communicate in an efficient manner.

Communication in public administration represents a difficult process because one of its main objectives refers to preserving a positive image in front of a large community whose main characteristic is variety. As article 2 from Law 52/2003 stipulates, one of the main principles of public communication is prior information "informing people in advance on the issues of public interest to be debated by the central and local public administration authorities, as well as on the draft normative acts." One therefore notices the stress put on the citizen and on the general interest, these being the main pillars of the difficulty of the communication process.

The development of the administrative action involves *the development of some communication activities*, both within the process of establishing the projects of administrative documents and as distinct activities, in order to achieve the different reports that the public administration activity refers to. If, in other papers we focused on identifying the characteristics and the functions of communication in an administrative context, the present paper aims at identifying the main difficulties, barriers or improvement needs of communication in an administrative context. We opt that identifying these aspects represents

the premise for identifying some solutions or ways of making public administration communication more efficient.

At the level of central public institutions and authorities (Presidential Administration, Government, Ministries and the other specialised organs of central public administration), as well as at the level of the autonomous local public administration authorities various communication structures are organised according to the law. They are called *public relations departments*. Special information and public relations departments can be organised, within the central or local public authorities or institutions, as offices, services or main offices subordinated to the head of the respective public authority or institution. The fields of activity for this information and public relations department are the following: to inform the media, to directly inform people, to inform the staff and to inform the other institutions.

The communication procedures, their particularities and efficiency at the level of administration are influenced by the typology of the public organisations. Communication goes beyond the day to day communication models and the models imposed by the organisation and institutionalisation form of people's social activities. In organisational environments communication represents a means through which organisational culture is operationalised (people's beliefs, sets of values, conceptions, attitudes and ordinary practices) (BURDUȘ & CĂPRĂRESCU, 1999).

Regarding the efficiency of public administration communication, L.G. Popescu considers that the issue participants in the organisational communication processes are confronted with is that of gaining adequate information in real time, meaning at the right place and time, in order to have the expected effect, given that it is often difficult to determine the right place, the right time and the right information (POPESCU, 2007).

The author identifies a series of organisational communication barriers, also explaining their significance:

- 1) *Informational quantification* – it varies according to the extent to which it can be quantifiable. The quantifiable information is more important

than the non-quantifiable one in decision-making;

- 2) *checking* – information varies to the extent to which it can be externally checked;
- 3) *neutrality* – information is rarely used in a completely neutral manner;
- 4) *rarity* – information represents an expensive and rare resource;
- 5) *formal and informal communication networks* – hierarchies can often be used even though they are not imposed on the informal communication networks;
- 6) *removal* – some information can be consciously or subconsciously ignored if they question or are contrary to the dominant viewpoint.

The difficulties of the public administration communication process are generated by: a) the components of the communication process: sender, receiver, their relationship, the message, the communication channel; b) the characteristics of the entities involved in the communication process; c) the organisational context in which the activity takes place; d) the specificity of public organisations.

Therefore, public administration represents a set of bodies and authorities whose mission is to apply the law, the activity it carries out being of an executive nature. It is considered as an intermediate body, because its activity is carried out on the basis of the law and to meet the needs of citizens, so the administration transposes the rules for the benefit of citizens, the Government providing administrative bodies with the necessary tools to implement the law, setting objectives, setting limits and imposing respect for guarantees, and public administration authorities carry out government policy.

In order for the civil servants from the administration to be as efficient as possible in the communication process, we consider that they have to possess certain qualities and skills, acquired in time, such as (DUMITRU, 2003):

- the identification and the use of specialised language, methodologies and knowledge from the field of communication sciences;
- the use of the new information and communication technologies;
- the identification and use of communication strategies, methods and techniques in the process of public relations;

- the development and promotion of a public relations product;
- specialised assistance in managing crisis communication and/or in mediating communication conflicts
- the realistic solving, with both theoretical and practical arguments, of some day to day professional situations;
- the use of efficient labour techniques in multidisciplinary teams, with the fulfilment of certain tasks on hierarchical levels;
- the self-assessment of the need for professional training with the purpose of labour market insertion and adaptation.

In the communication process, the *public servant – citizen* relationship represents the substance of the public administration act. The communicational units, respectively the public servant (as the sender) and the citizen (as the message receiver) have clear goals: the sender aims at informing, persuading, guiding and capturing interest and the receiver tries to be attentive, to understand and to remember.

Citizens come in contact with the local public institutions and therefore they need to know how to address in order to satisfy a legitimate interest, what documents they need to fill in or what procedures they have to follow. The local public institutions are obliged to offer practical information to the public, to inform citizens about the rules they have to respect and to facilitate their access in relation to local public services (POP, 2000).

An open, partnership relationship, will ease the flow of information from both sides. The administrative institution has to be the initiator of this relationship and it is obliged to look for more specific and efficient models in order to get feed-back and to know local resources.

The proper functioning of communications facilitates the administration and control of service delivery processes, of the operations that make up the various processes and has a strong impact on the behaviour of civil servants, efficiency and opportunity in interactions with the various categories of citizens.

As a EU member state, the Romanian public institutions are obliged to adapt their communication policies to the European standards. Therefore, the procedures and issues

regarding the management of citizens' interests are of public interest. Despite all this, *the right to information*, as part of the freedom of expression has to be exerted taking into account the imposed limits of independence and the exigencies of the right to information. It is necessary to find that proper balance between the public's right to be informed and the fundamental rights of the people involved in carrying out the activities of the State institutions.

Moreover, being more and more aware of the fact that public institutions should not only be regarded as an authority, but also as a public service for the citizen, the last thirty years have shown not what and how to communicate, but especially why to communicate – so that citizens get to know the way in which public institutions operate to protect their rights and freedoms, in order to bring the State closer to the citizen, in order to gain public trust about the fact that Romania has a performant and independent institutional system, inherent conditions for the rule of law (DRĂGAN, 2007).

However, beyond any communication strategy, the way in which civil servants and journalists act in their day to day professional and personal life, as well as their integrity and professionalism is what really creates the public image of a system. It is more than obvious that only an upright professional body, either of civil servants or of journalists, can send signals that the Romanian society is headed towards the direction that everyone expects.

We currently have specific laws, regulations, guidelines and tools appropriate to communicate effectively with the public. However, the dynamics of media communication procedures, in the context of the new codes, but also the continuous evolution of the media require the identification of innovative solutions adapted to the communication needs of a constantly changing society, as well as the existence of more powerful information tools regarding functioning of the institutional system.

Lately, due to the diversification of the mass communication platforms, more and more public people speak about institutional functioning, via journals or social media (MIHĂILESCU, 2016). We notice more and more that such statements undermine the independence and impartiality of

the institutional system, which represent the criteria for establishing statements made in the media that undermine independence and impartiality.

The administrative-institutional activity is based on communication. It is fundamental for human cooperation and plays a decisive role in the present activity. It is a complex process, with lots of error or misunderstanding possibilities. Communication is achieved through the use of a skill set and they can be identified and improved through practice. The ability of efficiently communicate, both as a sender and as a receptor improves the efficiency of the activity carried out (MANDA, 2013).

Communication is a tool used to get and offer information, negotiate and agree on common actions; to coordinate and monitor actions; to initiate, exchange and interrupt actions; to act for a common goal. Good communication is clear, concise, correct and complete. The notion of communication covers all forms of transmitting some information from one person to the other, both individually and collectively. The need to offer the exact amount of information is of great significance in the communication process. At the same time, the channel used to send information is highly significant (MATEI, 2006).

Accepting the above-mentioned idea, that public authorities have to try to satisfy the general interest of the population, we shall agree that public administration institutions are obliged to get closer to the members of the local communities and preserve a permanent contact with them. In order to do so, public administrations have to communicate, be open to dialogues, to respect and to take the citizen into consideration (ROTARIU, 2010).

Public administration institutions often use communication in the actions taken or in the relationships they establish. Citizens come in contact with the local public institutions and therefore need to know how to address them in order to satisfy a legitimate interest, what documents they have to fill in and what procedures they have to follow. Local public institutions are obliged to offer the public practical information, to present them the rules they have to obey in their endeavours and to facilitate their access in relationship to the local public services.

The excessive usage of *advertising techniques*, specific especially to the commercial sector has to be looked at with care when referring to public service communication. Public institutions cannot value their achievements the same way a commercial society does for a particular product.

An open, partnership relationship will ease the flow of information in both directions. The initiator of these relationships has to be the administrative institution, which is obliged to look for more efficient and specific models in order to achieve feed-back and to get to know local resources (DEAC, 2010).

A good functioning of communications in public administration facilitates the management and control of the delivery products, of the operations which make up the different processes and it has a major impact on the behaviour of public servants, on the efficiency and opportunities in interacting with the most diverse categories of citizens.

The use of institutional communication via the Internet, as a type of communication between citizens and the state represents one of the essential development requirements for information society. Public administration officials need and will continue to need to integrate the modern communication techniques in their work in order to increase the quality of the services that they offer to citizens (POPESCU, 2007).

An essential role in public administration – either central or local – is played by *electronic communication* which offers citizens numerous benefits, starting from the rapid and secure dissemination of information to the receptors, in our case the citizens and public officials, and up to eliminating some substantial costs.

E-communication shortens the administrative process, they type spent in front of the offices of the local administration and sets public officials free of a series of routine activities. The introduction of e-communication in the field of public administration led to the fluidization of communication between the administrative authorities at different levels and also to considerable cost reductions regarding the sending of documents via mail.

Taking into account the contemporary socioeconomic realities of increasing and

diversifying public services designed to meet the needs of citizens, communication problems tend to become more and more diversified and varied. The communication system requires the use of some varied forms of information, as well as some involvement methods of the end beneficiaries and citizens in their usage, with the purpose of triggering a series of changes when it comes to the communication mentalities and habits with the public partners. The communication policy used helps the institution track the promotion of its activities and services, as well as the feedback of the social partners. Public administrations often have to find ways to reinvent themselves and therefore to be able to assure the citizens' interactive involvement in decision making.

Administrative efficiency through e-communication represents a first step in the implementation process of a system of public policies at a national level by introducing new support tools for performance-based management. This is reflected from the perspective of the innovative communication techniques, aimed at supporting an efficient decisional process and at improving, from a qualitative point of view, the public services delivered to the citizen, through a continuous reform, modernization and increase of the institutional capacity.

It is well-known the fact that an efficient administrative and institutional capacity represents the key to a good governing and, taking into account the perception of public opinion in our country, one understands the fact that, at the level of public administration, we are confronted with a major problem, namely the poor institutional efficacy, combined with a poor coherence of the principles of a performance-oriented management and of added value of the delivered public services.

An important role in this process is played by the community, used as a tool in order to achieve the transparency of the administrative act, as a necessary precondition to increasing the performance degree of a performance-oriented management, but also as a measurement tool for both the satisfaction degree of the clients of the administrative act, respectively the civil society seen as a whole and of the performance degree of the coherence between the regulation

interactions: public administration – civil society – private sector.

One should mention that the development of the communication means obliges public officials to become more and more informed regarding the technical issues. It is clear that we are not interested in the technical engineering part, but in the deceleration of real innovations, the introduction of the new and especially its exploration for the benefit of one's own business. From one point forward, however, the introduction of new technologies means survival.

An efficient communication with the citizens helps save financial resources. Although in Romania the concept of volunteering and community involvement is still not yet very well developed, this aspect seems to easily change (e.g. tree planting campaigns). There are certain things that local authorities aim to perform in the community, but maybe they lack the necessary resources. Citizens can contribute, either by doing voluntary work, or by providing raw materials for an activity (for example, if you want to increase the green space in a community, there may be a company / citizen who can provide trees in order to be planted, and other citizens can come and help plant them) (ZEMOR, 2003).

Although a public authority does not necessarily assume this role, it also has to contribute to the democratic education of citizens. The more a community actively takes part in the decision-making process in a democratic manner, the more it will learn it better, also increasing the efficiency of the democratic institutions.

Citizens turn to public authorities and institutions in order to solve some issues related to the smooth running of community life, in terms of their private and social life. In fact, citizens and representatives of social groups, organizations, institutions or communities address public authorities to demand the performance of a public service or to report the abuses committed by people, authorities and public institutions regarding the fundamental rights, freedoms and duties of the citizen.

In conclusion, *the rights and freedoms of the citizen* are universal and undividable. They are stipulated and regulated by the Emergency Ordinance no. 57/ July 3, 2019 regarding the administrative code. The universality of the

citizen's rights and freedoms refers to both the real sphere of rights and to their holders,

Therefore, universality expresses the citizen's vocation to benefit from all the rights and freedoms in the inner context of the judicial reality of each country. Universality expresses the idea that all the citizens of a state can fully enjoy all these rights and freedoms.

References

- BURDUȘ, E. & CĂPRĂRESCU, G (1999) *Fundamentals of organization management* [in Romanian]. București: Economic Publishing House.
- CHELCEA, S. (2004) *Nonverbal communication in public space* [in Romanian]. București: Tritonic Publishing House.
- CRAIA, S. (2008) *Communication theory. Information and communication techniques* [in Romanian]. București: Romania of Tomorrow Foundation Publishing House.
- DEAC, A. (2010) *Communication in public administration* [in Romanian]. București: Athenaeum University.
- DRĂGAN, I. (2007) *Communication, paradigms and theories* [in Romanian]. București: RAO Publishing House.
- DUMITRU, I. (2003) *Public relations - efficiency through communication* [in Romanian]. București: Communication.ro Publishing House.
- MANDA, C. (2013) *The theory of public administration* [in Romanian]. București: Beck Publishing House.
- MATEI, L. (2006) *Public management* [in Romanian]. București: Economica Publishing House.
- MIÈGE, B. (2000) *The conquered society of communication* [in Romanian]. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- MIHĂILESCU, M.E. (2016) *Administrative law: general part: university course* [in Romanian]. București: Hamangiu Publishing House.
- PIETRARU, C. & SIMIONESCU C.A. (2001) *Public management and administration* [in Romanian]. Pitești: Economic Independence Publishing House.
- POP, D. (2000) *Introduction to public relations theory* [in Romanian]. Cluj: Dacia Publishing House.
- POP, L.M. (2003) *Institutional images of the transition* [in Romanian]. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- POPESCU, G. (2007) *Communication in public administration* [in Romanian]. București: Economica Publishing House.
- POPESCU, L.G. (2007) *Communication in public administration* [in Romanian]. București: Economica Publishing House.
- ROTARIU, I. (2010) *Communication and public relations business* [in Romanian]. Sibiu: Lucian Blaga University Publishing House.
- THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT (2001) LOW no. 544 / 12 October 2001 on free access to information of public interest,
- THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT (2003) LOW no. 52 / 21 January 2003 on decision-making transparency in public administration
- ZEMOR, P. (2003) *Public communication* [in Romanian]. European Institute Publishing House.