

COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIP, TRANSPARENCY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The new political and administrative climate presents leaders with a series of extremely complex issues. Solving them at high standards requires interdisciplinary knowledge and skills of a technical, economic and financial nature, especially in the field of communication. The continuous reform of the organizational structures and decision positions from public administration is dependent on the professional performance and the structural implementation of the adequate communicational processes. The content of these programmes plays a decisive role in the reformation process of the public offices that have to be adopted in order to ensure a concrete added value, necessary in order to successfully exert a substantial contribution on the general level of institutional performance. The present paper aims at analysing the extent to which a public administration communication programme satisfies these challenges, is able to actually assess performances and whether or not it has the capacity to prepare the future generations of leaders in the field.

Keywords: *communication process, relationship, performance, public office, administrative communication*

1. PERFORMANT COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

Within the community, public administration has to get involved and actively involve all citizens in the decision-making processes. Legal norms regarding decisional transparency generically aim at achieving the following synthetic goals: to increase the degree of responsibility of the institution in relation to the citizen, their participation in the decision-making process and in the process of drafting normative acts, basically to increase the degree of transparency at the level of the entire public administration. (COMAN, 2020)

All these purposes can be institutionally obtained if the administrative staff:

- offers the requested information in an honest, complete and clear manner;
- establishes a simple, fair and open relationship with the citizens;
- allows the direct expression of opinions in order to influence/correct decisions;
- encourages citizens to profit from the created democratic framework;
- explains the rigors, presenting all arguments that led to a particular decision.

Knowing and amplifying the professional-qualitative parameters necessary for a efficient communication with the purpose of ensuring institutional transparency presents an increasing importance both for pragmatic and juridical-normative reasons (ROMANIAN PARLIAMENT, 2003) which aim at:

- a. assuring the responsibility degree of public administration towards the citizen, as the beneficiary of the administrative decision;
- b. involving the citizen's active participation in the administrative decision-making process and in the development process of the normative acts;
- c. increasing the transparency at the level of the entire public administration.

These highly complex issues cannot be fulfilled without a proper communication process which is in full line with ensuring real transparency.

Basically, the local press and radio, Web pages, all social channels, information panels etc. can be accessed as means of information and explanation, and the information is to be communicated directly (verbally), through newsletters, posters, panels or photographs, flyers, brochures, leaflets, standard forms, applications, copies of various regulations and

decisions, exhibitions on important projects, local newspapers, official bulletins or newsletters.

The provisions of the legislation and the recommendations of the specialists in the field belong, to the same extent, to different vectors of reality in order to promote a performant government, a civic opportunity in ensuring a transparent activity for local administrations. Citizen participation can bring together the voices of ordinary citizens in the community and, at the same time, can better influence public decision-making through the action of local elected officials, civil servants, informal leaders, and the mass of citizens.

Good governance and administrative transparency in decision-making through effective communication can increase the accountability of the authorities, strengthen and intensify the efforts of mayors and local council officials with the explicit aim of increasing their degree of transparency, including through activities such as the Watch-dog (supervision).

2. GOOD GOVERNANCE, STANDARDS AND INDICATORS

The assessment of the conformation level in the actual process of transparency of an administrative authority belongs to the field of good governance which can be focused on three essential processual components:

- the actual level of transparency;
- the interest granted and the citizens' effective participation;
- the ensuring of access to the entity's data and information.

For the institutional regulation of transparency, it is necessary to establish some regulation projects, therefore:

- for ensuring decisional transparency within the local public administration authority;
- for the activity of the office for the participation of the citizen;
- for the conformation of the adopted decisions.

The measures of transparency and good governance help administrations to organize public debates during which the institutional decision projects can be analyzed. (LUCHIAN et al., 2018) In general, the conduct of public debates

has shown that the procedures adopted are followed only when civil society applies pressure, as officials are less interested in the new rules or attributes of service being applied in practice.

In order to eliminate these disfunctions a series of commitments to transparency and participation can be established and they should be assumed by all local elected officials, therefore independent rules for compliance with the legislation that provides:

- the nomination of a civil servant as responsible for ensuring transparency and citizen participation;
- ensuring the conditions for each civil servant to know the provisions of the legislation in the field and to strictly apply the norms described in the regulations of transparency and participation;
- assuming responsibility regarding the development of an informative page for the administrative entity. Here, one can insert public information;
- implementing measures to make public information known to citizens through various methods (information panels, articles in local newspapers, radio broadcasts, electronic platforms);
- collaboration with local public organizations in order to achieve projects of common interest and provide specific services to the public;
- encouraging citizens to participate in the process of consulting important decisions (budget, approval of strategies, plans, major investments, activity reports, etc.), by informing them about draft decisions and about council meetings;
- presentation of annual reports on how transparency and citizen participation are ensured.

Without any doubt, communication and transparency when it comes to working with the community represent a difficult process, which has to gain a permanent character. Involving citizens and mobilizing communities have the purpose of enlarging transparency in the administrative decision-making process, in which training and information activities can be carried out, such as seminars, trainings, round tables, contests etc., in outdoor activities or "door to door" information campaigns.

Communication in the administrative space has contributed to respecting and promoting the principles of good governance, ensuring transparency in decision-making and raising public awareness regarding the importance of taking part in community life. In recent years one can notice that the number of citizens taking part in the decision-making process has increased substantially as a result of the periodic monitoring reports and procedures adopted to increase communication, both representing authentic tools used to ensure transparency in the local government.

The biunivocal relationship between transparency and the real process of amplifying communication, which has really become metacommunication (LUCHIAN et al., 2015) recorded real growth evolutions in recent years through:

- the creation and improvement of the spokesperson's institution;
- the use of pragmatic measures in order to target some representative citizens' sample on major fields of interest and decision;
- the possibility of accessing all public interest information (budget, contracts, strategies, decisions etc.);
- the participation and active intervention of every citizen in meetings of local interest

Lately, administration officials have become more and more interested, saying that a higher transparency coefficient does no longer create organizational problems or additional negative consequences and that it brings more certainty to the activities carried out.

This reality may represent a consolidation opportunity for institutional communication as well as for the transparency that can be ensured by every public administration.

3. PERFORMANCE THROUGH POST-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING AND CONTINUOUS DIGITIZATION

Everyone accepts the idea that, in the classical approach, both post-employment training as well as continuous training lie at the basis of improvement:

- a. the first step, training and post-employment training, facilitates a good assimilation of

the necessary knowledge and skills for the position held. In these situations, training usually takes place at work.

- b. the subsequent level refers to the continuous improvement which allows administration officials to update the knowledge and skills necessary in order to successfully fulfil a work task. This kind of training should take the form of courses such as an undergraduate degree or master degree at a specialised faculty.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly changed the specific norms of communication used in public administration when it comes to access and the direct training of the competent / responsible administration official.

Sanctioning this relationship by strangling distance and reference time has accelerated the digitization process by creating professional computer access platforms for citizens interested in solving their problems, online relationships or promoting requests or options through virtual or computer means.

In this new professional setting, the public administration specialist has to create a clearly scheduled continuous professional development framework, which should also represent a priority for the institution with the purpose of fully satisfying the needs of the community.

It is necessary to make the difference between the notion of training and that of professional development, both seen as symbiotic parts of professional training. Professional training is a punctual training process which refers to acquiring the necessary knowledge for the display of the day-to-day activities. Professional development represents a more complex process, with the purpose of enlarging the knowledge horizon, both in relationship with the current position and with the future or targeted one. Here, knowledge is necessary regarding the performant, structured and constructive communication with the citizen, taking into account his or her training, age, and understanding capacity.

At this stage we find ourselves in front of a large challenge in the activity of public administrations, activity which is mostly mediated by professional communication, communication

carried out traditionally but processed more and more through computer techniques, that is, in relation to the changes that appear in the content of the administrative, didactic, medical or public health rigors. The existence of officials who do no longer manage to preserve themselves in a reasonable professional reality because of the changes that appear in modern life represents an increasingly important issue. The end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 highlighted the fact that many officials, who were recently seen as efficient and good at their jobs, fulfil their duties with great difficulty and their results follow a downward curve.

In order to overcome these situations and preserve some reasonable performance one should redefine performance in terms of the systemic acquisitions of modern knowledge, rules, concepts or attitudes which help workers become more efficient at work through a multiple verbal and IT communication, supported by a new technical and logistical support, the understanding of the opportunities offered by the pandemic period and the fluidization of the relationships with the citizens and their transformation into a vector of progress. (ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT, 2020)

The complex training of the entire staff refers to the following synthetic goals:

- the firm correlation between the purposes and the goals of public administration;
- the certain cooperation between the decisional and execution jobs;
- the development of skills specific to the job, the collaboration with other authorities or the establishment of relationships with different categories of public service beneficiaries.

The goals of the new training process of administrative officials which take place under pandemic circumstances are as following: (ROMANIAN GOVERNMENT, 2020)

- a. acquisition of new and specific knowledge, proper to the changes that took place in the technologies used at the level of the organisation's activity and at the level of the information system;
- b. changing the type of communication and the system used;
- c. research and innovation in the field of public administration;

- d. facilitating the communication of information in the field of public administration;
- e. training and development of specific skills to solve problems;
- f. restructuring individual and organizational behaviour (negotiation techniques);
- g. complete digitalization of the institution's internal work system as well as the external one used to establish a relationship with the beneficiary public;
- h. pandemic update and conformation of some knowledge.

Development as a whole involves significant phenomena and mutations in the paradigm of political, socio-economic, cultural phenomena and, last but not least, in public administration. It is always confronted with continuous changes regarding its own functioning framework, the expectations of the political vector, of the citizens, facing new attributions and responsibilities, including the reconfiguration of the performance evaluation factors. Therefore, in their hierarchy of values, the communication practiced by human resources appears as one of the most important variables that determines the success or failure of the activity of public administration authorities. One can say, without any doubt, that the performance issue has become the concern of some scientific and practical analysis in the field as public administration authorities have to answer to some increasing exigencies, and goal that has to be achieved is the conceptualisation and creation of an efficient and receptive public office, flexible to changes and oriented towards performance.

The use of the entire human resource potential can only be ensured through a training based on strategic principles that can correctly anticipate the evolution and especially the success factors. The requirements of high-performance communication record a notable ascendancy as the driving force of any institution, and its implementation in the public administration system acquires major valences.

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