

The synergy between mass-media and public management: a positive perspective for the Departments of Communication and Public Relations

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to emphasize the major role the departments of communication and public relations detains in the synergy process between mass-media and public institutions, starting from a series of short-circuits which have occurred in Romanian public sector and led to the misunderstanding of messages, due to an unprofessional communication. Synergy, on its basic meaning, represents a simultaneous action oriented in the same direction, which involves several agents who have the same purposes (DEI, 1999). In the present context, I define synergy as intensifying two activities with a determinant role in the proper functioning of public management which contributes, to a large extent, on informing and educating the general public. The premises I start with are that crisis situations occur because of a faulty communication department and these could be avoided if there would be a permanent and efficient relationship between mass-media and public institutions. In other words, an efficiently organized department of communication could enhance company's activity starting from the partnership between media and public institutions. Through collaboration, both units could present advantages to be felt at the organizational, social, economic and cultural levels.*

Key words: synergy, mass-media, public management, public relations, communication, information.

Introduction

We live in the informational era where communication represents, above all, the basis of all networking processes, and finding synergies between two areas today is like

seeking for connections that have already been made in terms of communication systems and information transmitting. It is not so hard trying to find connections among different fields, but it is just that hard to develop acting plans which involves upward

communication processes and to establish a purpose even since the moment two different domains starts to cooperate. I report these situations to mass-media closely related to public institutions, because mass-media have direct access to what happens inside and outside the environment and, therefore, they may have a decisive role in creating and maintaining a positive image.

Literature review

In the modern society of XXIth century, it is essential to discuss about a synergy between media and public system, mainly because the law allows the media to be binding communication between such institutions and their public. Among the articles of law no.544 of the Constitution, there are three of them i would like to put forward: mass-media access to public information is guaranteed (art.15/1); the activities of collecting and broadcasting information of public interest, performed by the mass-media, are a materialization of citizens rights to have access at any information of public interest (15/2); authorities and public institutions can't forbid, in any way, mass-media access to their organized public actions (art.19/2). Therefore, there is a strong connection among public institutions, mass-media and public, and an optimum communication would have a synergistic effect as even the beneficiaries could intensify their activity in order to create a direct relationship among the three components. This kind of relation is created by an efficient department of communication and public relations, as its function is to intervene in the reconciliation of conflicts, to offer fluidity to informational processes, to prevent situations of crisis information generated by the

non-observance/ misunderstanding of the rules or public demands.

Mass-media have an important role in forming public opinion, exerting a major influence on masses in four phases: media draw public attention regarding a subject, a theme (awareness); media makes available a volume of information about that subject/theme; the information provided leads to forming and changing attitudes; attitudes formed in this way influence behaviour (DeFleur, 1995). Therefore, it is very important for all these to be part of the public management field, which includes, besides the informative role, the administration component too, and the functions of forecasting, organization-coordination, motivation and control-evaluation. Public management has an integrative, political, diversity and synthesis character, and its domain comprises several areas of interest, such as: the public interest, public power, public authority, public service (Androniceanu, 1999, pp. 4-7).

James Hoggan recommends the best for an organization is to permanently maintain relations with mass-media, even before a crisis occurs (Horsely, 2004), so that the public management - which involves both PR department and media in collaboration - acts as a stimulating and compelling force on citizens. If an organization does not have a good communication philosophy to support the process of public relations from the perspective of informing and involving public, even if there is about a teaser or a general situation, it does not work properly. The organizations based on excellent communication processes (and who are aware of its importance, especially in a crucial period), will have public relations success, mainly if the collaboration takes place on a plain-hearted and

transparent information field (Horsely, 2004, p. 428 apud Marra, p. 463).

The following paragraphs are related to public communication in limited situations, nationally and internationally, to countries with tradition in providing information through media and to a few arguments about the advantages of the relationship between media, public institutions and their departments of communication and public relations.

A comparative analysis

In Romania, as for information transparency, public institutions managing EU funds incurs major difficulties; if in 2009 there could have been noticed a lack of information about „the announcement of launching terms of documents, about sources of financing, the documents changes that had already been published and the clarification of some conditions those documents contained“, about the delaying of evaluations or the postponing of results announcements, neither now the situation is a positive one.

Nearly six years after adhering to EU, information is poor, although there are many strategic communication plans made for each program; the notices about new available programs are not brought to the attention of the public concerned, often the only source they could inform about eligible projects being the official web-site of the implementation unit (however, the information on these sites is presented in a complex and bushy manner, difficult to access by people outside the system). More than that, in cases of public requests, there are no departments of public relations formed by professionals who could be able to respond to citizens in due time.

Mass-media play a minor role in this context, in my opinion owing to a lack of motivation cycle: media channels are not encouraged by the state to participate to the communication activities, and the public, who is the final consignee, all along of an insufficient information, is not motivated to start a new project, getting to the conclusion that accessing EU funds involves a very difficult process. A solution would be to coerce the establishment of some targets concerning a minimal number of founded projects, to determine public institutions to present interest in increasing the number of EU beneficiary funds. Consequently, an optimum communication could contribute to the synergy between mass-media and public management, so that the result would be a beneficial one for each of the three participatory components: mass-media, public institutions and public.

Retrospecting the situation to what happens outside Romania, it is noticeable a different approach in countries like Ireland, Germany or Poland; the informational support is rich in content, clear and transparent, media channels representing the main informational base. In informing public about all the measures, possibilities, rules and terms of accessing European funds, there are used communication platforms, public informing campaigns, diffused both on traditional and new media, and there are set up departments of communication specialized in offering all the information the interested public requires. It can be seen a synergy between mass-media and public management, intensified by the specific activities of the department of communication.

In comparison to other countries, Poland enjoys the most successful level of

communication and accessing European funds, grace to a few country's social-political issues, but not only. Grațian Mihăilescu, an European Affairs and Local Development Consultant, comes up with some arguments about the different situation between Poland and Romania. In one of his articles, he mentions that "the use of public-private partnerships, the process of creating an efficient system of public employment, eliminating the politicization risks of public service and clarifying the distribution of competences between regions, districts and municipalities, were all measures that have been taken in order to improve the efficiency of multi-level governance and regional development policy in Poland". He adds the fact that, although these social-political factors have contributed to a more efficient absorption of funds, „employees involvement, the transparency, multi-level governance, competitiveness and efficiency" had a great importance too.

The case of poor information about EU funds in Romania is similar to what happened in Ontario, in 1996, during the construction of a neo-liberal hegemonic project, which generated a strike and a very serious crisis at the social level. After an analysis of communication strategy and mediatic content of what had happened during the public strike, made by Kirsten Kozolanka, appears that „The Conservatives utilized political communications processes adeptly to win consent for their hegemonic project. They moved swiftly to centralize and control information and communications in government and in the legislature" (Kozolanka, 2006 apud Brearton, 2003). Communication strategies used by Conservatives in the election campaigns contained „centralized control of simple messages, extensive pre-wit

campaigning, heavy reliance on targeted television advertising, the use of hot button or wedge issues to polarize the electorate" (Kozolanka, 2006 apud Fletcher, 1999, p. 1), and all these were supposed to win consent. This made that „a strong challenge to the government led by labour and social justice groups failed in the face of state public relations, media silence, and internal dissension" (Kozolanka, 2006).

Communication perspectives in public management

Hereinafter, i will illustrate the way the north-american public system is improved, namely, how it is modeled after the private, corporate system, which, for many years, uses public relations to built a positive public image and to improve employee morale. Margulies, the president of „The Margulies Communications Group", who is dealing with improving communication processes in public institutions, mentioned in a telephone interview that „the most successful businesses have strong public relations operations." Thus, he goes in quest of developing the departments of communication and public relations in public institutions by increasing social responsibility through adding marketing and advertising to the portfolio of activities. Moreover, to those departments have been assigned the tasks of creating and maintaining compelling the informational web-sites (Wilton, 2001, p. 2). All these represents new perspectives for the development of these departments and may have a significant role in the partnership between media and public management, whose purpose would be to evoke attention, perception and interest of public.

An efficient collaboration between two or more institutions could be an advantage for public; „most major public challenges are larger than one organization, requiring new approaches to addressing public issues. Public managers who work collaboratively find themselves not solely as unitary leaders of unitary organizations.” They often operate in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that can not be solved by single organizations (O’Leary; Vij, 2012, p. 509). On collaboration between them, Huxham believes that the advantages of a relationship will be cherished only when objectives could not be achieved by a single public institution, but through collaboration. (O’Leary., Vij, 2012, p. 510 apud Huxham, 1993, p. 603).

Given the development of new media (online social networks, web-based relational databases, digital image archives, individual or collaborative blogs), these all could be used to develop the public interest in the issues are facing public fields today (Annany&Hennessy, 2006, p. 1). New media has multiple benefits that traditional media can not extend because new media’s potential is growing too fast and it offers the possibility of expressing freely in the online environment, to which people have access on a large extent. Moreover, social networks are formed through social groups, who share common ideas or try to find solutions to society problems, initiating real movements. Going back to the EU case, the fact that young people (aged up by 30 years) are familiarised with the use of new media applications, they

could be the largest target group of potential beneficiaries of funds.

Conclusions

The synergy between media and public management does not necessarily means a perfect functioning of the system; it only intensifies activities so that the institution develops better. There must be a specialized department to transmit the information, formed by professionals in communication field, who should know how to approach the problems incurred by citizens, to a wider level. Mass-media should be only a golden mean in constructing the image and offering information diffused by the public institutions, for the rest could come to the department of communication and public relations.

As it can be seen, specialists are seeking after a change at the informational level in public organizations, in order to an evolution that have positive effects (informative and educative) on public. Communication in such organizations has become a subject of global interest and has generated a series of tendencies and changes to contribute to the national interest information transmission, in two shakes, by professionals, using the best media technology. Periodically, the public management should be concerned to improve its activity in such a way to help to the progress of cultural, social, political and economic environments. If the partnership between media and public institutions is well done, it will intensify the organization success.

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