# Institutional Communication and Organizational Culture In Romanian Public Administration. A Case Study.

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*Abstract: The present study aims to emphasize the extent to which modern management principles are known and applied in the Romanian public institutions. We also aim to identify a system of values that set a pattern of the organizational culture in the system of public institutions. The investigation technique we used is the questionnaire and the method we chose is the sociological survey. According to the standards of research methodology and in order to obtain accurate results, we have pre-tested the research tools in conditions similar to those of the study itself. In this respect, the present study will test the validity of the questionnaire on a group of 41 subjects, master's students in a specialized program at the University of Bucharest, with the purpose of undertaking the sociological survey. The pilot study conclusions will allow the methodological framework of the sociological survey to refine and adapt the models of international analysis to the actual Romanian context.*

*Key words:* effective communication, public discourse, emotional intelligence, participative management.

### 1. The general context of the research: opportunities and relevance

#### 1.1. Hypotheses

The main hypothesis of the experiment is that the pressure of the public and academic discourse generates an organizational context in the public institutions [PI] in Romania, which allows the strategies of participative management [PM] to be valued. In the same socio-discursive context, we find the assumption of the concepts of effective communication [EC] and emotional intelligence [EI], and also the components of the leadership participative management in [PI]. Another hypothesis is that a new system of values of the organizational culture is created when the participative management principles are applied; these values are assumed to the extent to which the leadership implements the [PM] strategies and all that it entails.

#### 1.2. Objectives, premises

The study aims to emphasize the extent to which modern management principles are known and applied in the Romanian public institutions. We also aim to identify a system of values that set a pattern of the organizational culture in the system of public institutions. The research is conducted on two directions: a. The extent to which the management principles are known, especially the participative management principles and the values of the organizational culture, and b. The extent to which they are applied. The public discourse related to the subject of the investigation approach has been considered to be relevant.

The premises of the research include an empirical component which derives from the observation of the Romanian communicational space and the public discourses defining the local public sphere in the past 20 years.

In relation to the premises, we have found that in the public debate in Romania, the recurrent topics of analysis and critique are included in the complex issue of the public administration institutions and the values around which their activity revolves. After Romania's accession to the European Union, there was an increasingly higher interest for management professionalization in public institutions and the transfer of know-how from the EU to Romania, and also from the private to the public institutions.

Moreover, the public discourse underlines the importance of communication, communication practices and it is based on the assumption that communication is an important resource for the development of society.

#### 1.3. Scientific literature

The theoretical framework of the present research is included in the theories on participative management with emphasis on effective communication, which is considered to be a priority in the implementation of strategies for making the activity of the organizations more efficient. [PM] is also considered to be an important engine of change within the organization by setting in motion creativity and innovation, qualities which are more and more valued nowadays. Participative management is most often related to the management of change, and the key-words in their strategies are: employee involvement in decision making, client satisfaction, collaboration, creativity, operational, tactical and

strategic decisions (Pardo-del-Val, Martinez Fuentes and Roig-Dobon, 2012). The participative management is considered to be effective in systems where educated workforce can be combined with employee participation and individual needs and the objectives of competitiveness and efficiency of the organization. The [PM] philosophy is also based on the fact that responsibility and accountability go down to the lowest levels where decisions can be made. We start with the premise that in public institutions, [PM] is the most adequate type of management because the purpose of the activities in these institutions is to serve the public interest; therefore, all the employees are supposed to be responsible for achieving this objective, thus, they should be involved in decision making. Numerous authors think that [PM] is the main tool for increasing the competitiveness and the quality of the services and products in a globalized world (Neila Anchieta Holland, 1995). The topic of employees being involved in leadership/decision making is old in the history of management. For instance, in the French space, it dates from 1930 and it is found in the discourse of Christian trade unionism, where the principles of Taylorism and dehumanization of work are studied thoroughly and criticized, by underlining critiques of Marxist inspiration, based on the concepts of alienation and class struggle (Olivesi, 2005, pp.29-33). The participation is found again, even more powerful, in theory and in practice in the 1970s. This time, it is assumed by the employer as a way to eliminate the negative effects of Taylorian economic logic. The participative management has generated the institutionalization of the organizational communication and a certain decrease in the role of the unions in the relation between the employees-employer and society. The perspective we adopt on [PM] takes into account the role of [EI] in developing leadership strategies and communication strategies as an important resource in achieving efficiency and implementing and cultivating the values of an organization.

The most important component of participative management is the leadership. The modern leadership theories favor, among others, the concept of emotional intelligence, starting with the work of Salovey and Meyer (1990) who imposed the concept for the first time, described and instrumentalized it: „ . . . relevant to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feeling to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990, p. 185).

The concept of [EI] enriches and influences the theories on leadership regarding the mix of all skills, behaviors and features of the human personality, not only the cognitive ones ( Kerr, Garvin, Heaton and Boyle, 2006). The theories on [EI] have been naturally absorbed by leadership theories. Given that the leadership activity is intrinsically an emotional activity, the leaders create the group solidarity by sharing emotions (as well), and their ability to influence the work climate emotionally can influence performance (Humphrey, 2002, Pescosolido 2002, Kerr, Garvin, Heaton and Boyle, 2006).

We cannot imagine the contemporary world in the absence of communication: it is the core of individuals' emancipation in society and democratization of modern societies. Communication is the condition of mass democracy and it requires free human beings, whose freedom of speech is the core of their

existence; it must manage both the individual freedom and everyone's equality within the mass individualist society (Wolton, 2012, pp. 10-11). If we refer to effective communication [EC], the argumentation focuses on the idea that it is part of any strategy of organization or administration of some social entities which are more or less complex. In certain situations, [EC] becomes strategic communication with the following components: identifying and describing the audience, choosing the support, building the message and anticipating the possible reactions of the target, identifying the sources and meaning of the message. Sometimes, words mean action, and action transforms the meaning of the messages (Austin, 1962). This dynamic must be understood and taken into account in any type of management, even more in the participative management whose stake is the efficiency or transformation through the participation of the actors. The strategic communication, which includes media as principal actor, is the most refined version of effective communication. Halloran (2007), an important name in American journalism today, has identified seven basic principles of strategic communication: to express a professional and civic attitude, to assume the features of each media institution, to know the professional and ethical rules of media, not to lie to media, to provide a pertinent opinion on your topics and not to answer to hypothetical questions, to anticipate the effect of the messages you convey, not to allow errors to circulate in public communication without correcting them repeatedly.

The emphasis on communication in the management of an organization means to achieve some objectives of power, influence, action and transformation, relationships and

exchange, and, as Dagenais (2003) puts it, the communication plan is similar to „a military campaign".

## 2. The research methodology

The present study is a work in progress pilot study whose aim is to test the validity of a questionnaire for a future sociological survey; its objectives are to emphasize the extent to which the public institutions managers know and implement the participative management principles and the degree to which the Romanian public servants are acquainted with the efficiency parameters of the organizational culture. Our goal is to emphasize the values that circumscribe the organizational culture in Romanian public institutions as they are highlighted by the knowledge universe attached to the sample.

### 2.1. Investigation techniques

The investigation technique we used is the questionnaire, a tool for gathering information used in sociological surveys or fieldwork. The questionnaire administered in the present research was designed after having studied the specialized literature on management in public institutions, organizational culture and the role of communication practices in modern management. The subjects we interviewed are part of the group of respondents we selected. The data collection has been conducted online during a week, in January 2013; the questionnaire includes five factual closed questions, which shape the socio-demographic universe of the respondents, and ten questions which differentiate various aspects of the respondents' axiological system regarding the organizational culture in the public institutions. Eight of the ten

questions are closed questions with three options (yes, no, don't know/n/a) and five options for the affirmative answers (to a greater extent, to a great extent, to a small extent, to a lesser extent, don't know/n/a); the other two questions are semi-open questions with answer choices.

The questionnaire contains verification questions, too: Q7 for Q4 and Q8 for Q5. The semi-open questions are also verification questions, as we will demonstrate in the analysis in Chapter 3.

### 2.2. The corpus

The corpus was compiled from the answers of the 41 master's students in the field of public administration who completed the online questionnaire.

The subjects of the research form a homogeneous group in terms of the referential system (theoretical knowledge, expectations, age) regarding their education. The main critique that the experimental design could receive is related to whether the results can be generalized to the level of a representative sample. However, there is proof that the differences between a sample consisting of students and the total population are not that significant (Nelson et al. 1997 apud Botan, 2013) in order to prevent the extrapolation of the results.

*The socio-demographic profile of the subjects:*
*Age and sex distribution*

| Women | Men | Age group 23-29 | Age group 31-37 | Age group 41-43 | Age group 52-55 | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28 | 13 | 26 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 3 |

Job distribution

| Students | Public servants | Activity in the private sector | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | 13 | 1 | 5 |

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are as follows: the majority of respondents are women (28 out of 41); young: 26 aged 23-29 years and 29 aged 23-27 years; a third of respondents have experience in public administration and they are all postgraduate students, which gives them a common referential system and horizon of expectations regarding the activity in the public administration, the normative-academic discourses and the public discourses. All 41 respondents have already undertaken or are currently undertaking specialized studies; three of the 13 public servants have more than five years' experience, seven of them have less than five years' experience, two of them have less than one year's experience. Therefore, the profile is described as female, young, with academic reference in the field, but less and even irrelevant experience.

### 2.3. Data interpretation

The data collected using the questionnaire completed by the chosen sample have been interpreted using the strategies of quantitative evaluation. The questionnaire includes topics and subtopics that define principles of management, organizational culture and leadership. The ten questions in the questionnaire aim to explore the knowledge and the knowledge level of the management principles, and especially the participative management principles, and of the issue regarding the organizational culture in the public institutions of the 41 interviewees.

The questions are based on the subjects' knowledge or experience, requiring their opinions only to a very small extent. The questionnaire has been designed in order to be administered to a homogeneous group in terms of references, education and, partially, professional experience. We estimate that the analysis will reflect the representations of the axiological universe of the public servants in Romania.

### 3. Directions of analysis

The analysis focuses on two major topics which I consider to be relevant to the present study: the [PM] principles and the extent to which they are known and implemented (the organizational dimension, [EC] and [EI]), and shaping the axiological universe of the public servants in Romania. I have structured the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results on relevant topics and subtopics and not in the order they were inserted in the questionnaire.

### 3.1. The [PM] topic

### 3.1.1. The organizational dimension

(Q1: In your experience, have you noticed whether the public administration managers know their beneficiaries?)

Less than half of respondents have indicated very good and good knowledge, more than a third of respondents indicated little knowledge or no knowledge at all, and less than a third were irresolute. Therefore, more than half of respondents think that the management shows no concern for genuine knowledge of beneficiaries. Thus, the fundamental principle of any type of management, even more of participative management, finds poor validation in the subjects' answers.

(Q4: Have you noticed whether the [PI] in Romania are concerned with implementation of new strategies of communication that indicate the valorization of the employee participation in decision making in order to implement reforms?)

The high percentage of negative answers, more than half, shows that the managerial strategies in the public institutions are not concerned at all with attracting the employees to the decisional sphere through communication strategies. Therefore the qualitative analysis regarding the degree to which they are known and the level of appreciation is irrelevant.

(Q5: Do the public institutions that you know have the institution of the union leader? Q5.1 If YES, to what extent do you appreciate its role?)

Out of 23 affirmative answers, we have inserted the absolute values in the chart below:
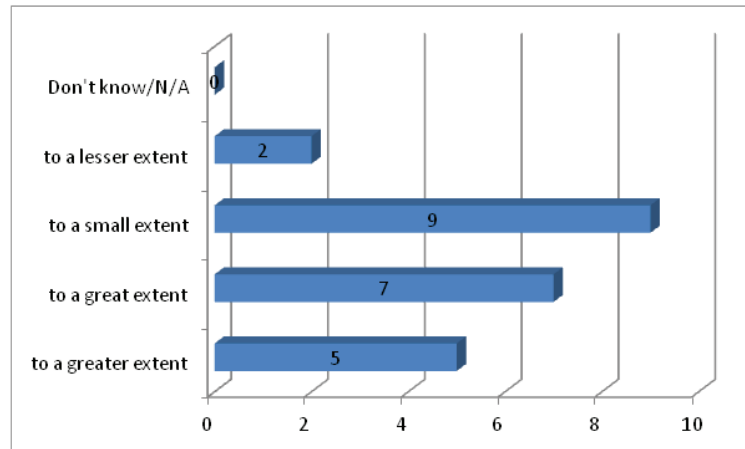
More than half of respondents state that there is an institution of the union leader. If we take into account that almost half of respondents deny or do not know, the fact that the number of respondents who consider its role to be positive (12) and the number of those who consider it to be negative (11) is almost equal, the qualitative evaluation is not very relevant in order to strengthen the quantitative analysis, which makes it difficult to define its role in the [PI]. Its role seems rather ambiguous in the minds of the experiment participants.

(Q7: As member of an organization in the public administration, do you find yourself in the managers' discourses?)

At question Q7, more than half of respondents have said no and almost two thirds of them do not know or do not answer, which is congruent with the interpretation at Q4. If such a high percentage of respondents do not find themselves in the managers' discourses, then it is obvious that managers are not actually concerned with involving the employees in decision making, according to the opinions at Q4. In this case, the qualitative analysis is no longer relevant.

(Q8: As member of an organization in the public administration, do you find yourself in the discourses of the unions leaders? Q8.1 If YES, indicate the extent to which you find yourself in their discourses.)

Out of 11 affirmative answers, we have inserted the absolute values in the chart below:
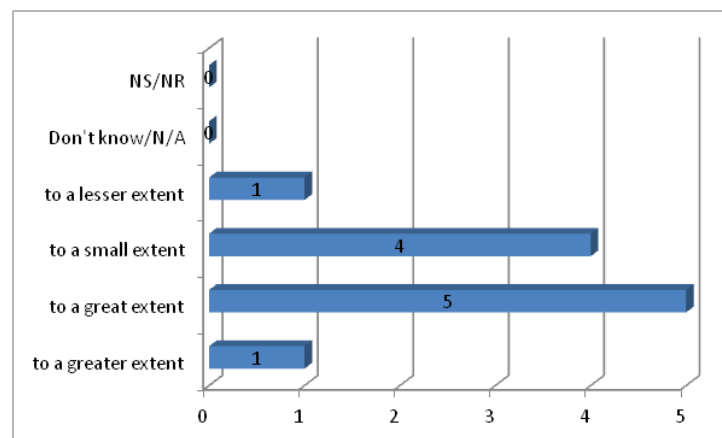
If more than a third of respondents do not find themselves in the discourses of union leaders and just as many do not know or do not answer, then it is hard to imagine that the institution of the union leader is functional with an active role in the life of the employees. The evaluation at Q8 confirms the qualitative analysis at Q5.

(Q9: What are the values promoted by the public institution that you know/where you work? You can choose several options: a. Employee participation in decision making. b. The employees receive prompt and accurate information. c. The beneficiaries receive prompt and accurate information. d.

Implementation of a public agenda which is relevant to the role of the institution in society. e. A correct evaluation of the internal social, political and cultural environment in European context. f. Defining the primary informational values for the target public. g. Support for continuous employee training (continuing education). h. Primary support for the interests of the managerial system. i. Primary support for the interests of the beneficiaries. j. Corruption exposure and other similar phenomena. k. Others. Please specify.)

We have inserted the following absolute values:
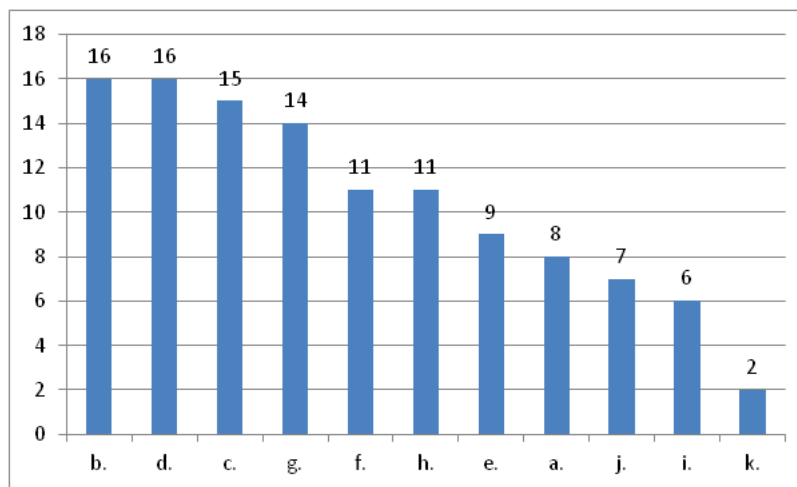


| No. of selected values | 1 value | 3 values | 2 values | 4 values | 5 values | 10 values | 7 values | 0 values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of respondents | 14 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

The first three values in the hierarchy created by the subjects of the experiment are related to the correctness towards the social environment, and the last three values in the hierarchy refer to employee participation in decision making, corruption exposure and

primary support for beneficiaries. The low-rank position in the hierarchy of the value "employee participation" confirms the analysis at Q4 and Q7. Moreover, the low-rank position of "primary support for the interests of the beneficiaries" in the hierarchy of values confirms the weak validation at Q1.

Most respondents (14) have chosen only one value, 28 respondents (more than half) have chosen one, two or three values, and the fewest respondents (2) have selected them all, seven values or no value. Therefore, a high percentage of subjects made a choice based on knowledge, not a random choice.

### Final considerations

● Knowing the beneficiaries is not a priority for the public institutions managers (Q1). The interpretation is confirmed by the low-rank position in the hierarchy of the value "primary support for the interests of the beneficiaries" (Q9). However, there are arguments supporting an increasing trend in the appreciation of the role that beneficiaries have in managerial strategies: a. The item "the beneficiaries receive prompt and accurate information" is among the top three choices of the subjects (Q9.c) and b. The item "implementation of a public agenda which is relevant to the role of the institution in society" is among the first to be considered valuable for an organization (Q9.d).

● There are arguments against managers who are not concerned with employee involvement in decision making: a. We cannot overtly identify communication strategies that aim to attract employees to the decisional sphere (Q4); b. Most respondents do not find themselves in the managers' discourses (Q7).

● The institution of the union leader is not functional with an active role in the life of the employees (Q5, Q8).

● The values that the respondents considered to be most common are related to the correctness towards the social environment (employees, beneficiaries) and the

implementation of a public agenda which is relevant to the role of the institution in society. On the other hand, "corruption exposure" is part of the correctness towards the social environment and it is found in a low-rank position in the respondents' hierarchy, which raises the question of whether the choice at Q9 is relevant.

● It is also worth taking into account the fact that 28 respondents have chosen one, two or three values, which, in our opinion, is an indicator of a high level of responsibility of the experiment participants.

### 3.1.2. Effective communication

(Q2: Do you think that effective communication is an important goal of the departments of communication in the public administration?)

The equal amount of negative and positive quantifications does not validate any of the choices. Therefore, the subjects' experience might not be enough in order to indicate a trend regarding the role of the departments of communication in promoting effective communication.

(Q4: Have you noticed whether the [PI] in Romania are concerned with implementation of new strategies of communication that indicate the valorization of the employee participation in decision making in order to implement reforms?)

The high percentage of negative answers, more than half, shows that there are no communication strategies that address the employees directly and aim to attract them to the field of decision making of the organization. Therefore, the strategic function of organizational communication seems to be invalidated by the interpretations at Q4,

and also Q7 and Q8, whose results confirm that most employees do not find themselves either in the managers' discourses, or in the discourses of the union leaders.

(Q6: Have you noticed any concern for the introduction of new technologies [NT] in the [PI] where you work/that you know? Q6.1 If YES, show how they have changed/ are changing the organization structures.)

Out of 25 affirmative answers, we have inserted the absolute values in the chart below:
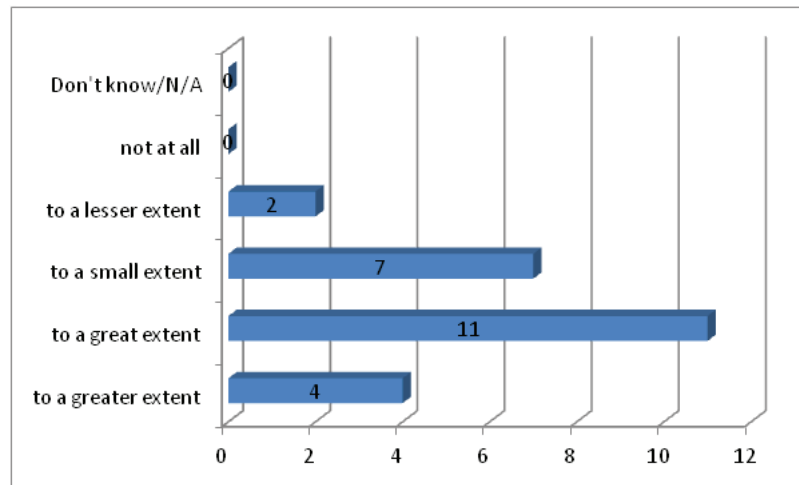


Out of 41 respondents, 25 said yes and more than half of them think that [NT] have a strong influence on the functioning of the organization. If we use the two evaluations, quantitative and qualitative, the result is valid. The subjects know that new technologies have an important place in public institutions and appreciate how they are changing/have changed the organization structures.

(Q10: Among the principles of internal communication, as some authors formulated them (Weil, 1990), choose those you have found in your activity in the public system: a. Communication puts forward a unitary representation of the institution; b. Communication connects the individual development with the development of the institution; c. Communication develops an imaginary of the community; d. Communication inspires and determines the evolution of the organizational culture; e. Communication is an engine of change within the organization; f. Others.)
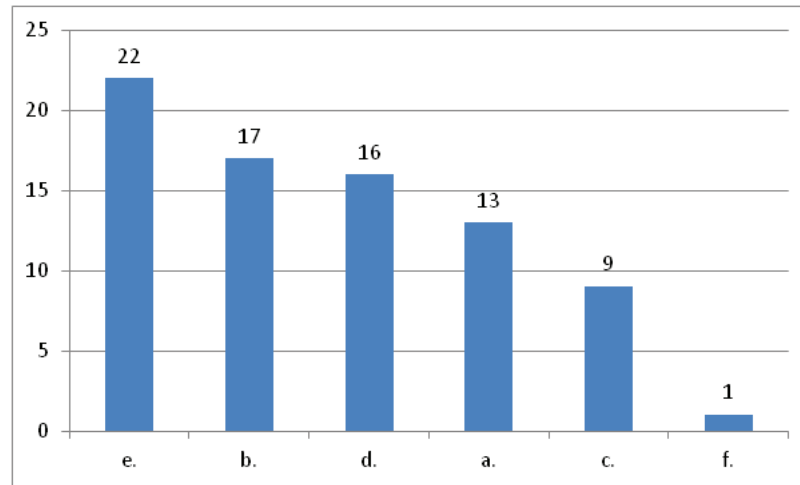
| No. of selected values | 1 value | 2 values | 3 values | 4 values | 5 values | 0 values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of respondents | 18 | 10 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

More than half of respondents (22) have chosen item Q10.e as the most common principle of internal communication: „Communication is an engine of change within the organization". The fact that most of them associate communication with organizational change, by shifting the focus from the [PM] to the management of change, indicates a trend in the representational discourse in the [PI], which is mainly influenced by the public rhetoric and the pressure of political communication. The following items that the respondents chose were Q10.b „Communication connects the individual development with the development of the institution" and Q10.d „Communication inspires and determines the evolution of the organizational culture". Thus, the emphasized trends also show that the respondents are aware of the role of communication in both the internal communication and the strategies for creating the organization.

**Final considerations**

● The interpretation at Q2 showed us that the subjects' experience is not enough in order to indicate a clear trend regarding the understanding of the role of the communication departments in promoting effective communication.

● The strategic function of organizational communication, which would favor employee involvement in the decisions that leadership makes, seems to be invalidated by the interpretations at Q4, and also Q7 and Q8, whose results confirm that most employees do not find themselves either in the managers' discourses, or in the discourses of the union leaders.

● New technologies have an important place in public institutions and they are changing/have changed the organization structures (Q6). This statement is validated by both types of evaluation: qualitative and quantitative.

● The fact that most respondents associate communication with organizational

change, by shifting the focus from the [PM] to the management of change, indicates a certain cognitive configuration of the respondents' profiles. We think it is mainly influenced by the public rhetoric and the pressure of political communication in the Romanian public sphere. The analysis also shows that the respondents are aware of the role of communication in both the internal communication and the strategies for creating the image of the organization.

• At Q10, 18 respondents have chosen only one option, ten respondents have

chosen two options, and nine respondents have chosen three options; therefore, similarly to the interpretation at Q9, it could indicate a high degree of responsibility of the experiment participants.

### 3.1.3. [EI], a value of [PM]

(Q3: Are you familiar with the concept of [EI] and its beneficial role in organizational communication? Q3.1 If YES, please specify.)
Out of 35 affirmative answers, we have inserted the absolute values in the chart below:
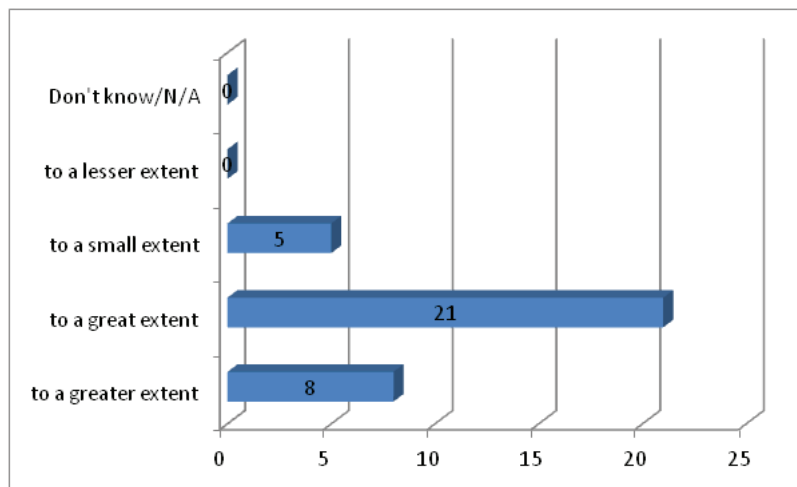


An overwhelming majority of subjects know and agree with the important role of emotional intelligence, the statement being also validated by the qualitative evaluation. If we consider Q10.c „Communication develops an imaginary of the community", where [EI] is an important variable, we find that the item is on a low-rank position in the choices the subjects made, which initially raises the question about the interpretation at Q3. The managers' discourses are usually the result of contextual, interactional and emotional evaluations: if the subjects do not find themselves

in the discursive construction of the leadership, it could be a signal that these dimensions do not exist or are not valued enough in the discourse.

### Final considerations

The recent studies show that [EI] is an important value in management, and even more in a culture with great oral and interactional values such as the Romanian culture. In the present experiment, the evaluations of the role of [EI] in [PM] are not relevant because the item [EI] does not correlate with the

questionnaire and the correlations we established are conjectural.

### 3.2. Re-evaluation of the research design

After a thorough analysis of the corpus, of the research tool and of the group of respondents, and based on the findings during the analysis, we have reached several preliminary conclusions that indicate the need to adjust the design of the research so that the results of the sociological survey are as relevant as possible and the proposed topics of the research are addresses to an extent that is acceptable from a sociological point of view. Therefore, after having tested the questionnaire on the group of respondents we chose, we propose the following adjustments:

The questionnaire:

1. Introducing a set of questions and verification questions on the role of communication in organizational culture and the role of communication departments in the organizational structure of the public administration.

2. Revising the group of questions whose core topic is the participative management by making a clear selection of the items that define it, including the emotional intelligence.

3. Formulating a question/some questions that eliminate or clarify the interpretation of the binomial participative management – management of change that emerged when evaluating the corpus.

4. Revising the questions that target the analysis and interpretation of the organizational culture values. We take out Q10, which has proved to be irrelevant in the present formulation, and we design the questionnaire again so that there is a clear connection between the values promoted by an organization and its organizational culture, and also the extent to which the role of communication is understood in this process.

The respondents: We will need to sample the subjects and broaden the administration base of the questionnaire, which will eliminate some of the interpretation ambiguities that could be (also) explained by the profile of the respondents.

### Preliminary conclusions

The experiment revealed several preliminary conclusions regarding the status of the organizational culture in the [PI] in Romania.

Thus, the topic of employee participation in decision making seems to belong to the category of an aspirational discourse, rather than to that of a representational discourse.

a. Knowing the beneficiaries is not a priority for the public institutions managers, but there is growing trend in the appreciation of the beneficiaries' role in managerial strategies.

b. The relationship with the employees and their role in the decisional sphere are not clearly defined categories in the management and communication strategies.

c. The communication strategies do not seem structured well enough according to objectives; in other words, the strategic function of communication projects is not exploited well enough. The importance of the discourse is still underestimated in leadership strategies.

d. Transparency does not seem an obvious option for most respondents.

The subjects know and agree with the important role of emotional intelligence, the statement being also validated by the qualitative analysis. The overwhelming majority of respondents who valued the concept of [EI] and its beneficial role in organizational communication, a trend which is also weakly validated by the corroboration of other evaluations in the corpus, indicates rather an aspirational trend of the subjects' discourses, which are influenced by a culture with great oral and interactional values such as the Romanian culture.

The values that were considered to be dominant in the culture of [PI] are those related to the correctness towards the social environment and the implementation of a public agenda which is relevant to the role of the institution in society. New technologies have an important and well defined place in the public institutions and they are changing/ have changed the organization structures.

The axiological universe of the corpus reveals that in organizational communication, the emphasis is rather on the management of change, and less on [PM], fact mainly influenced by the public rhetoric and the pressure of political communication in the Romanian public sphere.

The evaluations of the role of the communication departments in promoting effective communication are not relevant because: either the subjects' experience is not enough in order to highlight a trend regarding the role of communication departments in promoting effective communication, or the subjects have poor knowledge of what the department of communication and effective communication are.

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