Effectiveness of communication processes among crisis management entities in Poland

Efektívnosť komunikačných procesov medzi subjektmi krízového riadenia v Poľsku

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Abstract:

The correct communication process, which takes place through the transfer of information and the process of sharing knowledge is nowadays of key importance in any organization. The interaction of institutions and their external environment, thanks to an effective communication process, favours the adjustment of their activities to real needs of society. The aim of this study is to show how the selection of appropriate methods and instruments of communication affects the effectiveness of the functioning of institutions forming the crisis management system in Poland. This is an extremely topical issue due to growing expectations in the area of effectiveness, efficiency and speed of information transfer in such dynamic circumstances that require coordinated actions.

Keywords: *communication, management, effectiveness, information, model.*

Abstrakt:

Efektívna komunikácia v procese krízového riadenia si vyžaduje použitie najmodernejších technologických a organizačných riešení. Táto štúdia sa zaoberá otázkou efektívnosti výmeny informácií v procese krízového riadenia v Poľsku. Autori štúdie poukazujú na kľúčové oblasti z hľadiska efektívnej komunikácie, na ktorej účinný prenos informácií závisí od situácie, v ktorej má zásadný význam. V texte boli prezentované kľúčové body spolupráce subjektov krízového riadenia a možnosti zlepšenia informačných kanálov, ktoré zlepšujú kvalitu a rýchlosť výmeny informácií.

Kľúčové slová: *interpersonálna komunikácia, riadenie ľudských zdrojov, efektívnosť, informácia, model*

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1. Introduction

Communication is a process of conveying information between specific units, groups and institutions. Its purpose is to exchange thoughts, share knowledge, information and ideas. This process takes place at different levels, using different means and has specific effects.

Interpersonal communication is a natural process that takes place every day. It allows us to acquire knowledge, pass on information, establish mutual relations and build specific relationships. Getting to know this issue is a condition for being an effective sender and recipient of information. That is why in the era of the "information society" the communication process plays a very important role. Reliability of making certain decisions depends on the reliability and speed of information transfer. Successful cooperation of crisis management entities requires efficient and effective information management, but above all, effective communication at every stage of undertaken activities.

2. Effective communication process

All specialized organizations, ranging from armed forces and police to fire brigades, all inspectorates and NGOs, could not function effectively without proper coordination of their actions. For this purpose, decision-making bodies are used which, in accordance with the established legal order in the state, coordinate and create the rules for conducting activities by executive entities at all administrative levels. The most important element is an efficiently organized crisis management system that creates opportunities for given entities to effectively protect people and natural environment. These opportunities are all the more rational the more it is organized with regard to procedures that are based on specific information management systems.

The term "communication" comes from the Latin word *communico* or *communicare*, which means, among other things, "to consult/confer"[5]. In the literature on the subject, there is no single definition of the term "social communication". The complexity and interdisciplinary character of this concept often lead to discrepancies in interpretation. The communication deals with psychology, sociology, pedagogy, linguistics and many other fields of science, each of which identifies specific aspects of this issue.

The exchange of information between institutions also requires the coordination of data transmission within often complex organizational structures. That is why the communication process contains many variables, the undervaluation of which in practice may lead to catastrophic consequences.

During the attempts to define the communication process in the literature on the subject, the following definitions can be found[5]:

- transmission of information understood in a very broad sense (communication as transmission),
- a process by which we understand others and are understandable to others (communication as understanding),

- a medium, through which we interact with each other (communicating as interaction),
- a process that connects discrete parts of our living environment (communicating as creating a community),
- the means by which standards and principles are expressed in a given community (communication as a social process),
- social interaction through symbols (communication as interaction),
- exchange of specific meanings (communication as an exchange).

An interesting definition of communication is presented by Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska describing it as a "process of generating, transforming and transmitting information between individuals, groups and social organizations[15].

K. Wódz and J. Wódz define communication as "intentional exchange of verbal and non-verbal signs (symbols), undertaken to improve cooperation or sharing meanings between partners. By sharing meanings it is meant to produce a consistent interpretation of elements of social culture. The essence of communication acts, then, is the intentionality of behaviour – the intention of sending certain conventional signs, symbols encoded into the system of conventionalized meaning, but also to a large extent undefined, requiring contextual redefinition in specific interpersonal situations"[14].

Various definitions of communication are given in the subject literature[6]. Many of these definitions refer to the fact that it is a process of information exchange, taking place between at least two interlocutors (the sender and the receiver) using carriers such as words, gestures, signs, texts, images and sounds. Communication plays an important role in all relations between people in various spheres of human life.

The essence of communication is defined by the attributes assigned to it, which allow to perceive it as [12]:

- symbolic process, where a sign is something that replaces a real thing, an event or a real process,
- social process, because it refers to the exchange of symbols between people, it is more than the mental processes of an individual perception,
- mutual relationship, both symmetrical (the interlocutors have the same or similar status in the conversation), and to an unusually different degree,
- a process based on an individual interpretation of the message, so the common meanings are assigned to specific messages,
- process in a specific context – interpersonal, group, organizational, public, mass and intercultural,
- conscious and purposeful action,
- process of continuous and alternating verbal and non-verbal influences.

In the public administration, the role of proper communication cannot be underestimated. This complex and quite complicated process, in addition to the information function related to the transmission and receipt of information, can also perform the following functions[17]:

- instructing, determining the task to be carried out,
- control that emphasizes the sender's competence,
- persuasive, connected in exerting influence on others,
- motivating,
- regulatory, referring to feelings and emotional states,

- integrating, defining the appropriate communication channels.

There are several models of the communication process in the literature on the subject and over the last years, there have been many theoretical approaches to the communication process[5]. Individual authors propose various models to encapsulate communication processes. However, the solutions proposed by them still do not answer the question about determinants of effective communication. Therefore, the models created by them should be an inspiration to search for the most effective way of communication, both within the organization and with the external environment. Noticing and eliminating the most frequent barriers and errors occurring in the information exchange process positively affects the efficiency of the organization's functioning. Readiness for continuous, conscious and flexible development, and therefore tailored to the needs arising from the relations between enquirer and representative of a public institution, is the main factor contributing to effective communication in public administration.

Social communication in public administration takes place within the framework of communication with the external environment and intra-organizational communication. In public administration units, information policy should be seen as an important element of the management process.

In a public institution, a communication model should be adopted that allows information to flow in all desired directions, including feedback. In such a model, communication routes should be widely known, transparent, respected by all participants of the communication process, with a specific source of information. A complex structure of an organization may cause that the information will have to go a long way before it reaches the desired recipient. We can make improvements in the transmission of messages using the so-called Fayol's bridge allowing authorized employees of various parts of the organization to communicate between themselves in matters of lesser importance, bypassing their supervisors.

As part of formal communication, horizontal communication, which directly links positions at a similar hierarchy level, also plays an important role. This form of communication is necessary to coordinate activities that enable achieving organizational goals. Formal horizontal communication may take the form of periodic or ad hoc meetings of employees from parallel units, organizational departments, inter-organizational task groups or consultations between individual groups or organizational units.

Certainly, the increase in the effectiveness of communication in public institutions is influenced by the use of electronic communication tools, such as intranet, e-mails, video conferencing, etc. E-mails allow us to send personalized information, which prevents employees from receiving unnecessary information, which are useless from the point of view of their work effectiveness. Videoconferencing, which facilitates the exchange of information, is an opportunity to discuss disputable issues and develop a common position without the need to collect people in one place.

The formal communication system in institutions are also advanced IT systems used to collect and analyse specific data. They allow us to use them without having to wait for the information you need.

Administration employees, aside from formal communication, often communicate spontaneously and in an unplanned way. Informal communication functions independently of the hierarchical rules of subordination, which allows for a faster and

more flexible flow of information, strengthening or establishing links between employees and reaching a wider group of people. Excessively developed informal communication may be a threat to the efficiency of the functioning of a public institution. When informal communication focuses on rumours or gossip, introducing anecdotal or untrue information, management should take decisive action. An effective method of counteracting informal communication is to provide reliable information with channels characteristic of formal communication.

3. Cooperation of crisis management entities

All specialist organizations, ranging from armed forces, the police, fire service to non-governmental organizations, could not function effectively in practice without proper coordination of their activities. For this purpose, specific decision-making bodies are used, which, in accordance with the established legal order in the state, coordinate and create the rules for conducting activities by implementing entities at all administrative levels. The most important element is an efficiently organized crisis management system that creates opportunities for given entities to effectively protect people and the natural environment. These opportunities are all the more effective the more rationally the system is organized with regard to procedures that are based on all information management systems. The second most important aspect of the effectiveness of the entire system is the professionalization of executive entities in the area of their structures, technologies, management process and resources.

The crisis management system is a response to a number of threats ranging from natural to military, and, according to many authors, they are[8]:
- an integral part of the national security system;
- actions to reduce the likelihood of crisis situations, and in the event of their occurrence taking control and restoring normal conditions and their maintenance;
- purposeful actions and often taken during risk situations.

The experience gained so far by crisis management entities during the prevention and removal of the effects of crisis situations clearly indicates the need for cooperation between various institutions responsible for protecting people and eliminating threats in the country. This is manifested in the applicable law or adopted procedures. It should be noted that the existing solutions regarding cooperation between specific entities do not solve problems arising in relation to ensuring the sustainability of information exchange between individual administrative bodies.

When undertaking the problem of communication in the crisis management process, it seems reasonable to look at the definitions of the concept of "management" and to distinguish these features that deal with the issue of "crisis management".

The development of management science is currently focused on shaping strategies and tactics that would give any organization the movement triggered by specific activities that lead to its effective development. It is an active and intentional action carried out by the manager, which results in the dynamically managed and dynamically controlled organization located in the two-three-n-dimensional space and moves along a defined trajectory. According to W.M. Grudzewski if this effect is achieved by people thanks to their conscious decisions, this process is called "directing" and if it includes both material resources and human teams, then we are

talking about "management". If it includes only resources, then we are talking about "control".

"Management" refers to human and material elements of the organization and the interactions that occur between them. In the literature on management, we can find a functional and institutional approach to the management process.

The functional approach includes activities that guide the steps necessary to accomplish tasks and achieve goals.

The institutional approach, on the other hand, includes a group of people who have the authority to issue instructions. They are managed by those who are superiors regardless of the level of management, with formal authority in the organization.

The following management functions are distinguished in the literature on the subject:

Planning – includes setting goals and ways of acting for the whole organization, involves strategic thinking, long-term looking at the organization.

Organizing – includes creation of transparent task units corresponding to the plans, awarding them with competences and powers as well as vertical and horizontal tying them to a whole.

Personnel management – provision and maintenance of human resources.

Managing in a narrower sense – it involves assigning tasks/work to do and therefore executing management functions.

Controlling – comparing the achieved results with the plan.

R. W. Griffin defines management as a set of activities including planning, decision making, organizing, leading and controlling resource-oriented organizations and performed with the intention of achieving organizational goals in an efficient and effective manner[7].

"Management" is defined as "the process of planning, organizing, leading and controlling the activities of organization members and using all of its other resources to achieve set goals"[14].

J. Zieleniewski defines management as "action aimed at causing the actions of other people in accordance with the purpose of whoever directs them"[9].

M. Mroziewski defines the concept of management as a "social action resulting from the division of labour between various people based on authority, which, taking into account the parameters of the situation, aims at causing desired behaviours of the people being managed by the manager – members of the formal team – to achieve goals set by the organization"[9].

As it results from the above definitions, management has a dynamic and processual character.

To sum up the above considerations, one can try to define and identify the key features of the term "crisis management".

A "crisis" according to the definition contained in the Dictionary of National Safety Terms is a situation resulting from a threat, leading in consequence to breaking or significantly weakening social bonds, while being serious disruption of the functioning of public institutions[3].

According to Colonel Dariusz Majchrzak, PhD, crisis management process is characterized by:

- limited time for action (especially as a response to crisis situations);
- uncertainty in decisions – it is difficult to forecast the effects of actions;

- acting in an emergency;
- lack or excess of conflicting information (the so-called information chaos);
- shortened decision-making process.

The crisis management process in Poland is described in the form of specific phases to which specific tasks are assigned. Their common goal is to provide broadly understood security. The mentioned phases are:

- prevention,
- preparation,
- response,
- recovery.

Thanks to the implementation of tasks in accordance with the developed sequence, the bodies responsible for crisis management can more efficiently and accurately provide the safety of citizens.

Prevention phase – consists in examining the type and the possibility of occurrence of specific threats and implementing solutions in the fight against crisis situations. It also assesses spatial development and determines places particularly vulnerable to disasters or factors that may cause them. It also includes gaining financial resources needed to undertake determined actions and action plans to minimize the possibility of occurrence of a crisis[23].

Preparation phase – defines the ways in which one should act when a crisis situation occurs and creates emergency action plans. Another element is the tracking of events, ensuring the efficiency of communication, raising the alarm and issue information about the event of a disaster[23].

Response phase – this phase aims at providing help to people who have been harmed, while reducing the further development of the threat and limiting the increase of damage caused by the incident.

Recovery phase – includes activities that restore property that has been destroyed. It is focused on the most important things that are the basis for ensuring survival and human health. This phase also analyses the completed tasks, evaluates them and draws conclusions for future similar events.

In Poland the crisis management system consists of several key elements. These include state administration bodies, all kinds of services, guards, public administrations, inspections, the military and the like. The system is built primarily on the basis of the Act of April 26, 2007 on crisis management. It is entirely related to the territorial division of the Republic of Poland, at all levels, whether it be municipal, poviat or voivodship level. It follows that the borough leader, mayor or president are responsible for the safety and crisis management in the case of a municipality, in a poviat – the starost, and the voivode is responsible for a given voivodship. If the scale of the threat is so large that it covers the entire territory of the country, then the Council of Ministers is responsible for managing it. This system also works with the state medical emergency system and the National Rescue and Fire Fighting System. The systemic approach includes the cooperation of each of the elements that operate only in the scope of their duties. The crisis management system also includes modern IT systems that include spatial information systems, databases as well as telecommunication networks.

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The efficiency of the crisis management process depends primarily on the efficient flow of information both within the country and beyond its borders. Thus, crisis management systems should be constructed on recognized international requirements. So far in Poland the circulation of messages important from the point of view of security is realized through the mediation of all kinds of web applications or websites prepared independently by various organizations and institutions. Due to the use of specific technologies, it is difficult to single out a uniform infrastructure operating in the information sector from these solutions.

The state of preparedness of the country allowing for planned, organized actions to ensure the security of citizens, property and the environment is called the determination of civil readiness. Civilian readiness includes the phases of preparation, response and recovery. The effectiveness of operations in each phase is significantly dependent on the possibilities of using available information. Thus, the hardware and software tools used in crisis management for data exchange should refer to inter-system interoperability. Access to a narrow data area that has been created by individual institutions is no longer sufficient to fully solve a significant amount of crisis management problems. Due to the need to integrate information created by various public entities and other organizations, action must be taken to introduce uniform standards for their exchange.

The concept of a *network-centric* model of the crisis management process seems to be interesting. It includes the possibility of using an ICT platform to support the decision-making process in the area of crisis management. The system includes, inter alia, a geographical information system, an automated command system, a simulation system and a decision support system. The basic elements of this concept are[22]:

- *information grid* – creates a base for each of the calculations and network-centric connections, deals with the transmission and analysis of any type of necessary messages,
- *sensor grids* – they consist of sensors working on land, in the air, at sea, in space and in cyberspace. Elements of sensor grids are: dedicated sensors, sensors that provide equipment for the logistic platforms of rescue resources, sensors that are individual equipment for individual rescuers and other that include the logistics equipment of subordinate units,
- *resource grids* – thanks to them it is possible to use the available resources to achieve a more precise desired effect. This system is considered to be coordinated with resources that are on many different levels, facilitating efficient and fast resilience to specific threats.

The presented model is a proposal, the elements of which can contribute to improving the course of the decision-making process in a crisis situation. Appropriate, efficient information flow is a priority both within the crisis management entities and in external communication.

Conclusion

Effective communication between crisis management entities requires the use of specific organizational solutions in the form of accepted models of information transfer. Individual phases of crisis management, described generally by the author of

this paper, require cooperation of many institutions at short intervals in a given place. This requires not only quick information exchange but also precision in the provision of data. For many years, scientists probing the process of communication have been offering specific solutions in this area. However, it should be remembered that human lives often depend on effectiveness and efficiency of the adopted solutions.

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