

THE ANALYSIS OF THE CUSTOMS AND FINANCES OFFICE COMMUNICATION AND PR ACTIVITIES

A VÁM-ÉS PÉNZÜGYŐRSÉG KOMMUNIKÁCIÓJA, ÉS PR TEVÉKENYSÉGÉNEK ELEMZÉSE

Jelen cikk szerzőjének az a célja, hogy feltárja mindazon kérdésekre adott válaszokat, amelyeket a fenti cím meghatároz. Vizsgálom, hogy milyen mértékben sikeres a Testült ilyen irányú tevékenysége. Feltárom, hogy a Vám-és Pénzügyőrség miként alkalmazza a gyakorlatban a kommunikációs technikát és Public Relationst, valamint azokat a főbb stratégiákat, módszereket, amelyeket használ.

The objective of the author of this article is to reveal the answers to all those questions that the above title raises. I am focusing on how successful the activities of this kind in the organisation. I am trying to explore how communication techniques and Public Relations are applied in practice as well as the major strategies, methods used.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

COMMUNICATION is a frequently used, fashionable term in our days. 'It derives from the Latin *communicatio* which means announcement, publicising, division, performance, letting the public know'. (Bakos, 1994:629). I am aware of 16 different forms of communication, I would like to name some of them without being complete 1.Verbal 2.Non-verbal 3.Interpersonal (between people) communication 4.Group communication 5.Political and election communication

PR AS AN ABSTRACT NOUN means communication based on mutual advantages, organisation of relations consciously in a way which aims to establish and to maintain understanding and confidence among individuals, organisations and their environment. This global term can be divided into two parts.

1. Inside Internal PR

'Internal communication involves setting up and operating interactive (mutual) communication channels between the management and employees, colleagues, members as well as their interest unions of a particular organisation. It is a novelty which derived from the corporation management HR section and became independent in the 1990s.' (Internet source, 1)

2. External (Corporate) PR

'The definition suggested by the CERP, the European Public Relations Confederation. Public Relations refer to the conscious organisation of communication. Public Relations include management direction activity. The aim of PR is to achieve mutual understanding between individuals and organisations and their environment and to establish relations based on common advantages via two-way communication.' The author of the definition is Tamás Barát the deputy president of CERP. (Internet source, 2)

Communication in General

The term is increasingly popular and widely used in our everyday life. We are flooded with it from the written press, the radio, the television even primary school pupils deal with communication models. Communication unites the society we could only rely on our experience without it in order to cope with life problems. Everyday use of this expression in spoken

language is rather frequent. We communicate with each other via talking, phoning, writing letters, electronic mail (e-mail), etc. This term seems to be unavoidable in our daily vocabulary. Not only unavoidable even compulsory to use the term communication in public service institutions. There are formal and informal, written and spoken, conscious and goal-oriented communication processes flowing inside and between institutions target groups. This consciousness, planning and target orientation are major factors in shaping the image of customs institutions.

Customs and Finances Office is a 'linear organisation' named by Karl Erik Rosengren (2001:143) which occurs mostly in government and military organisations. Its main feature is communication based on orders and instructions.

Brief Historical Overview

In Biblical times Apostle Peter and evangelists John, Mark and Luke delivered speeches, arranged meetings in order to announce Jesus Christ's preaching and to follow him. They were those who represented a common cause, and wished to expand information. Practically, it was an early form of PR activity. Saint John had similar intentions. 'In the ancient times (today Iraq) people used convincing communication tools such as advertisements, signs. This activity occurred in the form of advertisements about products.' (Beke, 2001:12)

The phenomenon as a whole managed to emerge after the first industrial revolution. The possibility in the sphere of conscious occurred that employees started to possess increased leisure time, due to the invention and spread of printing press, the number of literate people increased which resulted in generally higher level of educated people. People started to think deeply about things beyond experience in close connection with their work. The technical background was ensured by the development of the press in particular the rotary printing machine. The headlines of the dailies took over the role of the pulpit. The favourable conditions were recognized by both the powers of progress and aggression. On one side, written word was used to fight for progress on the other side; they tried to force the public into the right direction. The press the national and international papers with its high circulation had meant mass communication for 100 years. At the beginning of the century the radio was invented and after 20 years the television appeared and the mass communication system of our modern society shaped form. A system has been established that differs in quality from all its predecessors to a great extent.

PR ACTIVITIES, STRATEGIES AND METHODS

The Customs management has gone through great changes during the recent years. The accession to the European Union proved to be a milestone in the history of the country. Something that only a few people are aware that 25% of customs duties will remain in the country the rest is transferred to the EU central account. This way a competition takes place among the particular countries as well as domestic customs locations for the income. The national management should take all measures that Hungary should be considered an attractive place for customs procedures.

The tasks of the organisation include informing about laws and making them respect, an organisational role which can answer the inhabitants' questions or solve their problems. The employee at the customs does not only understand the laws and makes sense of them but also someone who can understand the customers' troubles. It is essential then that mass communication tools should forward important information towards citizens. 'It is advantageous if mass communication, daily, technical papers, the radio, the television cite someone favourably. Publications about products, a company or simply about an individual are an extremely exciting thing in particular if the article conveys a precise and positive approach.' (Nyárády-Szeles, Volume 2, 2005:101) For public servants communication is not a need but a must. In customs offices the documents by the customers should be decided. Meeting customers lasts longer than some minutes since it involves receiving customers who arrive in the institution. The citizen leaving the institution will hold a picture of

the organisation in an unconscious way for a longer time based on their own experience. Efficient problem solving will create a positive institutional image. It is not only one person but through him several people will form a similar opinion. The same is applied to negative judgement but the basic rule is that bad news travels fast and it cannot be restored easily, it will even destroy years of hard work. The word image can be added to different suffix. As for me, the most suitable is organisational image. Practically, it is an existing word which has been built into the everyday practice of communication which refers to a favourable picture, a good reputation and it is used more frequently than the word in our mother tongue. In this field of science it does not occur as a foreign word. There are several PR activities exist such as press conference, opinion shaping activity, advertising, marketing etc.

Not all kind of information raises interest in public and journalists. The value of news can vary with culture. News will be novelty if for instance (fresh), effect (touched upon many people), originality (differ from everyday life). The rest of newspaper columns and the TV leading news prove to be negative announcements or gossips. People are curious to look into the celebrities' private lives and to get to know more about them.

All organisations should arrange their own press offices. Our website start page is <http://www.vam.gov.hu> if someone clicks on the pressroom menu they will find a lot of information. On the one hand, if one wants to get informed before his travels abroad on the other hand, if he would like to get more information about cases of great interest. Others include outstanding cases, statistics, investigation figures, professional lectures, events, daily press mirror. The Customs and Finances operate a separate Communication Department the head of which is responsible for these tasks to be fulfilled without any faults.

Keeping good relationship with written and electronic press is essential as information should be escalated. Timing is also vital as public should be informed without delays (local video record is made) and forwarded to different TV channels. If it is not possible to set up a separate department then the office or press executive should be placed under the organisation head so that he/she can answer to the questions put by the press.

About Mass Communication

Nowadays the most significant tools are the press, the radio, the television, the Internet. These days most information derives from the media (in my opinion it is the television which leads the list). In our era the 'Media' have become increasingly powerful and have great influence on people.

'The efficiency of mass communication tools depends largely on how much the sender knows the receiver that is media the public. The lack of direct feedback forces the controllers of mass communication that they should follow the reception of their programs with constant surveys, public opinion polls and shape their program policy according to the results.' (Bokor-Szabó, 2003:195). Mass communication plays an increasing role in the communication system of the society. 'Mass' has a double meaning in this context. On the one hand, it refers to the form of communication which conveys messages to a large number of people. On the other hand, it suggests that messages are mass products similarly to our consumer products, the products of the conscious industry. Only a few read fictions, the readers mostly belong to one segment of the intellectuals' only tabloids even if they exist, interest is very low. What types of news or announcements are worth publicising for the above mentioned mass communication tasks?

In my opinion those that have special importance. For example anniversaries, jubilees, visits by well-known or foreign people. The 140th anniversary of Customs and Finances was such a special occasion. Or openings of local events and local history exhibitions. PR experts should take all the opportunities to publicize statements of public interests to inform the public, to raise attention or to influence the social environment.

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'The objective of PR is that the image shaped in people's conscience should be favourable and suggest appreciation. Because good is that one thinks of good and he develops a need for it, votes for it and pays for it. These are the key words, the motivating forces.' (Mónus, 2003:16).

As I have already emphasized Internet presence is vital. Another important factor is having a good command of foreign languages and the skills to discuss matters in meetings. It is not the language certificate that counts but the real knowledge such as phoning, letter writing, e-mails in English which are most commonly used in the organisation (EU). This way the news of significant investigations can be targeted and forwarded abroad. News items should be published in specific press that is suitable for the field because it is more effective. Press conferences, meetings are worth organising with careful timing in that case the information published will have high novelty value. A good PR manager practically feels what the environment is most interested in.

The Image of the Source of Mass Communication

Most people shape their opinion on the announcers of the statements and do not hold opinion on anonymous communicators in a stable way. Among the most important components of the cognitive elements in general reliability and expertise matter. The significance of the prestige of the communicators shows how they have an impact on the efficiency of the PR activity and advertisements and how much well-known, respectable people can be caught for the purpose of a campaign.

Most of the time the public knows the communicator better than the problem forwarded by him/her consequently it is a common phenomenon that the content of the announcement is justified either by the personality of the communicator or the prestige of the media. In fact, the judgement of reliability on the other hand depends widely on the relationship between the communicator's views and the receiver's viewpoints. If the views are more or less similar normally there is no doubt concerning the credibility of the announcer but if views differ the receiver is inclined not to rely on him/her. The judgment of reliability also depends on the image of the communicator's intention. In addition, the communicator's expertise and competence are significant factors as well.

The possibilities of communication tools are rather favourable. The experts from all fields can be encouraged during their operation. In the case of mass communication the judgement of the source is particularly complicated. The absence of communicator and the lack of feedback, the limited knowledge of the mass communication institutions and their production will make the picture very transparent. The impression on the communicator and the media seems to be rather hazy, mixed, and probably the role of the former is not conscious.

The significance of the communicator's prestige shows that the efficiency of the advertisements or publicity is influenced by how much a celebrity is involved in the campaign.

Mass Communication Tools and Public Opinion

To understand the influence of mass communication tools in connection with shaping public opinion, we should examine the mechanism of public opinion and the features of communication structures. By doing so, we should count on the following aspects. In general, people form an opinion not only about the object of public opinion but also how others think about the question involved. I have heard several times that most people will join the winners' viewpoints during election time. It especially plays a role in the case of unstable people, what their opinion is about the division of public opinion and what expectations they have concerning its formation in the future.

Nowadays all major towns possess local radio stations and television channels, which can inform even 'popularise' the organisation with experts in a reliable, effective way. All the investigations, events that are suitable to be able to 'sell ourselves' can raise attention to what our main tasks include, how much work has been done into these activities for instance preparation for crime series. We protect the country from activities that are dangerous socially such as drugs

(addiction, health hazards, in the case of cigarettes only the lack of tax counts). All those possibilities that are available as tools should be utilised.

The Image

The image is the most significant term in marketing, which refers to a conscious picture of a company, website or individual shaped by it/him. To create an image the most vital is uniformity, a distinct style which should appear in communication space all the time. Besides uniformity, the image should be both unique and informative to express difference from the others.

As part of the image it's usual to define outside, inside, content and formal, as well as small and large images. Small image as a rule contains a logo, business cards, envelopes, sheets of paper, folders. Large image includes everything that exceeds those. Outside appearance makes the first impression on people; we shape a positive, negative even neutral picture about a company, an institution, a product or service in a matter of a minute. An efficient image does not only meet aesthetic aspects. It creates a stable inside identity on the basis of which a company can be recognised and appreciated.

The unique images which express difference from the others cover the whole palette with their colours. We have entered a modern era, where concrete judgements on values as well as characteristic viewpoints are a must. Image and through image identity can be crucial for institutions and companies.

PR STRATEGIES IN THE ORGANISATION

The meaning of the Greek word strategy is the 'art of war' as far as I remember, which meaning is still valid today. Strategic thinking was leaking into the civil sphere from military context in the 50s. Its widespread use could be dated when market competition increased and outside security decreased. 'Strategic planning is a process during which the management decides on general long-term goals and short-term performance goals then it works out actions with which these goals can be met.' (Csáth, 2004:37)

The Midterm Strategy of the Finances Office

The first stage of strategic management is the formation of FUTURE IMAGE. The right future image will link, increase enthusiasm and encourage searching for better solutions. At the same time it will contribute to realisation the necessary changes. Shaping future image involves changing directions. It refers to the value system of the management, its activity and readiness to take risks.

All the larger or even smaller organisations should have a MISSION, a value system that they would write on their flag if they had one.

A part of the mission is included in the above strategy: 'Our organisation intends to become one of the most effective Customs and Finances Authorities in the European Union. Our objective is to maintain economic, social and legal stability according to both the European Union guidelines and the national expectations as well as to improve Hungary's competitiveness.' (Midterm Strategy, 2008:3)

GLOBAL OBJECTIVE (extract) 'The aim is to set up a simple, transparent Customs and Finances Office...' (Midterm Strategy, 2008:3)

Strategic objectives are the landmarks that the corporation should achieve in order to proceed to similar conditions described in the future image.

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STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS: (extract) 'The performance of tasks due to our international responsibilities at a high level, with special focus on Hungary's next EU presidency.' (Midterm Strategy, 2008:30)

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES MORE SPECIFICALLY: (extract) 'Preparations for further European Union integration processes.' (Midterm Strategy, 2008:31)

Public Relations include a vast material by now, and find the position it deserves. A lot of books in this field are available in the market, which signs its importance at the same time. All organisations have to apply strategies with great responsibility, which suit efficiently the activity of a particular organisation.

In sum, it can be possible to work without PR but with less efficiency than without it.

Kulcsszavak: imázs, stratégia, jövőkép, tömegkommunikáció, szavahihetőség

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