

INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION - A MODERN MANAGERIAL INSTRUMENT USEFUL IN IMPROVING ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT. Integrated communication is a concept that first appeared in marketing where it proved its usefulness through successful results. From this to its extended use in organizational communication activity was just a step that opened integrated communication as a modern managerial instrument for effective communication inside and outside the organization. The beginning of the third millennium is characterized by a spectacular evolution of informational and communication technology liked by a great number of users who increase in number every day. These realities force us live according to modern times and apply our new discoveries order to achieve the organizational aims. This article publishes the results of a study that aimed to identify the information level, the interest and the implementation of the integrated communication concept in the district councils in the south of Romania starting from the premise that communicative abilities are essential qualities for the experts working in the administrative domain, qualities that can make the organizational activity develop without any problem.

Key words: managerial communication, integrated communication, Public Administration, organizational effectiveness.

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1. Introduction and Review of Literature

It takes a few characteristics so the communication act becomes efficient and these are: the clarity, coherence and concision. Controlling all these and helped by the modern technology that offers the possibility to cancel distances and to make an important time economy, we can say that we brought the communication very close to ideal and the problems regarding the communication become very easy to manage.

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The integrated communication concept appeared just for the necessity of having a more efficient communication and its use with professionalism can represent for any organization a very useful instrument in reaching the wanted objectives. The identification of all the ways and channels that we can use in communication for making it better already does not represent a big problem because of the fact that these are well known. The integrated communication inside the organization does not refer just to the channels through which it is done, but especially to those general strategies, because planning is crucial in the integrated communication. For an organization to express with one voice it is necessary for a coordinated effort and it is, also, necessary that each member of that organization to understand the importance of this process that requires responsibility (Stuart et al., 2007:7). Because we live in the digital era, we must account for the new evolutions of the digital space that redefined the mass-media and which became one of the strongest communication channels (Young, 2010:2) reminding us that the future belongs to the communication, to the data base and to the new electronic transportation vectors (Schultz, 1996:139).

The integrated communication concept appeared, as we know, as a marketing instrument that sends one message to the consumers, using all the ways and channels that it has. Later, thanks to the impressive obtained results, the integrated communication extended fast and to others domains (Finne, Grönroos, 2009:179). And because it is necessary to understand the evolution of this concept we must start from its beginnings, from the marketing integrated communication. Initially, the marketing integrated communication idea has been launched at the end of the last century, in the United States, where it was made the first study in this domain (Schultz, Kitchen, 1997:7). There are authors that consider that forerunners ideas of the marketing integrated communication appeared in the 50's (Van Riel, Fombrun, 2007:28) when the *integration* represented the coordination between the marketing functions and other disciplines, the same way that there are authors that place the apparition of this concept at the beginning of the 70's, or the 80's (Cornelissen, Lock, 2000:8). Initially, the concept related to the integration of the same message in all the elements of the marketing mix and through evolution it got to the strategic integrated communication plan, which purpose is to integrate in a marketing communication company different communication disciplines to obtain the wanted results (Kitchen, Burgmann, 2010:5).

In the same time with the digital revolution appeared one of the biggest challenges in the development of the marketing integrated communication thanks to the fact that the digital communication has development and expansion different rates according to the development grade of a country (Schultz, Patti, 2009:77). Described, in time, in a different way that the one that studied this

concept did, the marketing integrated communication is a domain that still develops, progresses and which from the first theoretical development stage will get for sure to a common theoretical type, singular and formal (Cornelissen et al., 2006:7). The marketing integrated communication is still a young discipline that needs solid theoretical fundamentals, that proves its efficiency in practice (Dewhurst, Davis, 2005:81). The faster spreading of this concept is explained through the fact that it offers a couple of advantages by efficiently applying the information's technology in issues regarding to the promotion and the efficient management of the relations with the clients (Dissanayake, 2012:28). Conceptual, the marketing integrated communication uses all the marketing communication instruments to obtain the predetermined products and to reach the marketing integrated communication objectives (Pickton, Broderick, 2005:26). This use of multiple communication instruments through the coordination of more actions regarding the achievement of a common result, with economy of ways, is what it is called the marketing integrated communication synergy (Prasad, Sethi, 2009:607).

The economical-social realities demand the assumption of the social responsibilities of the organization and this can be made through marketing integrated communication, with whose help it can be established the equilibrium between profitability, public utility and client's demands satisfaction (Kitchen, Schultz, 2003:66). From here to the rational communication it has been only one step in which the marketing integrated communication became an appropriate concept for the operational marketing (Holmlund, 2004:279; Finne, Grönroos, 2006:179; Rindell, 2007:64). Because in the 90's it had become very popular the concept of management of the relations with the clients (CRM), it appeared a new debate regarding the public relations role (Smith, 2009:263). Some researchers consider the public relations as being a support function for the marketing (Gronstedt, 1996:290; Hallahan, 1996:307; Kitchen, 1998:24; Kotler, Mindak, 1999:351; Keller, 2003:321-322; Debreceeny, Cochrane, 2004:45; Hendrix, 2004:197) and others sustain that the public relations are a strategic function of the relations management with the clients, whose main purpose is to build two ways advantage relations to an organization (Hon, Grunig, 1999:7; Dozier, Lauzen, 2000:4; Grunig, Huang, 2000:23-54; Heath, 2000:2; Cutlip, Center, Broom, 2005:284; Grunig, Grunig, Dozier, 2002:548; Ledingham, 2003:182). Beyond these opinions, the reality and practice prove that the public relations are included in the integrated communication thanks to the way in which this activity that takes place on the communication field is designed (Windahl et al., 2008:116) and which achieved through the integrated communication a meant role in the strategic management (Caywood, 2012:4). What is very clear for everybody and no longer is a secret that the integrated communication

includes and uses all the communication activities (Hallahan, 2007:320-324). The integrated communication represents the perfect harmonization of the internal and external organizational communication activities, ensuring the strategic success of any organization, no matter of its activity domain (Fig.1).

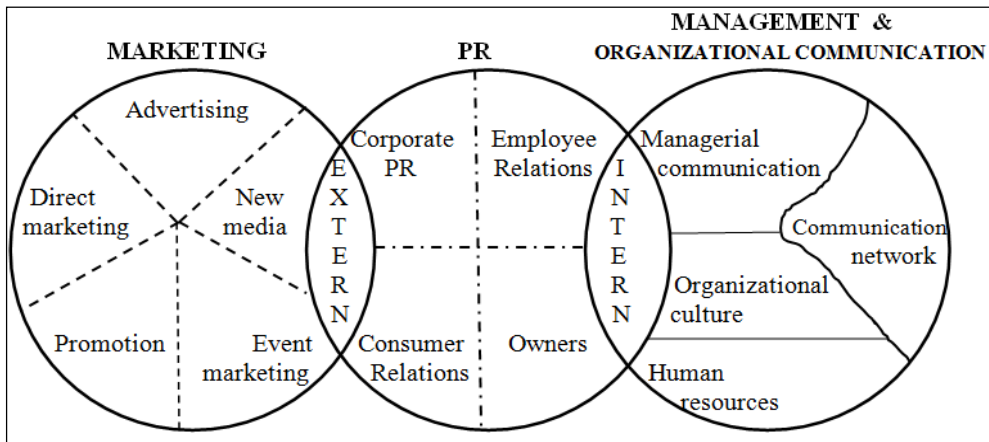


Figure 1. Integrated Communication

*Processing after Barat Thomas, 2008, Integrated Communication, slide 7,
<http://www.slideshare.net/tombarat/integrated-communication>*

In fact it is a planning process through which there are applied communication concepts in different domains as marketing, public relations, management, organizational communication, to develop the relations with the interested parts and building the brand relations (Stuart et al., 2007:154-155). In the last years, the most useful instrument of the integrated communication proved to be social-media (Drury, 2008:274), that successes the almost instant connection of the service suppliers and with the wide public (Weinberg, 2009:2-3) and so a significant change took place regarding the communication strategy with the interested publics and the establish of some emotional connections with these, by adopting some important causes for the public (Mangold, Faulds, 2009:363-364). This is the prove that regarding the integrated communication all that is about the information, the knowledge, innovations and improvements, all these know very fast changes and the organization's efforts to get to the B2B and B2C public can be simplified by knowing the current realities but mostly by permanent upgrade to the technological evolution.

2. Research based on questionnaires, regarding the implementation of the integrated communication concept in the county councils from the south area of Romania

Context

For an organization to speak in one voice it is needed that all the communication forms to be united in an organizational strategy that establishes in a clear mode who, when and how communicates to serve the organization's objectives. Either we refer to the internal communication or to the external one, the advantages of the integrated communication make that the adoption of this communication form to be imperative necessary, known and used. The new communicational technologies support the application of the integrated communication, and the way in which the organization's management chooses to use them or not, can bring services or disadvantages to the organization's interests. The initial acceptance by the big corporations, the integrated communication can be practiced by any type of organization including by the public institutions as those that make the object of this study and from which we intend to find out in what measure they are interested by the practice of this type of communication. The communication in the public institutions is conditioned by transparency, efficiency and responsibility to the citizens, which means a double sense discussion, a constant preoccupation for the offered feedback to the interested publics and by the opening of the institution regarding the public's influence and contribution to the welfare of its activity.

The identified problem that determined us to proceed to a research theme is the existent confusion between the marketing integrated communication concept and the integrated communication concept in business and especially the low implementation rate of the integrated communication, mostly inside the public institutions. The quantity empirical research present in this article represents a part of a bigger research, whose results will be included in the doctoral dissertation that I prepare.

The research methodology

Our research subject is the integrated communication.

The purpose of this research is to determinate in which measure the managers decided to use the integrated communication inside the county councils in the South of Romania, starting from the theory that the communication abilities are essential qualities for professionals in the administrative domain, qualities through which they can make the activity take place without problems.

The study had as *objectives*:

- The analysis of the implementation stage of the integrate communication inside the county councils in the South of Romania;
- The identification of the knowledge level and of the interest regarding the integrated communication.

The hypotheses of our research are:

- The integrated communication concept is understood especially by the organization's managers;
- The integrated communication is part if the general strategy of the organization;
- The organization's management is preoccupied with the assurance of the strategic coherence to apply the integrated communication plan.

The research method was the sociological investigation, made by survey. The data were collected by *interview*, using as technique *face to face investigation*.

The collecting data questioner was the questionnaire, which among the identification data contained 22 questions. For the research it has been used the *semantic differential*, variable with five stages.

The processing of the collected data was made with the help of Excel program.

To obtain a more exact image regarding the integrated communication image inside de county councils in the south of Romania, the questions were grouped in *three analysis domains* as follows:

- 1 - The evaluation of the integrated communication situation inside the studied organizations;
- 2 - The management preoccupation of the integrated communication;
- 3 - Relevant questions.

The sample of our analysis was represented by the 370 managers from the county councils in the south of Romania.

The observation unit is represented by the county council.

The study unit is established as being the person with lead function, no matter of gender.

The period of collecting the data was between 03.25.2014 and 06.30.2014.

The study was made using a sample, simple and random scheme.

The appreciations for each answering version to the questionnaire's questions were evidenced by calculating the score after the weighted average formula:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum x_i * n_i}{\sum z_i}$$

where: x_i = is relative frequency,
 n_i = is the grade given to the answer and
 z_i = is the total answers to the analyzed question.

There were applied 300 questionnaires, from which 292 were validated.

To establish the size of the representative sample for obtaining significant statistical data, it was used the Taro Jamane formula, method that starts from the total population volume without calculating the characteristics of the population and it is recommended for small collectivities. The total number of the persons with leading functions inside the county councils in the south of Romania is 370.

$$M_E = \frac{N}{(1 + N * e^2)} \quad \text{where: } e = \text{is the maximum admitted error,} \\ N = \text{researched community size}$$

$$M_E = \frac{370}{(1 + 370 * 0,03^2)} \cong 278$$

The maximum admitted error degree is 3%.

The medium scores and the global one, obtained after analyzing the answers obtained from the respondents represent the values on which bases we did the interpretations of the received answers in the sample of this study.

3. The results of the research

The 292 questioned managers in this study form a heterogeneous sample which reflects the reality at the 19 county council's level from the south of Romania.

The respondent's age is between 33 and 70 years, and there were 164 males and 128 females that occupy leading functions inside the county councils. At the hole sample's level the situation looks like this: the male managers are about 56%, they are between 35 and 70 years old, the age average being 50 years; the female managers are about 44%, they are between 33 and 60 years old, the age average being 47 years.

The study had in sight, by grouping the contained questions, the analysis of the next domains of interest:

- The evaluation of the integrated communication situation inside the studied organizations;
- The management preoccupation over the integrated communication;
- Relevant questions.

1. - The evaluation of the integrated communication situation inside the studied organizations (questions 1-6)

The main audience of any public institution is the citizen, which from this type of organization, beside the services this offers, awaits to be informed and to be able to easily relate with that organization, every time it is necessary. Used

with the easy access to the information thanks to the internet, the outside audience of the institution expects from this one the integration of the new communicational technologies through which can save time and nerves. On the other hand, the internal communication can face many difficulties regarding the difference between the context of the message or the impact they are expecting and the way the other members of the organization receive the message. All these communication problems can be elegantly solved by the implementation of the integrated communication, which by using all the tools, approaches and communication resources, succeeds to maximize the desired results.

The respondents' opinion regarding the main aspects that highlights the integrated communication situation from inside the institutions they lead (Diagram 1), shows that three of the numbered aspects in the questionnaire had been evaluated as being unimportant for these: the communication audit (1.88), the integrated communication plan (2.01) and the communication strategy (2.1).

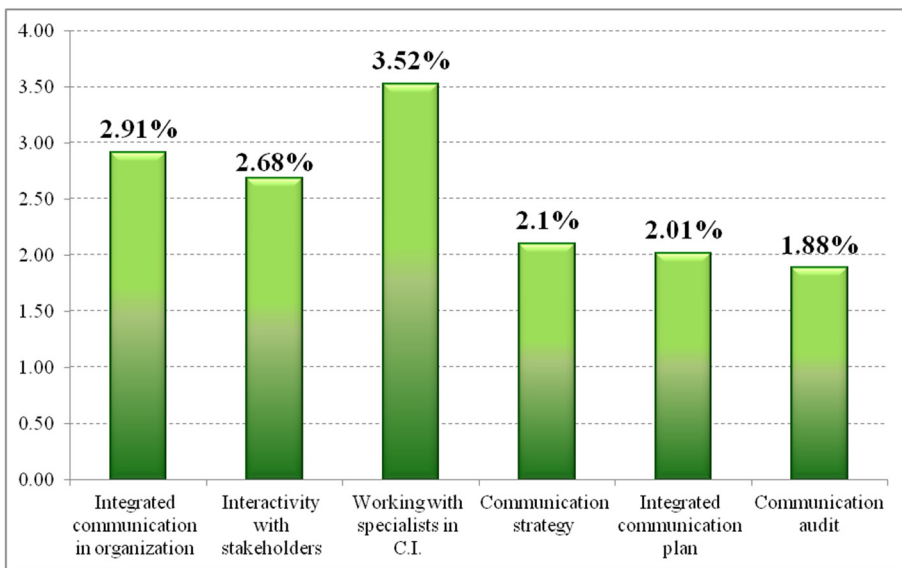


Diagram 1 - Managers assessments on the integrated communication

Source: own projection

They are undecided about the importance of the interaction with the interested parts (2.68) and of the integrated communication for the organization (2.91). The only aspect that has been proved as being important for the study's subjects is the collaboration with the experts in integrated communication, aspect that obtained a medium score of 3.52.

2. - The management preoccupation over the integrated communication
(questions 7-14)

The implementation of the integrated communication practices in an organization is the management decision, especially if we think that an organization's success depends and of the way the managers approach the problems regarding the communication process. The knowledge and, especially the use of the best communication practices is the main task of any manager and the integrated communication is no more than the application of the organization's strategy in communication because the integrated communication is built on the premise that between the internal and the external communication there is continuous, independent and synergistic interaction and has as main purpose to build relations that are profitable with the main clients and the interested party (Gronstedt, 2000:8).

Regarding the interest and the preoccupation of the questioned leading function persons we can say that the received answers show the fact that for these the integrated communication is not important, no matter of the aspects we presented. All the medium scores that we obtained are between 1.76 and 2.31, as it can be observed in the next diagram.

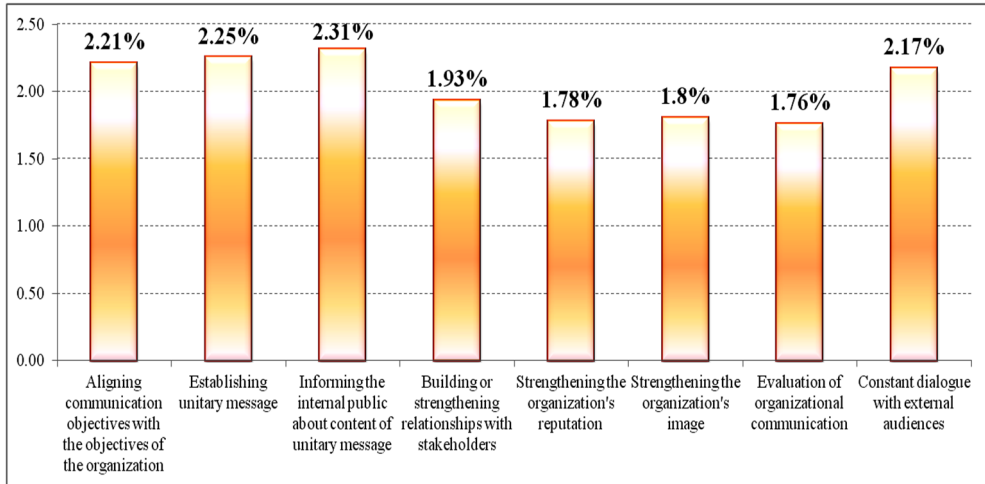


Diagram 2 - Management's concerns for implementation of integrated communication plan

Source: own projection

3. - *Relevant questions* (questions 15-22)

To be able to check the honesty of the received answers we considered that a number of control questions are welcomed in this study (Diagram 3).

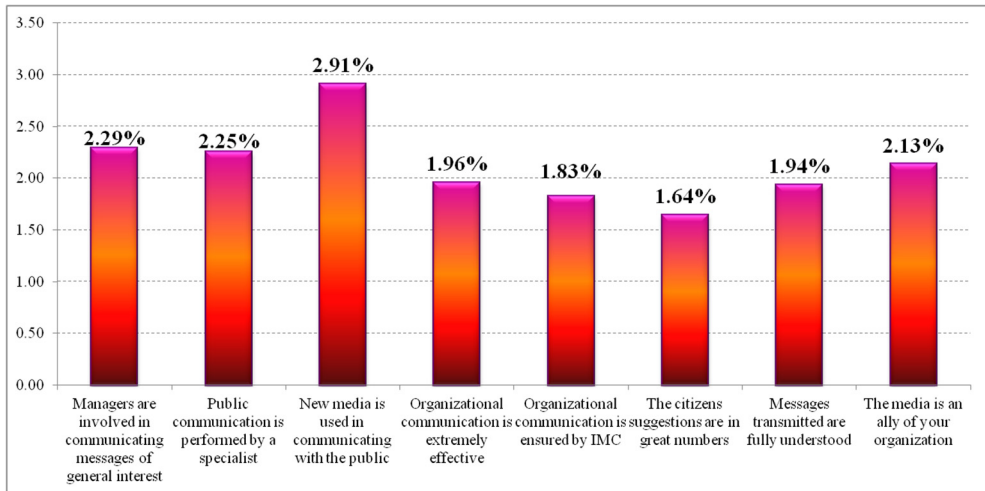


Diagram 3 - Relevant questions

Source: own projection

The obtained medium scores from seven of eight checked aspects and which are contained between 1.64 and 2.29 shows that our study's subject is not important for respondent, especially that at one of the question, in cumulative proportion of 62%, consider that the organizational communication is assured by the marketing integrated communication. The medium obtained score by one aspect, 2.91 (new media is used in the public communication), succeeded to make the respondents by undecided. Overall, the three interest domains targeted by the study, that obtained a global score of 2.22 proved to be, for our respondents, not important.

4. Conclusions

After making this study, getting over the convenience declaration's barrier that were received, the main conclusion is that at the county council's level from the south of Romania there is no interest for the integrated communication.

The study reached its objectives by making an implementation analysis of the integrated communication in the county councils in the south of Romania by identifying the knowledge and interest level over the integrated communication.

Regarding the hypothesis from which we started in this study, we can say that:

The first hypothesis - the integrated communication concept is understood, especially by the organization's managers - disaffirms

The received answers, especially at the relevant questions for the research, show that the persons with leading functions inside the county councils that were studied by us are far away from our expectations. More than half of the respondents don't understand the role and importance of the communication strategy, of the integrated communication plan and of the communication audit. Most probably, these persons that have a leading function inside the county councils have no manager talent and, more than sure, nor the required training.

The second hypothesis - the integrated communication is part of the organization's general strategy - disaffirms.

Considering that a big part of the respondents do not understand the concept of integrated communication nor interests them, it is obviously that from these reasons, the integrated communication is not a part of the organization's general strategy.

The third hypothesis - the organization's management is preoccupied with the assurance of the strategic coherence to apply the integrated communication plan - disaffirms.

The studied organization's management, over 70%, declared that they are the ones involved in the public communication, given that this is the communication's expert role. These declarations are checked by the fact that managers, in similar percentage, declare that there is no expert for public communication. The strategic coherence can be assured by very well thought and coordinated plans, after which the entire organization's efforts to materialize in reaching that organization's objectives. For our sample's managers, the interaction with the interested parts is an aspect with not so much importance, the same as the establishment of a unitary message. Overall, the preoccupations of the persons with leading functions inside the county councils from the south of our country regard anything other than the organization's interests from which they are a part. It will probably be necessary another study that can light the real interests of these persons. After our efforts to obtain a clear image of the actual situation regarding the integrated communication in the public institutions, we observed that the real situation is not encouraging and determined us to offer some propositions:

- It is necessary a sustained preoccupation for building some good relations with the public, it would grow the trust level that is granted to public institutions. Unfortunately, this preoccupation is present only in the isolated cases, which proves knowledge or interest deficit. It is a long way to work in the direction of the communication activity consolidation, of the integrated communication especially, to understand that it is one of the most important managerial instruments through which solid bounds between the institution and its publics are built.

- The existence of an expert in communication or the collaboration with a communication specialized agency can bring big advantages to the organization.
- A real preoccupation for the organization's image consolidation and of the relations with the interested publics can be obtained by using the information's technology which is accessible and used by a very large audience.

In conclusion of this empirical research, we can conclude that beyond the revealed problems, the foreseen perspectives are not encouraging at all and as we know for a long time and from many activity domains, it takes a deep modification in the way we understand the professionalism.

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