

Interculturality

Public Relations in the State Institutions from Galati

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Abstract: The paper aims at identifying and analyzing specific public relations activities in various state institutions from Galati in order to shape a PR typological profile in this geographic area. From the methodological point of view, the paper is based on in-depth interview technique for data collection and content analysis as a method of interpretation. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the professional activity of the specialist in public relations in state institutions in Galati and achieving it was made possible through a structured interview guide on three indicators: professional environment, typological profile, professional responsibility.

Keywords: profession; specialist role; typological profile; responsibility/accountability

Introduction

Communication represents the tool used by individuals to express their opinions, to share their hopes and ambitions as well as for celebrating and remembering achieved goals. Therefore, communication constitutes the tool by which people and groups understand their organization, which are the main characteristics of it, what it basically equals.

Public relations represent an institutional activity focused on building a group's credibility or the image of an organization which share common interests with other groups and organizations and which access communication strategies in order to obtain public validation of these interests (Rogojianu, 2010, p. 18). The most important definition of public relations is the one formulated by International Association of Public Relations: "The practice of public relations represents the art

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and the social science of analyzing some trends, of anticipating their consequences, of counselling leaders of an organizations and implementing some programs of action, which will serve the organization's interests as well as the public's interests" (Coman, 2006). A specialist of public relations must have a good theoretical knowledge but also a solid cultural background. It is important for him to enroll in profile courses within the field of communication or journalism (Coman, 2006). Beside these qualities, the specialist in public relations must reach some qualities as it follows: develop auxiliary work, have practical experience gained during his studying years, in parallel with recommendations and mass-media activity.

In accordance to the theory of D.L. Wilcox, those who wish to have a career in the domain of public relations must adopt four fundamental skills: writing skills, research skills, planning expertise, conflict management, good capacity of multitasking. In order to create a memorable and unique PR programme, innovative ideas and new, challenging ways of approaching the main issues of discussion must become prior (Wilcox, 2009, pp. 85-86). A student's competences rely significantly on how well he will be prepared as a PR specialist. Doug Newsom mentions the main areas of research that a professional in public relations must focus on (Pricopie, p. 66):

Planning skills of activities within the public relations department in accordance with the organization's structure.

The approach the individual implements towards the managerial component, regardless of the problems within the PR department.

Capacity to analyze and prevent conflicts identified by diverse sources.

Main Activities of Public Relations Specialists

Public relations specialists work within independent consultancy companies, either in governmental profiles departments, enterprises, associations, universities, etc.

Within the public relations department, there are some used techniques. The most known items are:

Press news: Writing the news represents the easiest form of press writing. Both journalists and press product consumers often use the concept of press news (David, 2008).

Press file: The press file must contain the list of journalists which collaborate with the given organization. The list contains the journalists who activate in written press,

from the audio-visual field or from specialized press (Dagenais, 2003, p. 262).

The press release: The press release represents a form of sharing written information dedicated to mass-media release. When writing and releasing a press release piece, one must take into consideration the official fabric of the given context (David, 2008).

Press folder: The press folder represents one of the most important instruments used in press relations (Toader, 2010).

Billboard: The billboard is represented mostly for commercials, posters, within busses, metro station, shops 'showcases etc. (Dagenais, 2003, p. 283).

The newsletter: The newsletter represents a way of noticing the employees about what is happening at a certain point of time, outside their sphere of activities (Aronson, 2008, p. 211).

Press article: The public relations specialist must write articles about his/her organization, not only press releases and pieces of news, because it has a significant impact on the organization's image and the public usually pays more attention to mass-media information (Dan, 2002).

Information sheets: The information sheets represent fundamental data about a certain organization. An information sheet must contain the description of all the activities, including the day, date, hour and duration of each activity as well as the name of the person who is responsible with the given activities (Newsom, 2004, pp. 102-103).

Organizing the Public Relations Department

Public relations specialists can develop their activity in public relations departments within organizations or consultancy companies of public relations (Coman, 2006). Profile departments can be divided in specialized sections: press relations, community relations, communication with its own personnel etc. Regardless of the size of a certain organization, within a department of public relations one can identify the following positions (Pricopie, pp. 67-68):

Departmental leader: He/She coordinates the entire framework of activities, assuring as well as functional working environment between the leaders of the organization and its members.

Project's coordinating board: they develop activities of public relations focused on a specific event or a certain category of a chosen target public.

Communication specialists: They are divided in diverse teams, each team corresponding to a certain project (data analysis, events etc.).

Technicians dealing with the logistic sector of public relations activities (communications, editing, image processing etc.).

A public relations department is organized in accordance with objectives, budget, size of the organization among others. As W. S. Dunn states, the factors which can influence PR department's organization are: *mission and objectives, the type of products and services the company is focused on, type of operations and geographical area, presence within the market and organization's visibility*. Public relations department's role is the one of assuring internal and external communication within a specific organization. Using efficient communication tools trust can be highly maintained within diverse public environments. Therefore, the organization will enjoy the benefits of a positive, promoted image.

Ethical Principles of Public Relations

A public relations specialist must focus his/her professional principles through the fundamental value of an individual's dignity, a special attention being given to the fact that the freedom of expression, liberty of association and freedom of press represent essential elements when practicing public relations (Serbanica, 2003, p. 191).

In regard to practicing public relations, one must be guided upon certain principles, more specifically:

Public relations are defined as a profession oriented towards public interest and not towards individual interests.

Public relations represent a way through which the public offers its perspectives and opinions towards certain institutions; the institutions afterwards interpret public's problems and respond to their requirements.

Public relations focus on serious problems, not fake requirements; PR is based on using concrete facts in regard to creating certain programmes which have the main purpose of serving public interest.

Public relations help to correlate the public and the institutions and establishing

viable, good relations between the two parts.

The International Code for Ethics in Public Relations, adopted by the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), contains a series of compulsory items for all its members (Boie, p. 7) out of which it is mentioned: *do not forget that, given the relation between your profession and the public, your behaviour, in particular, will have an impact on the way your profession, generally speaking will be appreciated.*

Methodological Aspects

The aim of the current study case is the one of investigating the professional activity of a public relation specialist within the public institutions within Galati city.

The general aim of the study focuses on analysis and identifying specific activities of public relations in diverse state institutions within the Galati city when creating a certain profile of PR activities within state institutions.

The case study underlines the following specific objectives:

The importance of communication in professional decision making processes.

Analyzing the professional profile of a PR.

The values of a professional activity in the domain of public relations

The challenges of professing public relations.

The responsibility of professional activity.

Throughout the study three key elements will be considered, more specifically: the professional environment, responsibility and typological profile. For each indicator a series of questions has been prepared, in order to follow-up its investigation. The methodology used in collecting data is the in-depth interview, which is being articulated in accordance to an interviewing guide. Following to that, the interviewing guide will be presented as an instrument to collect data for this study case.

Results and Conclusions

Professional Environment Indicator

For the professional environment indicator we pursued five major themes namely: professional activities, used tools / techniques, PR influence in decision-making, the used media channel and the fulfillment of institutional goals.

How would an ordinary working day look like for you? Which kind of activities do you work on?

Through this question, the research tries to investigate the activities that a PR specialist works on in its daily professional activity. For the first theme the respondents opted for activities such as: information activities on events of local and national media; use of socializing sites activities, workshops; drafting specific materials.

Which are the most commonly used PR techniques that you use professionally?

Through this question the interviewer tries to investigate how the activity of a PR specialist develops and the techniques that are being used to reach the proposed activities, given the fact that within the field of public relations, within the field of communication, diverse PR techniques are used, for example: press conferences, newsletters, billboards, etc. For the second theme, the respondents said that the most commonly used tool is the press release. In addition to the press release, there are also other techniques that completes the mode of information transmission, namely: press releases, interviews, press conference.

From a decisional point of view (publication materials, media partners etc.) how influenced are you in your professional decision making by your manager/general director? How important is the PR specialist status within the decision making processes of your organization?

This question evaluates how could a PR specialist influence professional decision making, if he/she can make decision but also how important the PR specialist profile is within the decision making processes of a company. For the third theme entitled the PR influence in decision-making, it was noted that some respondents assume the role of “influencer” of public decisions, either in terms of their wording, either in terms of supporting them. On the other hand, there are respondents who considered having compatibility as the key relationship between the manager of the institution

and its PR. Following the responses provided by specialists, it is clear that the PR has a very important function in institutional decision making.

With which (local or national) media channel do you usually collaborate most to disseminate events? By addressing this question, it is desired to find out how events are disseminated, how information is spread, given the fact that each institution/organization uses certain too to share the information. Media channel, the fourth theme of the indicator, highlights the relationship between PR and the press. Whether it is print, online, or on TV from the perspective of the respondents, they work together to disseminate information to all local or national media.

Under which circumstances does your department help to reach your institution's objectives/ targets?

By addressing this question, it is desired to find out how the PR department of a particular institution reaches its objectives. The fifth theme entitled *The achievement of the institutional objectives*, contributes to shaping an important image of the local PR, the respondents answering that they have “to a great extent” an important role in fulfilling the objectives of their institution.

The Typological Profile Indicator

For the typological profile indicator there were analyzed five important topics such as: the pros and cons of the brand identity profession, profile typological specialist in public relations, differences between public relations specialists in the rural state and private sectors, the role of a PR person in a public institution, the role of a PR person in society.

Which are, from your point of view, the advantages and disadvantages of this profession?

By addressing this question, it is desired to find out which are the advantages and disadvantages of this profession in the domain of public relations/communication, given the fact that each profession has its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus, for the first theme the pros and cons of the brand identity profession have considered that the advantages are the following: the accumulation of knowledge and information, professional prestige. The respondents stated also the cons of the profession, focusing on errors, speech.

Could you portray a typological profile of nowadays' public relations specialist in Romania?

By posing this question, one intends to find out how would the typological profile of a PR specialist look like in contemporary Romania. Which are the qualities that one can develop in its profession? During the second theme, the typological profile of the specialist in public relations, the respondents offered different criteria to describe the profile of a specialist in public relations, namely: the employment, carousel, train speed.

How would you portray a PR specialist within the public/state environment versus the PR specialist working for private companies?

Are there any differences in regard to activities, responsibilities, etc.? Why is that? By posing this question one tries to underline which are the differences of a public relations specialist working either in a state company or private owned business. How would he/she develop its PR activities in a public environment by comparison to a specialist working for a private owned business? From the theme entitled differences between public relations specialist in state and private environment, it shows that public relations specialist, both in the public state and private sector aiming different purposes.

Which is, from your point of view the role of a PR specialist working for a public institution?

By posing this question, one intends to find out which would be the role of a PR agent within a public institution, which are his/her main responsibilities within the institution where he/she is working. For the fourth theme in the role of PR in a public institution the respondents focused on managing the messages and the role of mediator of the PR between the institution and journalist.

Which is, from your point of view, the role of a PR agent within the society we are currently living in?

Through this question, the interviewee intends to conclude which is the role of a PR specialist within the society, not just within the institution where he/she is working. The 5th theme entitled the role of the PR in the society, highlight the fact that the role of PR is to capture the right target audience to remain in line with the institutional evolution, to cooperate with journalists.

The Responsibility/Accountability Indicator

For the responsibility indicator there were discussed five topics, namely: professional associations, responsibility, the challenges of the profession, public relations project, article on the topic of public relations in the state public domain.

Are you a member of a professional association? Since when?

By addressing this question, it is intended to result whether the interviewee is part of a professional organization and which is the specific period of time since when he/she is activating within it. The first theme entitled professional associations includes the views of respondents on the quality of member in membership organizations. It was found that two responded negatively and other two positively. Those who responded negatively believe either that share common interests with the existing associations and have nothing to learn from them, or that there are no coordinated associations of professionals in the true sense of the word.

What does it mean for you to be responsible in your professional activity? Please mention the most important three values that you consider most valuable in your professional activity.

Through this question, it is intended to find out which is the level of responsibility applied for this profession and the meaning of it within a domain as that of communication or public relations, but also which these responsibilities are. By addressing this question, it is intended to find out which are the professional activities' values within the domain where the person interviewed currently works. A second theme called responsibility captures several senses of responsibility from the perspective of the interviewed specialists. The respondents emphasized that: the responsibility as a skill, and responsibility as respect and honesty. Regarding the values of the profession of public relations specialist the respondents emphasized the following values: punctuality, correctness, readiness, fairness, empathy, critical thinking, commitment, perseverance and self-improvement.

Which are the challenges of your profession/status within the institution where you currently work? Which are the deontological challenges?

By addressing this question, it is intended to find out which are the challenges that can occur in the PR field, also which are the deontological challenges that might come up, given that fact that each profession/ position has its own risks. It is underlined which are the possibilities to deal with professional dilemma, especially in the case where personal examples of daily life can be specified as well. Conflicting

situations emerge between persons within the same department of an institution, based upon the differences of personality among the staff as well as because of the lack of communication. The third theme that captures the challenges of the profession and the fact that the respect for professional ethics is closely linked to the person. The respondents said however that there are also few challenges of the profession such as maintaining the position of PR in crisis, contacting the PR with other institutions, compliance with statutes and laws.

Which is the project of public relations that you realized and which you are mostly proud of?

By addressing this question, it is interesting to find out if the interviewed PR agent realized personal projects within the professional field where he/she activates, which would make him/her proud of the project's achievements; which is the basic concept of the project? The fourth theme entitled Professional accomplishments includes a series of projects that interviewees have raised into the discussion from the perspective of the success in their careers. They have mentioned the Project Open Doors at the Police Border of Galati, the birth of the Siberian baby tiger, the dismissal of a director.

If it would be for you to write an article (under editorial nuances) having the topic: "Public relations in the public/state department", what would you write about?

By realizing an editorial article with the given theme, the interviewee highlights which is his/her opinion in regard to the domain of public relations. The fifth theme entitled *If I were to write about public relations in the state public domain what would be the subject of the material?* It captures the sensitive spots of a state institutional environment seen through the eyes of the interviewed professionals. Thus, the issues of potential materials bring to the foreground: the political pressure, the temptation of power, the lack of comprehensive regulations, if there is no communication, we have nothing, the thermic issue.

Conclusions

We believe that this study is a new experience in terms of public relations at local level. It is a research that adds new theoretical and practical training in this area, but limited in terms of reduced sample (four local state institutions). This can be changed by extended future research so that the analysis would be representative for the entire the south-eastern Romania. As for the expected outcomes we consider that the

targeted indicators were covered, and the purpose of the case study, namely to investigate the professional activity of the specialist in public relations from public institutions of Galati, is achieved. The results of the study can be a benchmark for other future studies on shaping a typological profile of PR in state institutions.

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