Systematic Framework for Management of Change Communication: Organizing Elements of Change Management and Communication Process

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ABSTRACT Communication with the community to promote current or future changes to be implemented in the public sector is one of the key prerequisites for building an inclusive society. Institutions implementing public policies, in particular in the field of healthcare, social security and labour, operate in close proximity to the community. Therefore, changes in such organisations, including organisational ones, have significant influence over the community. Acceptability by the public and consequently efficiency and effectiveness of imminent or actual reforms considerably depend on the quality of communication of the changes to the society. Problems that are faced by many governments, especially in young democracies, are frequently associated with failures to achieve the expected results of planned changes or substantial resistance of the population resulting in the loss of public confidence in government institutions. One of the causes of such problems is ill-timed communication and insufficient engagement of the public before, during and after implementation of the changes.

KEYWORDS: change management process, change communication, systematic framework.

Introduction

The scope of research is an inclusive internal and external communication of changes within public sector organizations that could strengthen relations between such organizations and the population. The paper introduces communication as a systematic tool of social institutions.

The paper aims at designing a systematic framework for management of change communication in public sector organizations, which would enable them to manage changes strategically and engage the society into the management process.

The research methodology combines the following theoretical and empirical methods: analysis of scientific literature, case study, semi-structured interviews and a discursive review of the documents of the organization the proposed framework is tested on. After conceptual proof and conceptualization of theoretical findings, seeking to highlight the main theoretical dimensions and criteria, 25 public organizations in Lithuania (local municipalities and non-governmental organizations) were selected for testing the developed framework.

The main outcomes and result of the research refer to a systematic framework for management of change communication, which was tested and adapted to public sector organizations. The framework has been constructed as a Conceptual Model. Its structural parts explain the expression of communicational stages, which provides the possibilities for the preparation of communication plans with the aim to manage organizational changes strategically. Other organizations can adopt this model too. This aspect illustrates practical applicability of the research result.

The conclusions that might be drawn from the data and results and novelty of the research is that the developed framework highlights management of internal and external communication as a systematic tool, which integrates with the cycles of organizational changes, focuses on engaging the society ensures functionality of feedback loops and aims
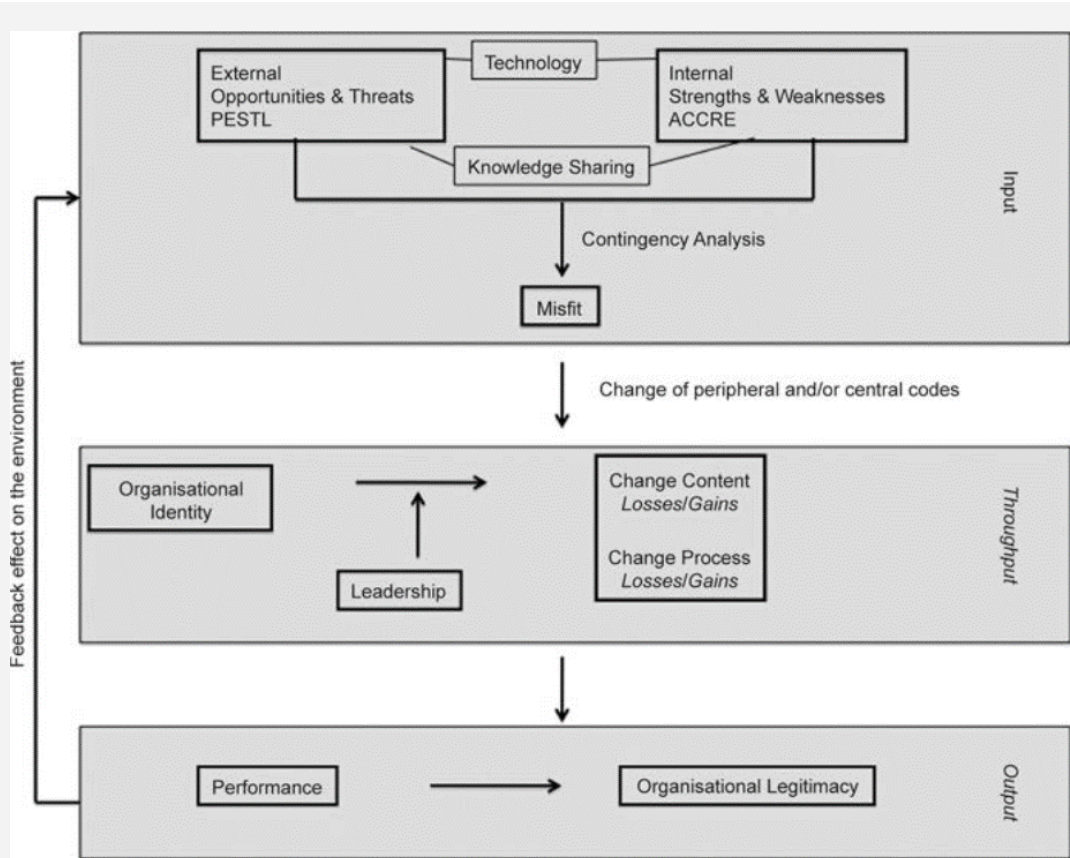
Figure 1. A unified framework of organizational change (Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn and Christe-Zeyse, 2013, p. 777).

to enhance reputation of organizations implementing public policies. By applying this framework, organizations are likely to improve management of change communication within internal and external environments, to become more pro-active in fluctuation periods, and better prepared for institutionalization of changes.

The main message that might be drawn, including the implications for further research or application/practice is as follows: *integration of the change management process with the communication process and communication management supports the strategic decision making in organizations by helping them to avoid communication faults and maintain and enhance their reputation*.

Change management in an organization: a theoretical toolbox seeking to analyze organizational environment

Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn and Christe-Zeyse, (2013) stress that the natures of the academic disciplines that are typically called on change management include research in social psychology, sociology and economics. From a more applied perspective, the rich literature on organizational change is typically scattered across organizational behaviour (Oreg *et al.*, 2011) and strategic perspectives on organizational change (Schwarz and Huber, 2008) as well. Furthermore researches (Maes and Hootegem, 2011) highlighted extremely dynamic description of the attributes of organizational change.

Doing the research it can be focused on three different traditions: on a micro perspective (analyses the psychological aspects of organizational change, focusing on what organizational change does to human beings – typically to change recipients); meso perspective (addresses issues relating to the organizational context of organizational change, as well as how organizational change affects and is affected by organizational identification and institutionalisation processes) and macro perspective (addresses issues relating to the organizational context of organizational change, as well as how organizational change affects and is affected by organizational identification and institutionalisation processes). Typically, authors summarise theoretical logic in the context of a simple input-throughput-output framework (see Figure 1).

According to Jacobs, van Witteloostuijn and Christe-Zeyse (2013), organizational change is a notoriously complex phe-

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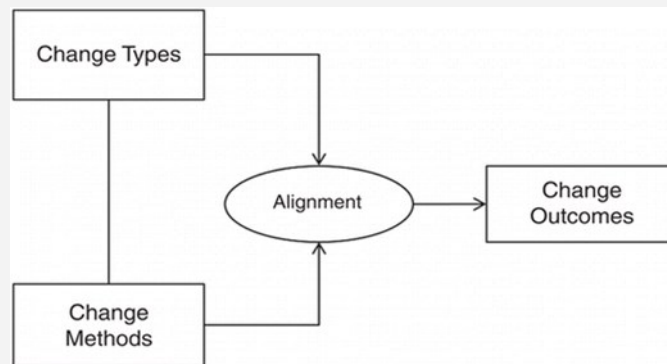Jul. 2017

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Figure 2. The proposed alignment model (Serina Al-Haddad, 2014; A Dissertation of PhD, p.90).

nomenon; it is only natural that research on organizational change addressed this complexity from numerous more or less complementary or contradictory, but equally legitimate perspectives. These perspectives stretch across disciplinary boundaries, across methodological camps, and often across contradictory visions of organizations. The result is a debilitating fragmentation of theories of organizational change, with widely different perspectives – sometimes complementary, but sometimes contradictory – blossom side by side in the large organizational change literature.

The literature provides many investigations on organizational change. We can see the taxonomy to the change management literature, such as: discuss on change types; on change enablers; on change methods; on change outcomes (Serina Al-Haddad and Timothy Kotnour, 2015).

Towards Serina Al-Haddad (2014) change management methods tackle change on a large scale and include a range of intervention strategies (see Figure 2). These methods help management align the change initiative with the overall mission and the organizational strategy by proper planning and creating a vision that involves people in change. Change management processes assist in making change part of the organizational culture. The most common methods can be classified into six groups according to the analysis of the field and the author: (Lewin's method, 1948; Judson Method; 1991; Jick and Kanter Method; 1992; Leading Change Method – Kotter,1996); Luecke's; 2003; Insurrection Method – Hamel, 2000). Single method provides detailed analysis. But Serina Al-Haddad (2014) adopts this view on a wider scale when she calls research paper proposes aligning the change types with the most appropriate change method to achieve the desired change outcomes. According to the author, heaving properly plan for change, this research proposes aligning the change type and change method to achieve the desired change outcomes.

In the recent years, researchers (Sepper and Alas, 2008; Rees, 2008) have tried to *identify dimensions of change management, have discussed ways and methods of prediction (determination) of change management and preparation of the scenario of their realization; monitoring of implementation of changes.*

However, the aspect and dynamics perspective combining of analysis of two fields (change management and change communication management) still lacks widely scientific debates.

On the other hand, it can be conducted, that the main theoretical background of my research constructs and primary research questions are: How to find consensus during change management and change communication process, seeking to evaluate organizational change processes? How can we select implementation methods for systematic change management and change communication?

Facing these facts, Valackiene (2013) based on Goodman (2006), states *the importance of communication in organizational change management*; points out that corporate communication as a strategic management function entered challenges as follows: the need to build trust with all internal and external audiences; the expectation by the corporation to accomplish more with less; the demand to build a responsible and accountable global corporate culture in response to a hostile environment for multinational corporations; the perception of the corporate communication executive as "counsel to the CEO" and "manager of the company's" reputation; the understanding of the global impact of the local act, and the local impact of the global act; the demand for greater transparency and disclosure that made media relations more complex and strategic; the understanding of transparency as the best practice strategy for reputation management and the knowledge that corporate communication remains the core skill for management.

Change communication area of the public sector organizations: a theoretical background

In order to highlight the conceptual understanding and practical perspectives of communication within the change management in public sector, it is necessary to identify the actions of effective communication for an organization, ways to solve the arising problems and application of communication in the course of changes. The first stage in the change communication management refers to *the planning of the change communication*.

From the methodological point of view, this process could be presented as an effective and preventive preparation for change communication. According to Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (2001), planning in organizations involves the setting of goals and correct and suitable selection of means for the attainment of the goals. Turney (2004, p.29) has developed a model *of Crisis and Change Communication according to six stages of preparation*. This model is depicted as a cycle that identifies the functions and the sequence of activities for six steps/segments: the mission of organization; the stakeholders of organization; the specialists of communication and the place of special operations centre; the role of crisis/change communication team; the composition of crisis/change communication team; the control of crisis/change communication plan. In summary of the change communication field in the public sector it can be stated that effective preparation requires for certain preventive actions, anticipation of advance strategy and forecasting.

It would be worthwhile to raise a question: when is it most beneficial to have a change communication plan in a public sector organization? In my opinion, the necessity to have a change communication plan and to implement it suitably comes to the fore in public sector organizations when developing new activities, during reorganization, when faced with an explicit or implicit disclosure of an unethical conduct in the organization. Another special feature of the public sector lies in the fact that these organizations are accountable to the society for their activities, and the essential changes should therefore be communicated to the public.

Legally, in the European Union this issue is governed by the law. In 2009, the EU Internal Control Standards Committee prepared an official document *The Guidelines of Internal Control Standards in Public Sector*, where an exceptional role is given to the management of information and communication in public sector organizations.

Researchers Bell and Roebuck (2015) who have discussed the area of organizational change management and communication argue that during organizational changes, top managers must always be dialled into the hidden hierarchy (informal networks) of the organization to prevent communication at this level from turning the entire organization towards the depravity of poor moral choices. Leaders are shown to be the catalysts for organizational change through their MC (management communication) activities.

Authors briefly discussed the role of change communication and agreed that key communication skills such as listening and dialogue become paramount during the times of change. According to Luscher and Lewis (2008), managers must communicate their understanding, particularly in the midst of organizational change, in a way that provides their subordinates with a workable certainty. Poor communication from management can result in rumours, resistance to change, and decreased job satisfaction. The main idea tends to link managerial action to organizational climate by positing organisational climate as a mediator between managerial action and individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and performance (Kaiser, Hogan and Craig, 2008; Kuenzi and Schminke, 2009). Schein (2004) suggests that managers are able to subtly but potently embed and communicate the underlying ethical values and expectations of the organization's rules and codes to their subordinates. When employees understand and embrace the expectations and values inherent in organizational rules and codes in their everyday decisions, the result is an ethical climate.

Bell and Roebuck (2015) construct a new theoretical insight (defined *as consultative communication*) into the area of change communication. According to this methodological attitude, they explain that consultative communication is intended to be an asymmetrical dialog shaped by different observational positions with respect to the client's decision-making style as well as the different process management and professional competencies of consultants and clients.

When discussing on the issues of change expression in the public sector, researchers (Dvorak and Kaselis, 2010) outline the pathways for the changes in the assessment of public administration activity planning and programmes implemented in Lithuania and evaluate the area of the change communication and institutionalisation. Information management and communication in public sector are discussed in their study by Atkočiūnienė and Janiūnienė (2014).

Change communication as the key value of organizational culture is disclosed by Bold (2011). According to this attitude, it can be said, that a long-created overall image of a public sector organization might crumble and damage further activities of the organization. Reputation of an organization may be damaged by unsuitable *prevention* and *response* that are the fundamentals of organizational communi-

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cation seeking to avoid obvious damages being inflicted to an organization or errors, or eliminate them (Argenti, 2007). Hale (2005), Hale, Dulek and Goodsell (2003) state that at the times of changes, the stage of *response* is one of the key stages of organizational communication (all of them being prevention, response, recovery, assessment) when influencing the changes as well as responding to their causes. In the response stage, actions of the organization have the greatest impact on the public opinion; they shape the image of the organization and its reputation.

The conception of change communication is also defined in official documents governing the EU quality standards (The Victorian Quality Council. Successfully Implementing Change, 2006; British Standards Institution, 2008; Emergency Preparedness, 2012), which present the guidelines for successful implementation of changes in organizations.

In summary of the discussed theoretical insights from the change communication point of view it can be stated that organizational communication is an effective means for successful change management; however -/, in individual instances, particularly in the public sector (seeing that the changes in organizations of this type concern a large portion of the social environment contrary to a business organization), it should start substantially earlier than the changes themselves, before efforts begin to implement them. According to Blažėnaitė (2011), communication comprises the grounds for the existence of an organization, when the role of each communicator is important. *Through the conceptualisation of organizational communication, the following aspects of the analysis were distinguished*:

1. It should be stated that organizational communication is a social process defined by contacts and information exchange both within the organisation and external environment, seeking for effective functioning of the organization in the social setting and implementation of common objectives in the public sector.

2. It is emphasised that organizational communication is a process where the organizational identity is conveyed for the image formation; the way the information is transferred from the executive level to personnel and the way it reflects on the organization in external environment.

When communicating, the organizational change behaviour is modified, transformations are implemented, thus realising the objectives of conveying the information to other target groups, which have a connection with the public organization (Stoner *et al.*, 2001). As stated by Pandey and Gamett (2006), organizational culture has great significance to the communication process. Stromback (2006) discusses on the

implications of communication for change management and emphasises the importance of feedback.

It is noteworthy that such approach is important when discussing about the expression of public sector organisations' communication in the area of change management. Communication is effective only when the impression of the recipient matches the one sought to convey by the sender. When ensuring the feedback of communication in organisations of the public sector, the sender and the recipient sort of change place. A possibility appears to observe the effect of the presented information on the public and to model further communication actions of the organisation while presenting the intended changes.

Lithuanian scientists (Baršauskienė and Janulevičiūtė-Ivaškevičienė, 2005; Blažėnaitė, 2011) note the interaction of internal and external communication and the functions linked in the organizational process. By communicating with the external environment, an organisation coordinates the elements of its internal system, while through the interaction with the players of economics, politics, law, technologies and culture, negotiating with competitors, partners or customers the company adapts its objectives, develops a strong organizational culture, adapts its management style and regulates the organizational structure. According to Blažėnaitė (2011), strong organizational culture helps the employees to integrate themselves into communication processes and promotes effective communication externally.

Blažėnaitė (2011) has developed determinants of the organizational communication system (Figure 3).

As noted by Baršauskienė and Janulevičiūtė-Ivaškevičienė (2005), effective external communication shapes a positive external image of an organization.

Reilly (2008) observes that the public opinion is based on individual subjective attitudes in specific situations; consequently, organizations in a public sector must take into account all circumstances that shape the individual opinions of the members of the general public about the organization.

Valackienė and Susnienė (2013) analyse the issues of communicating the changes in an organization from the quality management point of view and reflect on the striving for the continuity of organization's activities when managing the changes according to the standard ISO 22301. Guidelines for successful implementation of changes in an organization were discussed with the key role placed on the communication area. Thus, the special features of communication are to be closely linked with the implementation and management of changes within the organization, implementing its own objectives, while seeking to strengthen its reputation. It
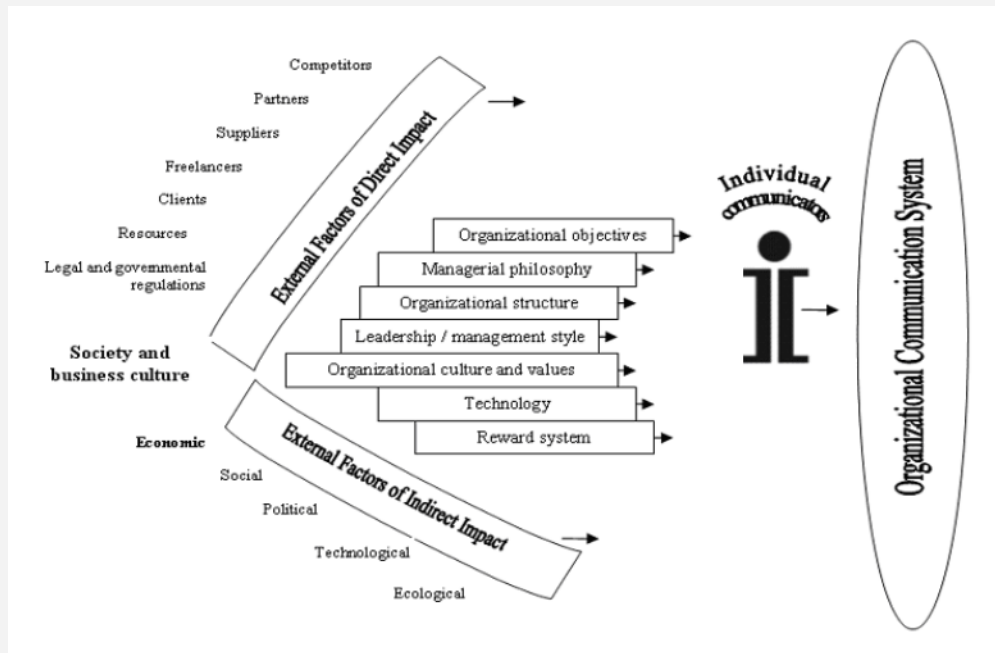
Figure 3. Determinants of the organizational communication system (Blažėnaite, 2011, p.92).

is very important to prepare suitably: to disseminate a newsletter and plan for suitable communication means with each external (target) group yet before the changes, at the time of changes or crises to prepare a model of change communication.

The situation diagnosis in a public sector has shown that in order to manage the changes effectively and notify them suitably to the public, internal communication in a public sector organization should take place on parallel with external communication. At the time of changes, the external communication process is organised and implemented by a group formed by the head of the organization or public relations specialists, whose function is to maintain the trust between the organization and external environment.

Methodological platform: highlighted the relevance of Change Management and Change Communication Process in public sector organization

Seeking to highlight the relevance of Change Management and Change Communication Process in an organization we can follow Smelser (1993), who stated that the arguments on the disciplinary distinction of the professional communication fields, for the most part, have already been settled, including a de facto definition and focus of management communication.

According to this methodological approach, the theoretical constructs of the process of the modernization of public

sector encourages not only to search for new ways and new methods to improve the provision of public services, but also places higher and higher requirements on public sector (municipalities and Non-profit sector), thus enabling them to initiate changes and show the way how it can be communicated during and after implementation of the changes. It can be discussed in order to depict the peculiarities of organizational communication during changes, to construct communication models and strategies.

To emphasize the subject matter of this attitude, a Conceptual Model of Change Management and Change Communication Platform: Organizing Elements of Change Management and Communication Process was constructed (Figure 4).

This attitude defines the main area of the public sector seeking to construct the strategic directions for the initiation of change: progressive growth, stable growth, and growth of integration of the initiation of change in municipalities, non governance sector and other public organizations.

The developed Framework highlights management of internal and external communication as a systematic tool, which integrates with the cycles of organizational changes, focuses on engaging the society, ensures functionality of feedback loops and aims to enhance reputation of organizations implementing public policies.

This model was empirically tested and is devoted to qualita-

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Figure 4. Conceptual model of organising elements of change management and communication process.

tive empirical research with the aim to analyse the peculiarities of organizational communication by the example of the chosen 25 public local municipalities and non-governmental organizations in Lithuania.

The author seeks to highlight the nature of changes processes and its management in a more detailed overview. Using this ideology as an instrument, the qualitative research was selected: qualitative research conceptualises the research object, which is based on the research data obtained.

The methods of research helping to solve the tasks include the analysis of secondary statistical data and descriptive analysis (allows for comparing the public sector organizations in both quantitative and qualitative indicators), 25 multiple case studies (purified strategic change direction in the organization; main situation diagnosis in a public sector organization; disclosure of the strategic; the interaction of which shows up in the field of organizational changes) and 50 semi-structured interview (carried out with the Heads of Divisions responsible for the management of communication processes in the public organization and helped to depict the peculiarities of change communication; helped to identify main initiators of changes, determination of the need for changes; directions for changes). *All methods of*

the research allowed evaluating the impact of communication to the activities of the organization, its image and reputation during changes.

Discussion, reflection and main message

The Systematic Framework explains the expression of communication in public organizations during the processes on change management. To sum up, that the area of organizational change in public sector and change management in these social institutions is a complex phenomenon, the structural analysis approach has been employed. Using this theoretical background, it can be highlighted that organizational communication is a social process which provides contact and information exchange between both departments and units of organization and organization's environment for the purpose of organization's operation and accomplishment of its objectives.

The structural parts of Systematic Framework explain communicational stages in a more detailed overview, which provide the possibilities for the preparation of communication plans with the aim to manage organisational changes strategically. Other organizations can adopt this model as well. This aspect illustrates practical applicability of research result.

The novelty of the research: By applying this Framework, organi-

zations are likely to improve management of change communication within internal and external environments, to become more pro-active in fluctuation periods, and better prepared for institutionalization of changes.

The Framework is composed of three interrelated sub-systems:

- The field of communication management includes internal and external communication processes of an organization. The structural body of the framework illustrates particular actions that would foster management of communication in a strategic manner and enable optimal and efficient change management processes.

- The stages and means of communication management provide organizations with the key sub-processes influencing the quality of communication: development of a communication plan, dissemination, monitoring and evaluation.

- The stages of changes in an organization aligned with internal and external communication processes enable timely and relevant communication with employees and the population about planned, ongoing and implemented changes, and adequate evaluation of and professional reaction to public messages.

The main message that might be drawn, including their implications for further research or application/practice is: integration of the change management process with the communication process and communication management supports strategic decision making in organizations by helping them to avoid communication faults and maintain and enhance their reputation.

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