

Possibility of Increasing the Quality of Communication in Public Administration

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is a proposal for an effective selection of communication toolkit within public involvement in the process of improving the quality of public sector activities. The proposal is aimed at optimizing the selection of communication tools depending on the weighting of the criteria required quality in the planning of strategic communication in the public administration. This proposal builds on the recommendations of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, aimed at involving the public in the preparation of government documents. Application of the recommendations in practice is associated with risks of miscalculation suitability of communications tools to the communications context. Application of that proposal would lead to a reduction or complete elimination of this risk.

Keywords: communication, quality; public administration; public participation, communication strategies

Introduction

The Strategic Framework for the Development of Public administration in the Czech Republic for the period 2014-2020 (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2014) defines topics for the next stage of modernization and development of public administration and eGovernment, particularly towards streamlining and improving the work of public institutions (National Quality Policy, 2014) in accordance with the strategic documents of the European Commission and and Czech governments (CR International Competitiveness Strategy 2012–2020 and the National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2014) (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2015a). Associated aim of this material is to provide for the realization of the set objectives and topics most efficient use of funds from the state budget and structural funds and investment funds in the programming period 2014–2020. For the new programming period, there is a plan to substantial modernization of public administration through the use of eGovernment tools. Ministry of the Interior of the Czech

Republic issued papers for public participation in projects removing red tape in the modernization of public administration. Such documents are Methodology for Public Involvement in the Preparation of Government Documents and the Manual for Public Participation in the Preparation of Government Documents (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2015b).

Methodology for Public Involvement in the Preparation of Government Documents defines minimum standards for public participation in the preparation of Government documents and is aimed at both the general forms of public participation in the preparation of government documents and to concretise these general forms in the process of Regulatory Impact Assessment RIA. However, the basic requirements of the RIA process relate to the content of the issues that should be analyzed even government documents non-legislative nature. It is expected, therefore, using this methodology also for government documents non-legislative nature. The methodology is recommendatory in nature and does not require the use of all forms contained therein to prepare a particular government document and vice versa does not limit the central authorities in any other forms of public involvement. Selection of specific forms of belonging within the laws of the respective central administrative office (Blaha, 2009). Same as methodology, the manual is recommendatory and not limit the central administrative authorities in any other forms of public participation in the preparation of government documents. In accordance with the methodology, manual can be helpful in the process of regulatory impact assessment (Blaha, 2010). The manual is not confined to the connection with the evaluation of the impact of regulation, such as legislative proposals, but it can also reasonably be used in the preparation of other government materials such as proposals for concepts and strategies in which it is appropriate and necessary involvement of lay and professional public (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2015b).

The manual offers a catalog of communication tools and techniques for public involvement, which can be used in the process of involving the public in conjunction with the procedures described in the methodology. The actual decision on the selection of appropriate tools in terms of efficiency leaves for each communicative intent upon themselves leaves office. The manual is not confined to the connection with the evaluation of the impact of regulation, such as legislative proposals, but it can also reasonably be used in the preparation of other government materials such as proposals for concepts and strategies in which it is appropriate and necessary involvement of lay and professional public.

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The degree of involvement of subjects to be consulted

The aforementioned degree of involvement of the public express the relationship between the author of the document and the consulted entity (Blaha, 2009). The methodology to each level of public involvement, there are assigned practice techniques that can be applied at the relevant level. The list of communication tools and techniques is not comprehensive and should be understood as possible or appropriate (Weberová, 2013). Methodology distinguishes these four basic degree of public involvement (Blaha, 2009):

1. Information – a one-sided flow of information from the processor of the document to a consulted subject. Informing is the lowest level of involvement and can be seen as a prerequisite for the realization of higher degrees. Manual presents (Blaha, 2010) these recommended techniques: information board, information telephone line, press conferences / press releases, leaflets and posters, publications and information brochures, internet portal, public hearing, information centers / counseling centers and other.
2. Comments (Blaha, 2009) – is the one-sided flow of information, requests, opinions or criticisms from the consulted subjects towards the processor of the document. Here we can include not only commenting on the text, but also different ways of listening and gathering information from the consulted subjects. The manual (Blaha, 2010) recommends for this level of involvement of these tools: questionnaires, surveys, personal interviews (individual, group, focus group), phone interviews and others.
3. Consulting (Blaha, 2009) – is the two-way exchange of information, opinions or suggestions. Processors can choose their own way and lead consultations. Ideally consultation takes place at the same time and same place (ie all participants in the consultations will gather together and discuss the topic). This type of consultation can be described as direct (ie face to face). Of course, there are numerous cases of indirect consultations that do not run at the same time or one place (eg. different internet forums, discussions in press). Manual (Blaha, 2010) lists these communication tools appropriate for consultation: public meetings (in various forms), public debates, conferences and seminars, internet discussion forums, internet chat, happenig events and other.
4. Partnership (Blaha, 2009) – occurs when the document processor and consulted stakeholders work together on a given topic. Consulted subject is on an equal footing to the document processor, even if it is necessary to take into account the fact that the main responsibility has a always processor. Communication tools (Blaha, 2010) are particularly suitable for the partnership: workshops, working groups.

Selection of an effective set of communications tools

Manual for Public Participation in the Preparation of Government Documents (Blaha, 2010) gives a recommended set of communication tools for public involvement degrees. This list represents only a recommendation to the authorities themselves, so that they could roughly estimate the appropriate communication tools, in accordance with the communications monitored intention. The efficiency of the selection will be conditioned by the ability to estimate their interconnectivity and the final effect by a person (Farkašová and Rolková, 2013) who prepares a communication plan. One way, which would result in increased efficiency of choice of communication tools could lead through the determination of the criteria which are required by the communication target and the specific character (target group public, financial budget etc.). Obtaining basic parameters for subsequent optimization of the communication set is conditional not only by establishing their own criteria, but also by assessing their view of the importance of communication in terms of intent. For determining the required quality criteria imposed on the communications actions we may make use of a set of recommended quality criteria, which discloses Ondrůšková (2007) in her work.

This set of criteria is the supplemented by some additional criteria with regard to the specifics of the environment Public Administration:

- credibility of information ,
- speed transmission,
- specificity – the degree of relevant (specific) information,
- number of recipients,
- clarity – how the information is comprehensible,
- an amount of needed information – the level of satisfaction of information needs of the recipient communication through the communication process,
- brevity – whether the transmitted messages contain too much redundant information,
- obtaining feedback – can be monitored from several aspects (speed feedback, receiving feedback, frequency of providing feedback to the recipient),
- anonymity (relevance of information based on anonymity),
- transmission direction of information (direction from authorities or towards authorities),
- distortion or loss of part of information.

We can determine the appropriate value of the individual criteria for planning communication by an application of these criteria to the specific conditions of public administration. Criteria as desired direction may represent a limiting factor which will determine the appropriate set of communication tools that will be examined in the context of optimization of choice.

Determination of the valuation criteria

Based on the comparison of the suitability of optimization methods from Ocelníková (2004), the most appropriate for the set of issues seems Saaty's method. We can use the Saaty method for determining the values of the criteria to determine the importance of individual criteria. The principle of Saaty's method lies in the fact that instead of using a numerical scale, it enables the users to express their preferences verbally which is often a much easier way of expressing themselves. Verbal expression is automatically transferred into a numerical scale. The level of importance of one parameter before any other is expressed by the user on a whole number scale 1 to 9. The value 1 means that the pair of parameters has the same importance (Jablonský, 2002). The value 9 means that the value of one parameter is absolutely higher than the value of the other parameter. If one parameter is less important than the other, the reverse value of the whole numbers of the given scale is used. The information from pairwise comparison can be put into a matrix $S = (s_{ij}, i, j = 1, 2, \dots, k)$ known as Saaty's matrix. The elements of this matrix s_{ij} can be interpreted as estimates of the share of the i th and j th parameters (relation 1) (Jablonský, 2002):

$$s_i \approx \frac{v_i}{v_j} \quad i, j = 1, 2, \dots, k \quad (1)$$

User's preferences are contained in the matrix of pairwise comparisons S . It is important to use the information about these preferences for the estimate of the weight of the parameters. One of the conditions for usability of this information is its appropriate quality. The matrix of pairwise comparisons must be sufficiently consistent. Matrix S is fully consistent if for any index trio i, j, q it applies that $s_{iq} = s_{ij} s_{jq}$. For example matrix (relation 2) (Kampf et al., 2014 and Jablonský, 2002):

$$S = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 2 & 6 \\ 1/2 & 1 & 3 \\ 1/6 & 1/3 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (2)$$

A good estimate of vector v can be obtained as a geometrical average of elements in each line of the matrix. Matrix S normalized so that the sum of its elements is equal to 1 (relation 3,4) (Jablonský, 2002):

$$v'_i = \left(\prod_{j=1}^k s_{ij} \right)^{1/k} \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, k \quad (3)$$

$$v_i = \frac{v'_i}{\sum_{i=1}^k v'_i} \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, k \quad (4)$$

In this procedure we obtain the values of parameters from a subjective point of view of the evaluator. To determine the objective values of the parameters we need to get data from a representative group. The total value of the i -th parameter is the arithmetic average of the values obtained from a representative group (Kampf et al., 2012). Exemplary use Saaty matrices for solving problems in this paper is shown in a model example. For simplification, the model situation is assessed to only one expert. We assume that it is necessary to optimize the selection within the communication flow from government units to the public. Communicative intent is to gain public favour and inform about a project of regional development. We can compare a set of communication tools by assessment under six criteria (K1 – speed transmission, K2 – credibility, K3 – the number of recipients, K4 – quantity mediated information, K5 – feedback, K6 – no distortion and loss of information). First, it is necessary to determine the value of each of the criteria for the communication flow and intention (see Table 1).

Tab. 1: The weights of criteria using s method

Criteria	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	v'_i	v_i
K1	1.00	0.11	0.17	0.50	0.14	0.14	0.238330	0.02721
K2	9.00	1.00	1.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	2.993795	0.34180
K3	6.00	1.00	1.00	6.00	0.33	0.17	1.124288	0.12836
K4	2.00	0.20	0.17	1.00	0.14	0.14	0.331737	0.03787
K5	7.00	0.25	3.00	7.00	1.00	0.20	1.394380	0.15920
K6	7.00	0.25	6.00	7.00	5.00	1.00	2.676350	0.30556
								$\lambda = 1.00$

Source: author

In this procedure we obtain the values of parameters to chose of optimal communication tools for public inform about of a regional development project. We can assess of communication tools and take into account the price and availability, too. From this results we can see, that the mainly quality of criteria is K2 (credibility) and K6 (no distortion and loss of information). The smallest importance criteria for this specific goal are K1 (speed transmission) and K4 (quantity mediated information). Determine the weight of importance, it is possible to examine the suitability of each communication tool through selecting the appropriate option Saaty matrix, which is comparing studied communication tools designed for each criterion in Saaty matrix.

Conclusion

The target of the paper is the proposal of choosing to effective communication toolkit for public involvement in improving the quality of public sector activities. This paper presents the use Saaty’s matrix method for solving op-

timization options appropriate mix of communication tools in the context of public involvement based on the current concept of quality enhancement in public administration. The use of this method of optimization options communication toolkit allows the selection of those communication tools depending on a communication plan in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and based on specific parameters. This selection enables optimized to reduce time to decision and eliminate the increased financial costs incurred by the application is not fully effective communication tools with respect to the intent, target group and other parameters of communication actions.

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Možnost zvýšení kvality komunikace ve veřejné správě

Cílem příspěvku je návrh pro efektivní volbu skladby komunikačních nástrojů v rámci zapojení veřejnosti v procesu zvyšování kvality činnosti veřejného sektoru. Návrh je zaměřen na optimalizaci výběru skladby komunikačních nástrojů v závislosti na váze kritérií požadované kvality při plánování strategické komunikace ve veřejné správě. Tento návrh navazuje na doporučení Ministerstva vnitra ČR, zaměřená na zapojení veřejnosti do přípravy vládních dokumentů. Aplikace doporučení je v praxi spojena s riziky špatného odhadu vhodnosti komunikačních nástrojů s ohledem na komunikační kontext. Uplatnění uvedeného návrhu by vedlo ke snížení, případně úplné eliminaci tohoto rizika.

Klíčová slova: komunikace, kvalita, veřejná správa, strategická komunikace, zapojení veřejnosti

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LIŽBETINOVÁ, L. Possibility of Increasing the Quality of Communication in Public Administration. *Littera Scripta*. 2015, 8(1), 40–48. ISSN 1805-9112.
