

## **STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE MILITARY COMMUNICATION**

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*It is said about communication - and the practice proves it thoroughly – that it serves as a lubricant of management. There is consensus among experts regarding the paramount importance that the leadership has within communication. Referring only to the decision that the commander should make in any situation, it is enough to see that its adoption and success would be unthinkable in the absence of communication between the commander and executants.*

**Keywords:** communication; information; effective communication; strategy; public relations.

Experience has shown that for any organization, communication is an essential requirement for achieving the targets, a *sine qua non* condition for its efficient operation and for establishing the most basic human relationships.

Communication is one of the main prerequisites for the exercise of leadership. Only effective communication enables planning and scheduling, coordination and control, motivation, consultation and the active participation of the organization members to implement the targeted purposes. Each part of the organization work is based on effective communication as a way of focusing and correlating efforts.

Effective communication, as a complex system of mutual relationships that occur between members of the military organization, requires their mutual understanding, confrontation, conciliation and harmonization of their views. Therefore, for each leader, a key concern is ensuring open, continuous and accurate communication, resulting in the organization's strategic thinking.

The way to effective communication interferes with a number of obstacles, which have to be overcome with ability to avoid a blockage. All these obstacles cause disturbances in the communication process, from the message issuing until its reception.

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The external disturbances, which relate to the communication, distance, time, structure of communication networks etc., as well as the internal disturbances related to human nature, the perception of messages, messages tend assessment, individual limits, etc. have to be identified, analyzed and mitigated by the measures adopted in the organization, which will help improve communication.

### **Strategies for Achieving Effective Military Communication**

For any leader, the development of communication must be a constant concern covering all functions, steps and elements of the communication process. It will result in enhancing the message consistency, the communication expressiveness and the communication intelligibility.

Increasing communication efficiency requires the use of methods and techniques to improve it. The following methods have emerged as particularly useful: active listening – a technique to increase the accuracy of information by paying full attention to the interlocutor; and the meeting – bringing together a group of people for a short period to solve tasks having information and decision character.

Of course, compliance to and enforcement of effective communication principles and rules are related to the leaders' personality, to the specific timing, but also to the manner of communication chosen.

In literature, we frequently meet the notion of communication strategy. But what significance does this concept have and how is it materialized in relation with the act of communicating?

*The New Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language* defines strategy as: *the coordinated action plan to achieve a goal; the ability to utilize all available means, circumstances, conditions, etc. favorable to achieving the intended purpose.*<sup>1</sup>

Similar meanings are assigned to „strategy” by the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language as well as by the Encyclopedic Dictionary.

A comprehensive definition is provided by *The Armed Forces Doctrine for Joint Operations*, according to which strategy is *the art of having a desired pattern or scenario of the possible events where the purposes, ways and means of their achievement can be assessed in a planned and predictable environment*<sup>2</sup>.

*The Communication Strategy of the Ministry of National Defense* is the main planning and management document of the communication and public

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<sup>1</sup> Ioan Oprea, Carmen-Gabriela Pamfil, Rodica Radu, Victoria Zăstroiu, *The new universal dictionary of the Romanian language*, International Letter Publishing House, Bucharest-Chisinau, 2008, p. 1556.

<sup>2</sup> SMG/P.F.-3, *The Armed Forces Doctrine for Joint Operations*, Bucharest, 2003, p.104.

relations activities, including the set of actions that establish the details of the communication process (objectives, themes, messages, target audiences etc.). *It is prepared annually by 20 December for the following year by the Public Relations Department, based on the National Security Strategy, the Military Strategy of Romania, the Government's White Paper and on the projected profile of the desirable image for the military institution.*<sup>3</sup>

The communication strategy of the military organization includes, in principle, the following chapters: the military image analysis for the previous year; the forecast for the current year; the projected image profile of the military institution; the communication objectives in relation to political and military objectives; the core themes and messages for the internal and external communication; responsibilities in communication and public relations.

*The Communication Strategy goal for the current year is to support the Fundamental Objective of the Ministry of National Defense in 2012 by promoting the general directions of action of the Romanian Army, by increasing the information and understanding levels of the military associated issues among the group audience members.*<sup>4</sup>

Reading carefully through the contents of the *Communication Strategy of the Ministry of National Defense in 2012*, we find that the improvement of communication is presented constantly in close relationship with the improvement of the public relations activity. In these circumstances, we consider it is necessary to provide a summary of these specific activities.

For some specialists, public relations are the most active, most dynamic part of communication. It is difficult to conceive today this certain type of activity as not being accompanied by planned and constant efforts to communicate with the environment.

Viewed from a psychological angle, as mechanisms for establishing relationships between institutions or between institutions and people, the public relations can be defined *as representing the set of means used by institutions and enterprises to create a climate of trust and sympathy among their own employees but also among the public opinion*<sup>5</sup>.

In the military institution, public relations *constitute a distinct function of management and consist of establishing, maintaining and developing bi-univocal relationship between the army as a public institution and the Romanian citizens*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Relations-1*, Instructions for the Army Public Relations Activity, Bucharest, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Communication Strategy of the Ministry of National Defense in 2012*, Bucharest, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Stancu Șerb, *Public Relations and Communications*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Public Relations-1*, p. 7.

The fundamental mission of the Communication Strategy of the Ministry of National Defense is to contribute actively and continuously to the promotion and defense of the Romanian Army values both internally and abroad, by providing timely information on the military activity to citizens and public organizations.

In peacetime, the communication strategy aims to streamline communication within the military, detecting and solving the communication problems that could affect the military's ability to carry out their tasks, to obtain public understanding and support for the military institution through timely, accurate and complete public information. Thus, the military personnel, the civilian public, the civil society bodies and the media are able to accurately perceive and assess the activities, evolution and trends of transformation and modernization of the army.

During crisis and war, the army's communication strategy is primarily aimed at the public, to benefit from continuous, timely and accurate information about the activities and operations of the military forces in order to gain public support for military operations.

The need to establish a communication strategy of the military organization derived from: the constitutional right of every citizen to be informed properly about public institutions and on the use of funds from the state budget; the military institution's legal obligation to provide information of public interest to natural or legal persons *ex officio* or upon request; the special importance that the own public image has within the military activity, the positive effect of the internal information process on the efficacy and motivation of the military personnel in fulfilling their tasks.

The most important areas of the public relations activity in the military are: *public information, direct public information, internal information, relations with local community, international information and media crisis management.*<sup>7</sup>

Even after a brief analysis of the Communication Strategy of the Ministry of National Defense we note that it is confined almost entirely to planning the public relations activity, which however, is only part of the military organization communication. Moreover, the kind of communication that the public relations activity uses is, above all, informative.

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between *information* and *communication*, terms which are often confused. Thus, *information* is exclusively the content transfer (sending and reception), while *communication* refers to the exchange of cognitive structures aimed at changing someone's behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> *Idem*, p. 28.

Often, communication is usually lowered to the level of mere information, resulting in the absence of adequate feedback from the receptor. Without feedback, decisions are made exclusively at the management level without consultation with those involved in achieving organizational goals.

In other words, the term *information* refers to situations where the active role refers exclusively to the sender while the *communication* concerns an interactive system of relationships. *Information* consists therefore in linking people with facts, while the *communication* consists in interpersonal relationships. *Information* functions in a single direction from the sender to the receiver. Instead, *communication* is done in several directions, each sender in turn becoming the receiver and vice versa in the same sequence of communication.

In this context, the military organization must regulate the information and communication flows.

In the first case, it sends detailed internal or external messages and receives and analyzes internal or external messages.

In the second case, the military organization is, on the one hand, the vector of interactive exchanges with the external environment and on the other hand, it adjusts both the formal and informal exchange of information between the military personnel. If the importance of the external relationships was more or less acknowledged, because basically, the survival of the organization depends on it, the importance of the internal relationships is constantly neglected. Internal messages (especially if they reach the decision makers through informal channels) are almost always ignored.

Returning to the subject of communication strategies, we would like to emphasize that the following strategies are commonly used in practice:

- *the control strategy* (authority) – used especially in emergency situations, when the leader expresses his/her full authority, imposing severe restrictions. She/he directs all actions, the direction of communication is unilateral, and feed-back occurs only for clarification;

- *the structuring strategy* – used in the process of restructuring, of complex organization, of modernization and of planning to ensure order and discipline through information, guidance and persuasion;

- *the dynamic strategy* – practiced successfully in rapidly changing environments, is oriented towards immediate action. It requires direct and concise communication, via a pragmatic message, based on trust and understanding, motivation and stimulation;

- *the participatory strategy* (egalitarian) – characterized by bilateral transfer of information with mutual influence, which ensures making decisions by consensus. It is effective with communication within a small group, when there is enough time for persuasion to accept solutions. It is not

recommended for use in communication with incompetent interlocutors, who lack initiative or experience in emergency situations;

- *the acceptance strategy* – aimed at accepting the partner's opinion (it can be a consulting team, an audit committee etc.), who was asked to advise the manager;
- *the avoidance strategy* – used only in special circumstances requiring restrictions on disclosure of information.

The duty to choose the most appropriate communication strategy for a certain given situation belongs undoubtedly to the commanders, regardless of the echelon of command they belong to, who are also responsible for the most effective use of the strategy in order to achieve the assumed objectives.

The choice is extremely difficult due to the many aspects to be considered. In our opinion, the most important factors that contribute to choosing the most appropriate strategy for increasing communication within the structure they are leading are: the specific nature of the situation; the time available; the commander's level of training in organizational communication; the commander's experience; the commander's communication skills.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, the communication strategy of an organization of the size and complexity of the military organization is unable to cover in detail the full scope of the specific communicative act, being only the general framework of how communication is perceived during the reference period.

Therefore, we think that the mandatory continuous search for concrete ways of increasing the effectiveness of communication within each military structure, regardless of the level at which it is situated, belongs mainly to the commander of that structure.

To successfully accomplish this task, it is necessary, first, that the models, algorithms, and the guidance of higher echelons concerning the communication process in certain situations, to be well learned and precisely applied. These models can be improved depending on the specifics of each situation and on the experience of the person applying them.

Hierarchical models always represent principles, being only the general framework for solving situations, the concrete manner of applying those involving different solutions, each of them bearing the commander's imprint.

There are situations for which there are no guidelines provided by the higher echelons, so it is necessary to find the best solutions and even to elaborate certain algorithms of work in order to solve these specific communication situations.

Communication involving action and, of course, daily routine becomes normal and acceptable to the community while gaining coherence and consistency.

*Involvement in communication is deeper than language involvement; it requires the ability to understand the communication messages, the aspirations of people, groups, organizations and societies.*<sup>8</sup>

But in order to understand the need to initiate such approaches, to achieve them and to require the use of their results, it is necessary, first, that all commanders have a very solid training on organizational communication.

Only having this knowledge and applying it with perseverance, commanders at all hierarchical levels will be able to improve their personal skills in terms of communication and to continuously increase communication efficiency within the structure they are leading.

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<sup>8</sup> Mircea Cosma, *Psychological Operations during War*, Lucian Blaga University Publishing House, Sibiu, 1997, p. 53.