Organizational Communication – an Institutional Resource for Efficiency.
Case study: City Hall Zalău

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Abstract

The effectiveness of organizations in today's society depends on the interconnection of human, financial, material and technology resources through the most important and valuable one of XXI century, is the communicative resource. In the era of globalization, of ongoing changes and permanent challenges, organizations are determined to adapt quickly. Intelligible communication is the key for building, maintaining and developing organizational systems in which employees work for achieving strategic objectives. The private system, characterized by flexibility and interest in evolution, replies in a timely manner to the organizational dynamics, while the public system, described as a system resistant to change, is requiring a specialist intervention to harmonize expectations and requirements. For these reasons, our interest has grown in making a diagnosis of the communication system in the public institutions, in Romania, and we selected City Hall Zalău for this sociological study.

The scientific analysis has, as main objective, to investigate organizational effectiveness in Zalău City Hall, on the premise that "effective communication is of primary importance in any organization today, as it ensures the interaction of the information flows, management of organizational communication processes and the creation of an open and flexible communication system that benefits large-scale organizations." (Szukała, 2001, Zaremba, 2003; Tourish and Hargie, 2004; Eisenberg et al, 2009). (Blazenaite 2011). Our research sample includes 238 employess of the Zalău City Hall on whom we used several research methods (sociological survey, administered questionnaire, interview, sociological observation, Likert scale) with the purpose of investigating communication styles, skills assessment and professional behavior for analyzing internal processes and measuring the beneficiaries satisfaction.

Keywords: communication, communication styles, behavior and culture, organizational resource, internal processes, institutional effectiveness

1. Introduction

After the collapse of communism, the evolution of public organizations from Romania was conditioned by economic, demographic, social and political factors. The passage to the market economy, territorial reorganizations,

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expansionary migration, accession politics to the European Union etc., are some of the examples which contributed to the modeling of public organizations from central and local administration of Balkan countries. The political and economic interests oversized the administrations and configured the public organizations, in line with the contingence theories (Burns and Stalker), according to the nature of environment and strategies followed (Niță 2015, 289).

"The first beginnings of the analysis of organizations from public administration date from 17th century, the notion of "administration science" coming from 19th century and the field which subsumes it being more older" (Burlacu 1999, 20). The evolution of public administration concept evaluated like the theories about the public administration system, towards influences from various fields and new interpretations, in case of our countries the change of political regime imposing the assimilation of good practice models from administrative systems of Western states. The taking-up was beneficial, but adapted to the national socio-cultural specific, thus the performance of institutions from public administrative system and their efficiency integrated with difficulty the notion of fulfillment of citizens needs. (Niță 2015,290) "The passage to the new public management (NPM), appeared in 1980s, introduced a new business mentality in the field of public administration, for member states of OCDE", facilitating the reconstruction of Romanian public administration system, increasing its exigencies, but also its vulnerabilities". (Somerville 2011, 2).

The efficiency of organizations in current society depends on the interconnection of human, financial, material and technological resources, through the most important and valuable resource of 21st century, the communicational resource. In the globalization age, of permanent changes and challenges, the organizations are determined to rapidly adapt themselves. Illustrating a visual model of organizational communication system, Schmidt and Gardner (1995) conceptualize the variables which influence the organizational communication, introducing it in a larger context. The communication system is thus characterized through a communication climate which depends on the interpersonal skills and on the relationships between groups. (Blazenaite 2011, 85). Hereby, the intelligible communication is the solution for elaborating, keeping and developing organizational systems where the employees work in an integrate way in order to meet the strategic objectives, activating its skills and competences. The private system, characterized by flexibility and interest for evolution, answers to the organizational dynamics in a reasonable time, while the public system, described as a system resisting to change, needs specialized interventions in order to harmonize the expectations with the requirements.

Creating realities and relationships, before existing an exchange and sharing of significances, the communication is complementarized with the organization, determining not only the apparition of new structures, but also

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contributing to keeping and adapting the existing ones to the evolutional requirements of the environment. (Haines 2008, 8).

Depending on persons, content, expectations, and problems to be solved... (Mucchielli 2008, 19), communication represents the real challenge of Romanian organizations to fulfill their mission.

The coherent objectives of organizations from public administration are exclusively decrypted from the legislative point of view, without belonging to a culture with rules and customs, values and visions, principles and ideas, such as we find in case of performing private organizations. In a developed society, "the culture of an organization is based on a relatively broad space of opportunities and constraints, it being the one giving the attitudinal significance to the organization, in respect to the type of activity carried out, being at the base of its conception and projection and of its way of functioning." (Hoffman 2004, 109).

After the Romania's accession to the European Union, the unification of functioning standards of public services became a desideratum for which were allotted funds in order to model the mechanisms and to train the employees (public servants). It's incontestable the fact that the social morphing process of organizations from public administration affected all the individuals, directly or indirectly and proposed itself to be as efficient as possible in order to meet the people's needs and requirements.

Practically, the efficiency of an organization entirely depends on the quality of supplying its services (Peters and Waterson 2011), but public organizations from Romania haven't yet a clear understanding on the supplier role of public service to the beneficiary client, namely the citizen (Fountain, 2001).

In order to meet those interested in the optimal functionality of this system, implicitly the efficiency of those who make that the public administration system being performed, our theoretical analysis is doubled by a practical one, including the conclusions of a sociological research, whose main objective was represented by the investigation of organizational efficiency of the Zalău Municipality Town Hall, starting from the premise that "nowadays, an efficient communication is fundamental in any organization because it ensures the interaction of information flows, the management of organizational communication processes and also the creation of an opened and adaptable communication system, which brings organizational benefits on a large scale (Szukała, 2001, Zaremba, 2003; Tourish and Hargie, 2004;. Eisenberg et al, 2009)." (Blazenaite 2011, 84).

2. Organizational communication, resource of institutional efficiency. Case study: Zalău Municipality Town Hall

Sociological analysis was complex, aiming the investigation of the entire organizational system of the Town Hall from Zalău Municipality, from its systematic component, based on processes and relationships, until the analysis

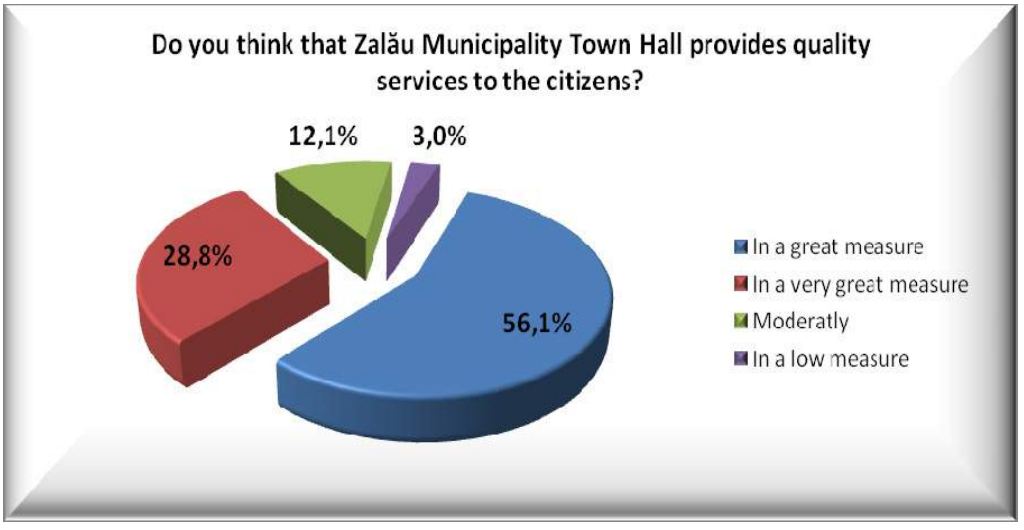
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of the main resource of this institution: human resource. Being supplier of services, Zalău Municipality Town Hall works through people, for people. The evaluation of its efficiency depends on the activity quality of the employees whose main purpose is that to correspondingly serve the beneficiaries request, since "the representatives of local administration analyze the problems of citizens and search to find optimal methods in order to solve them, entraining available financial resources." (Burlacu 1999, 107).

The sample of our research was composed of 238 employees of Zalău Municipality Town Hall, applying them a mix of methods (social investigation based on a managed survey, interview, sociological observation, Likert Scale) with the purpose to investigate the communication styles, to evaluate the skills and the professional behavior for the analysis of internal processes and to measure the fulfillment degree of beneficiaries.

For any organization, it's important to being able to measure the fulfillment degree of the customers in respect to the services rendered, the transparency and the opening to the real needs of citizens. The success of any organization depends on people and on the groups from outside it. The fulfillment of beneficiaries needs mandatorily passes through the skill to efficiently communicate with them. As the internal operational communication, the external communication is essential for the organization (Level and Galle 1998, 89).

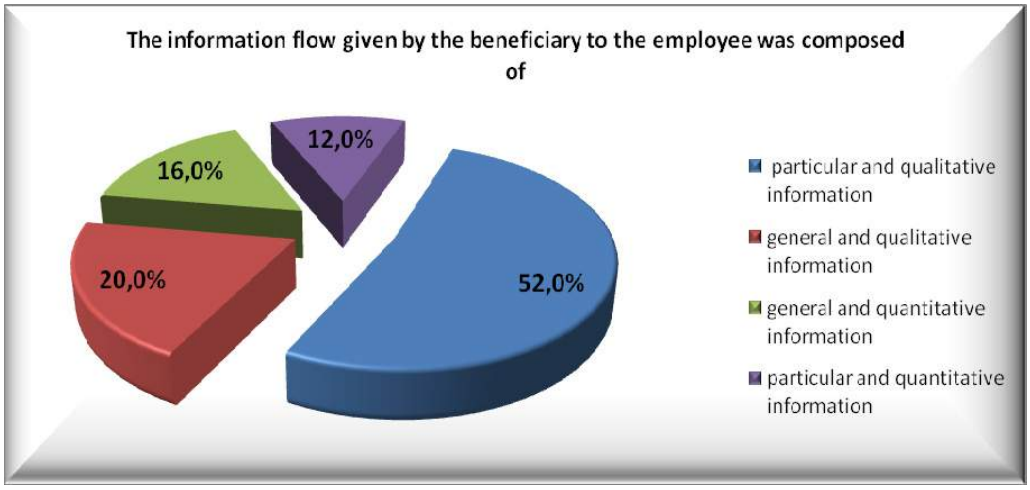
The aspects regarding the perception of the quality of services supplied were checked in a crossed way. This article displays sequentially the opinion expressed by the employees of the organization in respect to the quality of the activity, of the time and of the manner in which the requests are solved, of the way in which information is communicated, of methods used and also of the necessary skills of performance.



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84,9% of persons who answered consider that Zalău Municipality Town Hall provides high quality services to its beneficiaries, while 12,1% of the employees interviewed indicated *Moderately* variant. Herewith, 3% of the employees interviewed consider that the services provided by Zalău Municipality Town Hall are qualitative in a low measure.

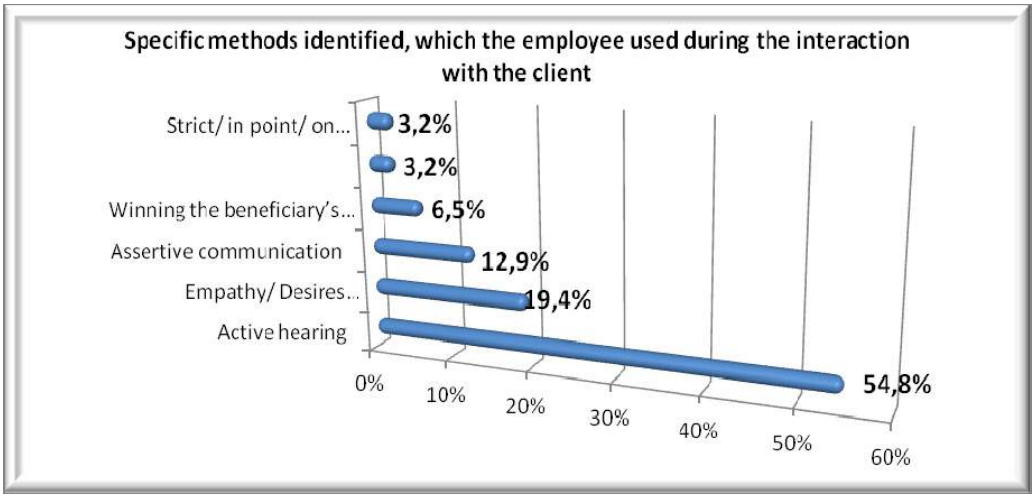
60% of the employees from Zalău town hall gave an answer which totally corresponds to the beneficiaries' needs, while 36% of the employees realized this thing only partially. Herewith, in 4 percentages of cases, the answers of public servants didn't correspond to the beneficiaries' expectations.



The information flow sent to beneficiaries shall be well moderated and orientated, because they can need different information, general or particular, quantitative or qualitative, which means that the information set transmitted by the employee shall be *personalized* depending on the beneficiary with whom he interacts.

With this in view, slightly over half of employees gave particular and qualitative information, while 20 percentages sent general and qualitative information. Herewith, 16% of employees had to use general quantitative information and 12% sent a particular and quantitative flow to the beneficiary.

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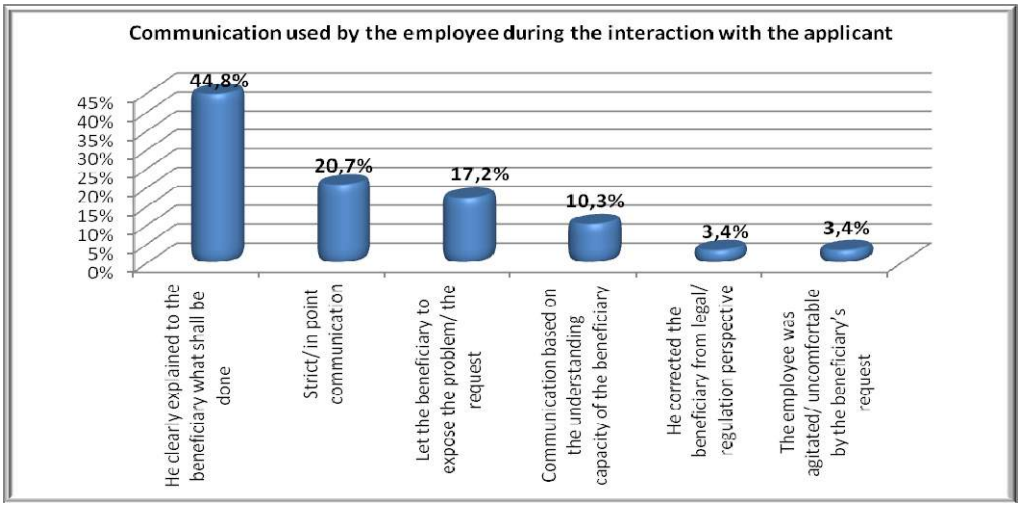


Within the interaction with beneficiaries, the employee can use a variety of methods, depending on various factors, such as: size of the problem, its emergency, features and education of citizen, his level of perception of information, etc.

Thus, 54,8% of the employees of Zalău Municipality Town Hall used the active hearing in the interaction with beneficiaries, while 19,4 percentages empathized with them and understood their problem. Herewith, 12,9% of employees used the assertive communication in their relationship with the beneficiaries. Hearing actively means adopting an understanding attitude, without interpreting, judging, accusing or criticizing the interlocutor or his idea. Moreover, the active hearing presupposes that above the interlocutor's reasoning and the related facts, the servant/ the employee shall understand the intellectual and affective meaning of these facts for the beneficiary.

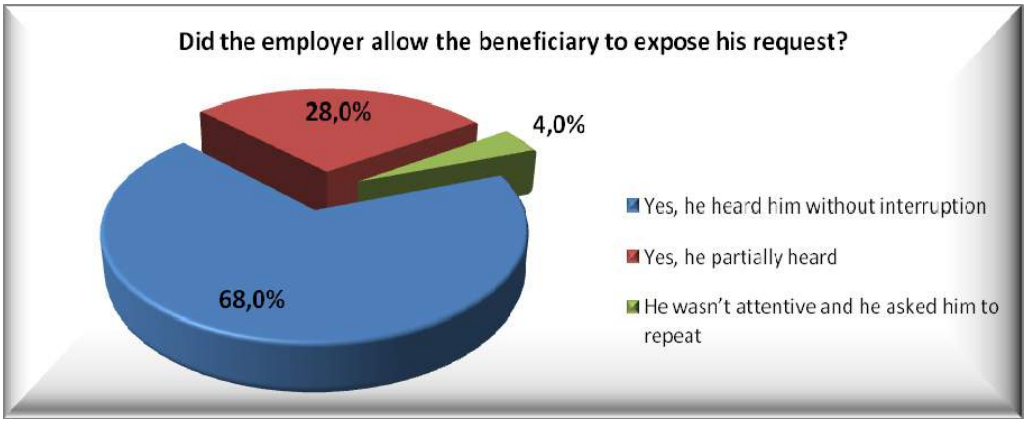
The empathy is the habit of recognizing and sharing the feelings expressed by another person, even if this person doesn't orally express it in full. Other methods identified in the communication process between the beneficiary and the employee were: *Winning the beneficiary's confidence* (6,5%), *explaining the problem solving method* (3,2%) and *strict/ in point communication* (3,2%).

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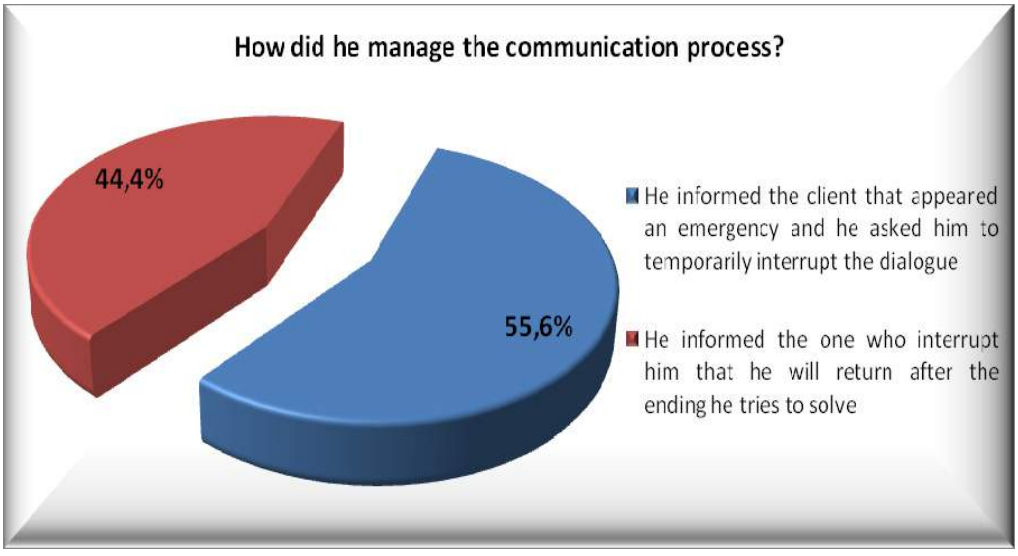
44,8% of the servants clearly explained to the beneficiaries the stages to be undertaken in order to solve the requests, while 20,7% used the simplest method, that of the strict in point communication.

Herewith, 17,2% of the employees used as main communication method that through which the beneficiary is allowed to leisurely explain the problems, clearly formulating his request. Other identified aspects of the communication were: *communication based on the understanding capacity of the beneficiary* (10,3%), *beneficiary's correction from legal/ regulation perspective* (3,4%) and *the fact that the employee was agitated/ uncomfortable by the beneficiary's request* (3,4%).

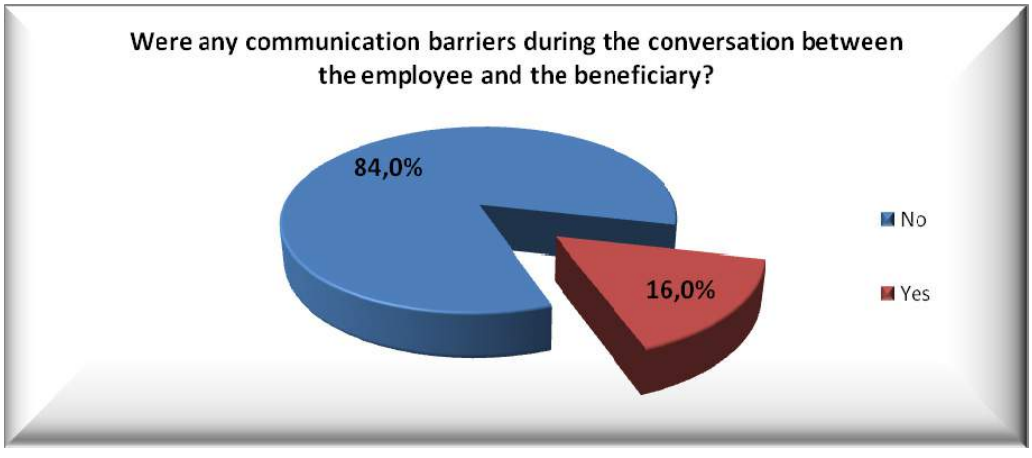


At the work place can appear various factors which interrupt the interaction between the servant and the beneficiary, either the phone, or a colleague, a subaltern or a superior. Thus, 32% of employees were interrupted during the interaction.

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The approach of such a situation depends in large measure on the balance between the two problems, that of the interlocutor and that appeared afterwards. With this in view, in 55,6% of cases, the servant informed the client that appeared an emergency and he asked him to temporarily interrupt the discussion, while 44,4 percentages of the employees informed the one who interrupted them that he will return after the solving of the request they try to solve.

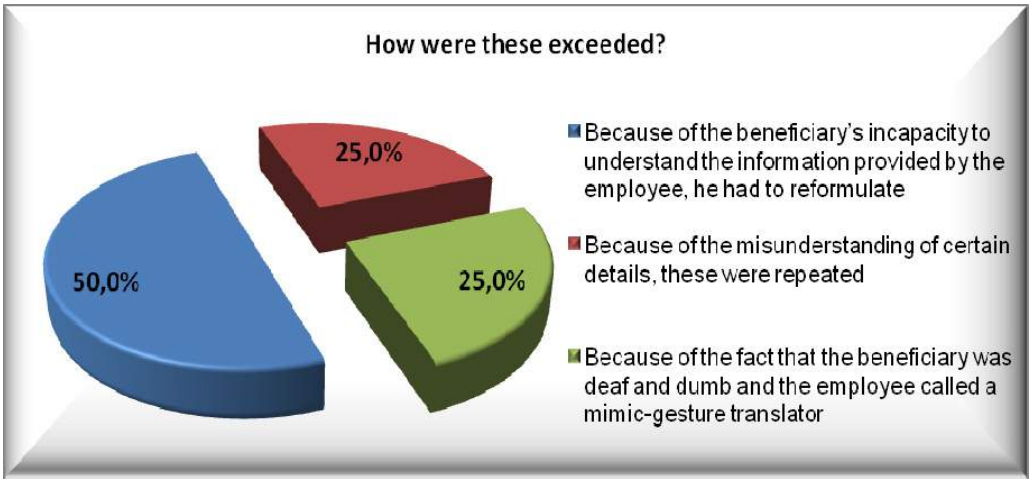


The communication isn't carried forward in a sterile environment, out of external factors, but contrarily, this takes place in an environment full of diverse influences, either natural, social, cultural, technical, etc.

It counts a lot that these barriers be rapidly exceeded for not reaching to the distortion of the conversation and to the apparition of frustration or awkwardness of interlocutors.

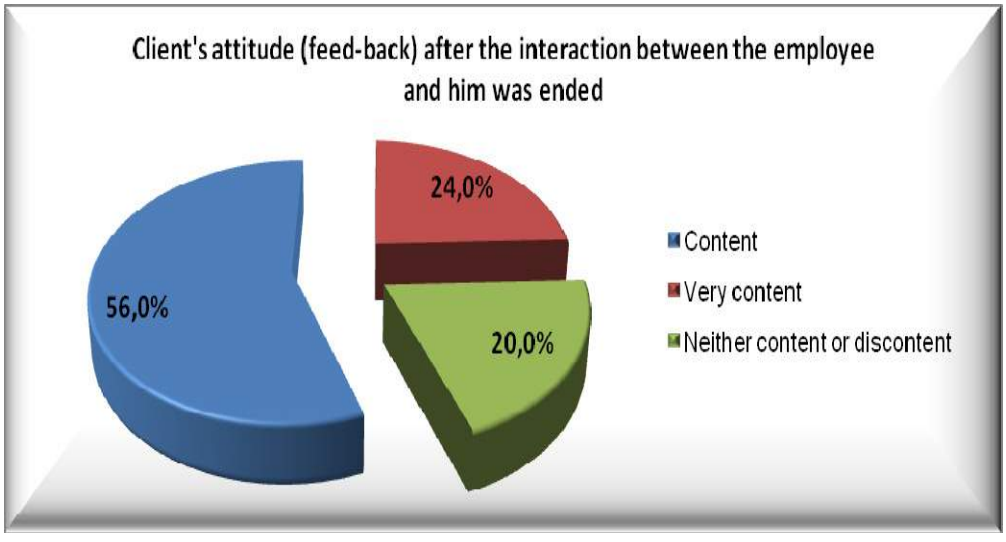
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The percentages of this study show us that communication barriers appeared in only 16% of cases noticed, while 84% if cases were normally developed, without the apparition of such impediments.



Communication barriers are factors which perturb the probability of a successful communication. In this case, half of sticking points in the interaction beneficiary-servant appeared because of the beneficiary's capacity to understand the information provided by the employee, the last one being obliged to find another expression formula.

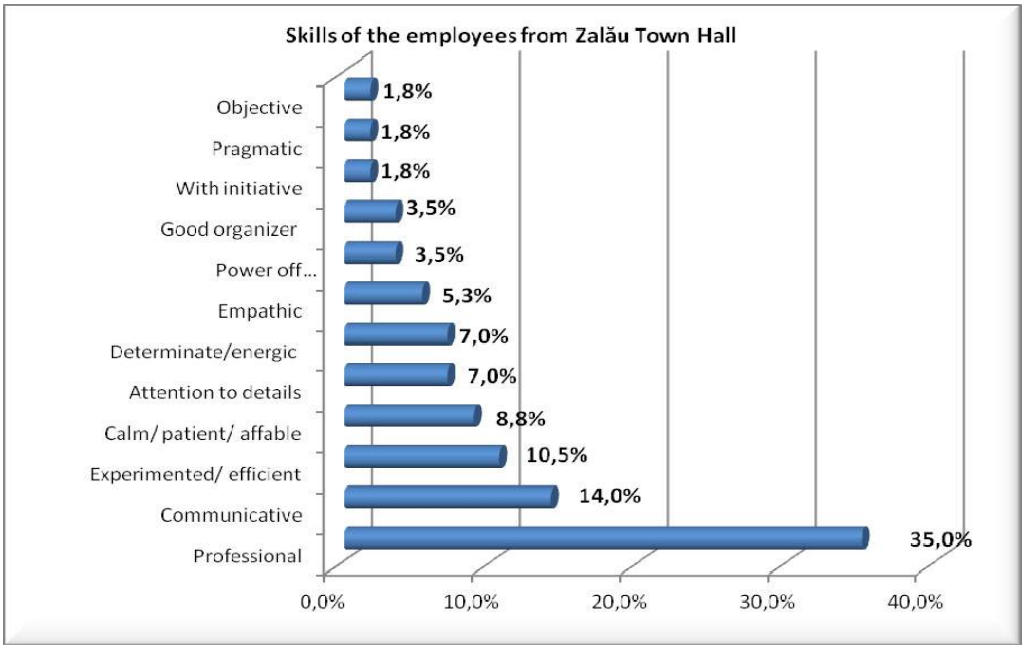
Herewith, the other half of cases due to the misunderstanding of certain technical/ specific details or because of the fact that the beneficiary was deaf and dumb, the employee of Zalău Municipality Town Hall acting in an effective way, by calling a mimic-gesture translator in order to facilitate the interaction.



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80% of beneficiaries of services provided by servants had a positive feedback, being content or very content for the treatment received within Zalău Town Hall. At the same time, 20% of clients weren't content or discontent.

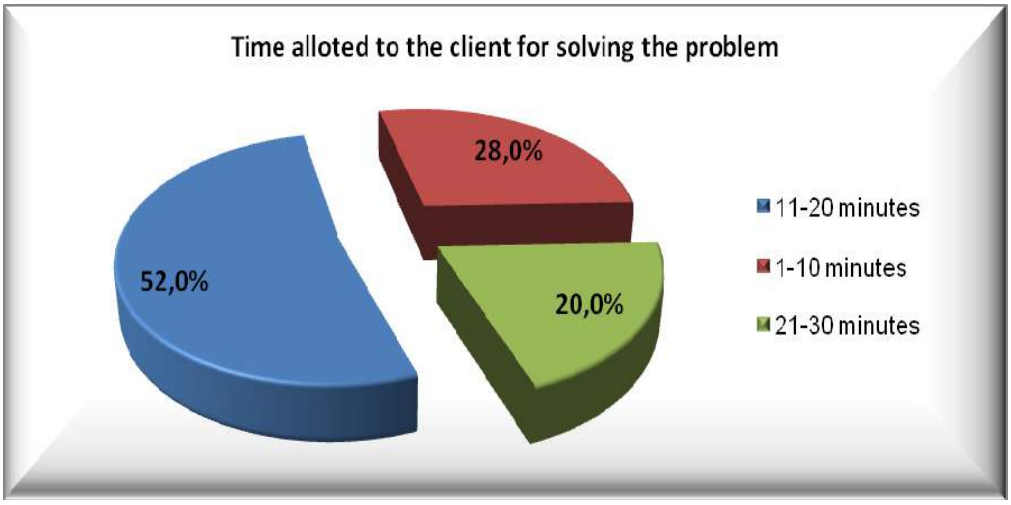
An employee "engaged in work is the one who has a strong desire to remain a member of the organization, is decided to make a superior effort for the benefit of the organization and he believes in the values and the purposes of the organization." (Hoffman 2004, 302)



Each day, at the work place, the strong points give to each person the opportunity to show what is better. The new challenges result from the importance of the development of individual skills or used within the work group. The skills of a person show a born or acquired part of his tangible and intangible personality under the direct control of the person.

Within the observations of the employees from Zalău Municipality Town Hall, the most often met attribute was that of professional (35%), followed by the capacity to communicate (14%) and by efficiency/ experience (10,5%). Herewith, other strong points of the employees are: *calm/ affable* (8,8%), *determined/ active* (7%), *attentive to details* (7%), *empathic* (5,3%), *good organizer* (3,5%), *understanding/ summarizing power* (3,5%), *objective* (1,8%), *pragmatic* (1,8%), *with initiative* (1,8%).

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The time allotted to each situation can vary from case to case and this thing depends on several factors, such as: problem complexity, work procedure to be adopted in the respective case, quality of communication between beneficiary and servant, etc. 52% of the employees of Zalău Municipality Town Hall analyzed interacted with the beneficiaries between 11 and 20 minutes, while 28% of the employees needed an interval between 1 and 10 minutes.

Herewith, 20% of the employees analyzed needed 21-30 minutes for the interaction with the citizen.

3. Conclusions

The analysis of communicational resource within Zalău Municipality Town Hall was submitted to the visionary filter of Hickson, shaped since 1973, in respect to the efficiency of organizational communication. The efficiency itself is intrinsically related to the functionality of "the communication system synonym with the organization itself", characterized by two components: adaptation (to changes from organization environment) and providing of services rendered by the organization. (Blazenaite 2011, 85)

Permanent improving concerns of services generally provided by Town Halls are obvious! Immediately after the Romania's accession to the European Union, in the National Development Plan was inserted the need to increase the quality of services and the continuous identification of solutions in order to adapt the Town Halls to the requirements of a performing European administration. One of the answers was given by the European Social Fund through the Operational Development Program of Administrative Capacity. Most of Town Halls became part of it and took clear methods for the rationalization of services, reorganizing its departments depending on the citizens needs and of administrative-territorial development, investing in the

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specialization and the improving of public servants, using advanced technology and learning the algorithm of organizational culture.

But, in public field, through his choices, the citizen is the one who determinates the nature of the offer, the organization and the responsibility of resort institutions, in their general orientations, determinates the general offer of giving (Rădulescu 2009, 212).

From these rations, the dual understanding of Blazenaite model of assuming the organizational system of communication (submitted to the influence of determinant factors) presupposes the unitary integration of an organizational culture, a correct and transparent managerial approach, mandatorily directed towards a social utility.

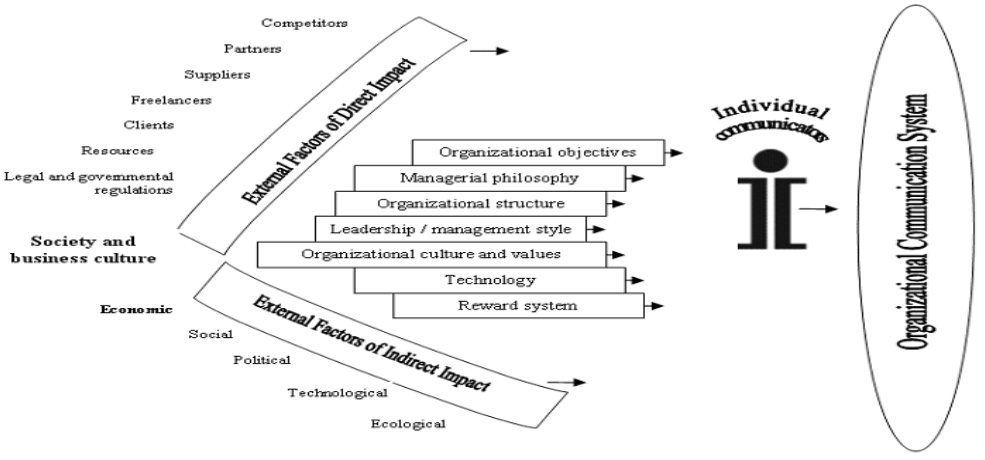


Figure no. 1- Determinants of the Organizational Communication System (Blazenaite 2011, 92)

The communication, under all its forms, is a factor which contributes to the establishment of an "organizational culture" through the exchanges of rules and values. (Hoffman 2004, 246). But, it's difficult to rule the set of values on which we can build the public communication, knowing that "the citizen in an ambivalent interlocutor – concomitantly attached to the public system.

The sociological analysis realized within Zalău Municipality Town Hall confirms the hypothesis of operationalization of organizational culture as a model for Romanian public administration. The diagnosis realized was the base of departmental reorganization, of managerial approach change, of improvement of public servants and of organizational motivation determination.

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