

THE ROLE OF THE PREVENTATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS' IMAGE

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Abstract: *The entire economic, political, and social Romanian environment is undergoing a process of quick transformation under the influence of some factors among which the most important are Romania's process of integration into EU structures, the globalization phenomenon, liberalization of new markets, or the constant process of privatization. If we consider 2007 as the year of Romania's integration into EU, the Romanian business environment faces an unprecedented challenge. In an extremely short period of only a few years, public services organizations, trading companies or non-profit organizations must be in line with the European legislation and standards, in one hand, and on the other hand, they must be very well prepared to face a direct competition with similar organizations within EU or powerful multinational corporations. This preparation covers conceiving adequate strategies, permanently perfecting management, promoting the concept of preventative management, improving human resources quality, up-dating companies' technological level. However, the economic performance in a volatile and very competitive environment is unconceivable without a good management of communication activities.*

Key words: *preventative management, risk, crisis*

1. Introduction. Preventative Management – the Concept

Even if a crisis cannot be precisely anticipated, companies must not passively wait for it, but they must have in view crises scenarios around which to settle their preventative strategy, especially under the form of contingency plan. This includes all actions undertaken by an organization in order to prevent negative events that may damage its image.

All measures concerning organization's preventative management may be set up into an ensemble under the form of security policy. The efficiency of a security policy firstly depends on the importance granted by the companies' leadership through all their actions. For example, if managers do not strictly apply all the measures proposed in internal documents, then the personnel will not take seriously the security policy, vigilance will be reduced, and chances that a catastrophe should happen increase.

Preventative management supposes a good coordination of all communication actions within an organization with the purpose of strengthening its image. A practical approach presupposes covering ten stages, as follows:

1. Initiating a project of image consolidation within an organization, respectively designating a manager for the preventative management sector, as well as a structure adequate to the manner of this process

administration. It is essential to ensure a support from an institution or experienced persons in this field.

2. Evaluating risks and their control. In this case, there will be an evaluation of the implications presupposed by the appearance of risks in the development of processes, as well as the determination of causes that lead to losses inside a system.

The manner in which risks are perceived differs from one organization to another, depending on experience, tradition, organizational culture, and tolerance to risk of each company.

The risk tolerance refers to the level of risk a company accepts, depending on potential benefits associated to risk and other factors. Normally, most of the companies manifest aversion to risk asymmetrical in comparison with perceived gains. A careful analysis and monitoring of the environment offer real possibilities to identify risks, determine those that must be approached with priority and the necessary resources for those measures. It is possible that a company runs a highly serious risk, but whose possibility of appearance is infinitesimal, therefore to have a middle level. On the other hand, minor risks may manifest often, and their cumulated effect be more serious.

3. The impact of the analysis over the process of activities functioning. During this stage, the identification of critical moments shall be

considered, as well as the determination of losses' impact on company's activities. An important part is played by the settling of each department's activities within the preventative management sector.

4. Developing a strategy of preventative management. During this stage, it is necessary to settle all critical moments and the strategies to prevent those short circuits and reduce afferent losses. Not least, the agreement between those strategies and the company's general policy must be checked.
5. Manner of operating in crisis situation. To optimize the strategy previously mentioned it is necessary that all team members applying crisis management should know exactly their responsibilities and the measures to apply.
6. The development and implementation of continuity solution of organizations' activities. Statistically, it has been ascertained that it is at this level that the most serious errors happen. This occurs due to the fact that, after identifying what caused crises and the measures to apply, it is ignored a possible appearance of a new dysfunction of activities.
7. Awareness and continuous improvement. During this stage, we start from the idea of permanent training of the team in charge with the management of crisis situations that may appear. It is obvious that the success of preventative management strategies cannot be ensured but in a close co-operation with the other departments of a company.
8. Maintenance and permanent application of continuity plans of an organization's activities. It is not sufficient to implement a strategy but to continuously improve it, preventing rather than diminishing damages that follow a dysfunction. All the improvements carried out to a strategy of preventative management must be in

agreement with the initial aim for which such a measure has been adopted.

9. Crisis coordination through public relations campaigns. One cannot always foresee a crisis and its effects. That is why an adequate strategy must also contain the manner of response to a crisis resulted from a dysfunction of one or more activities. This stage has in view the maintenance of a connection with the internal or/ and external communication media, the ensuring of a correct and objective informing in due time of those who are interested, as well as the ensuring of a proper support to overcome the crisis situation for human resources or implicated materials.
10. Coordination of overcoming crisis activities with those of the authorities in the field. In case of accessing secret information of a company, for example, one must take into account the law regarding the confidentiality of data, the legitimacy of using them in a common interest and the way of penalizing errors.

It is important for managers of an organization to be aware of the possibility of producing an image crisis and to be prepared to prevent and solve it. Famous cases of companies that have come across and survived crisis situations are an extra proof of the fact that the stronger the image is, the less it is affected by the crisis. Thus, what saved "Johnson & Johnson" company in the case of Tylenol was: the well-outlined image in the market, the previous preoccupations in the social responsibility field, the company's background, the exact management and the quality of its products. Practice has always proven that a preventative management is more efficient in such situations. This aspect is surprised also in the figure 1. The more prepared the company is, the bigger the chances to successfully face crises.

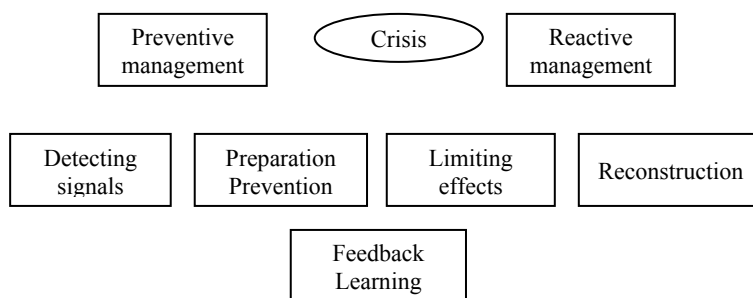


Figure 1 – Preventative management effects at the level of an organization in crisis

Source: Susanne Westphal – "Unternehmens Kommunikation in Krisenzeiten", Weinheim, Wiley, 2003, p. 153

2. Information the Management of the Organization's Image from the Perspective of Preventative Management

Image management presupposes concerted actions spread out into means that result from considering numerous aspects of an organization functioning: such an approach supposes problems administration through strategic options. But only conceiving strategies and, then, implementing them into ways to make possible eventual corrections or adapting measures to new situations are able to give coherence and perspective to actions in the field of the organization's image management. We have in view the ensemble of problems dimensions, including the image management of those who decide, organization products, and the position of the company in the fields it manifests itself.

During the difficult process of managing the image of an organization, it must be considered the fact that its prestige depends on more classes of images: its solvency, the brands under which it presents its products and services, credibility, honesty, and the competence of its leadership.

Approaching image problems through the perspective of preventative management favors the elaboration of strategies to manage them within the strategies of public relations that may satisfy demands of the type mentioned above.

Within the mentioned theoretical perspective, the organization image management implies at least:

- conception of images that may favor organization having in view its possibilities of functioning;
- systematic analysis of aspects implied in the constitution of monitored images for the identification of aspects that need support and of those which need corrective interventions;
- conception of constitution strategies and maintenance of images considered desirable;
- conception of programs to implement those images.

In order to have pertinent and efficient image strategies, a few types of activities are indispensable:

- identification and monitoring of much more sources of information that contribute to the constitution of organization's images;
- strategic options referring to images that need to be promoted in order to favor organization in its functioning, as well as in its relations with other organizations, especially with collaborators and potential beneficiaries of the company;
- evaluation of messages about the organization that target people consider credible;

- conception of ways of intervention for the organization, through the ensemble of its manifestations, not to generate messages that might harm its image, i.e. messages contrary to performed strategic options;
- identification and development of possibilities of improving the ways target people receive and process information about the beneficiary organization.

The mentioned premises are sufficient to highlight the complexity of problems and the nature of competences that are able to protect organization's image.

The problems of administrating an organization's images may be solved in two ways:

- either to appeal to a consulting company that may offer itself to administrate customers' images;
- or to form a department specialized in managing organization's public relations, also implying managing organizations' images.

The first may be but of conjuncture; it can be adopted when a particular situation arises, for example in a critical moment, and it is not able to produce a lasting administration because the aspects implied in image maintenance permanently modify themselves. There is also the danger that the consulting company will not be loyal to the beneficiary. We may conclude: periodical resorting to a consulting company may be less expensive than maintaining a team of specialists in the organization, but it cannot be more profitable if the solution is evaluated analyzing the relation between efficiency and costs.

In order that the problems of image management should receive solutions really advantageous for the organization, they need to be approached by a specialized team belonging to the organization in the wider context of public relations management and being connected to the problem of managing relations among people inside an organization.

We consider the mentioned aspects as sufficient to propose: managing organization's images must constitute a distinct and continuous objective of the integrating management and be solved through the specialization of a group inside the Department of public relations.

The practice in this field proves that the necessary investment to form a group able to manage organization's images is one of the most profitable. It is paid off as positive images and activities specific to "public relations management" will favor the types of relations organizations believe advantageous and will supply to those who decide useful data for the

improvement of processes involved in organizations' functioning.

In the present stage of the approach of the problems analyzed in Romanian organizations, when there are not very well outlined groups of specialists to function in theoretical horizons of performance, in order to accelerate positive processes and to avoid improvisations, we consider useful a competent consultancy.

Public Relations –an operative instrument of the preventative management

Starting from the statement of a specialist in the field "who does not help communication, who does not encourage public relations is not a winner, a leader in the true sense of the word... they will lose, sooner or later", we can easily recognize the valence and the power of this instrument. Practice has proven that public relations represent the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain the organization's prestige and mutual understanding between the company and its customers.

Also, Al Ries states in his works that public relations have unexpectedly become the most powerful discipline in the service of marketing. Furthermore, he attaches importance to advertising, but only as a mechanism to support brands and products already existing in the market and not to launch new other, the image of the latter being built more efficiently by public relations. If they are practiced cleverly and in a dignified manner, public relations are able to help the company work more efficiently in a turbulent environment with predominant crisis situations.

Public Relations – between the clichés of the present and the challenges of the future

Nowadays, only in multinational corporations, public relations have found their natural place in the structures of the organization, taking part in making decisions with media impact, managing the work climate, public image, hastening changes and organizations' adaptation to external environment.

An organization cannot live without communication. If they do not bring an event, an initiative, or a project to the attention of the public, then that event does not exist for the society. An organization that proposes to come out of anonymity must express itself public, making appeal to mass-media. In order to have success, all institutions and organizations want to develop themselves, to establish objectives for whose fulfillment they try to build a certain image.

The activity of internal informing tends more and more to become a priority of the leadership and

not a secondary action. Restructuring and resizing, changing activity fields, shortage of personnel, mutations in the economic and social sphere with implications in the institution's activity bring about deep changes within the personnel.

For people who are not informed, changes mean uncertainty, difficulties of adaptation, lowering of the interest to build a carrier. The public relations manager should not overlook that the personnel who are correctly informed, motivated and attached to the company's values allow organizations to fulfill their goals, they develop a healthy work environment, strengthen cohesion and team spirit, personnel's moral, which reduces the risk of appearance of undesirable events, that can become crises.

3. Conclusions

For any organization, image can be strengthened by the definition and implementation of a constant communication strategy on a long term. They must become more aware of the potential represented by the image attribute, as a direct factor to influence all entities with which they interact – public, press, companies, and financing institutions. A good image, a planned communication ensure credibility and transparency – essential values when it comes to raise funds. Also, the Romanian business environment must understand the true dimension and the role of the public relations agent, as a specialized structure in the process of organizations' image management.

There are also three matters that Romanian organizations must continue improving:

- communication between them in view of efforts concerted on common projects;
- practicing a preventative management that will give them more chances to maintain themselves and to succeed in the market, more credibility and transparency in the work with the public;
- a wider exposure of the extraordinary achievements they possess.

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