ORGANIZATION-IMAGE-PUBLIC. CASE STUDY: THE CLUJ-NAPOCA CITY HALL

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Abstract: This section of the research, part of my PhD thesis, represents an attempt at clarifying the manner in which relations are initiated, constructed and nurtured between an organization and its publics, through the exploration of the connections between the employee-organization, employee-public and organization-public nexus.
These three relational dimensions represent key-concepts of the research.

Keywords: relational theory, organization, public relations, image

Introduction

The relations between an organization and its publics represent a central preoccupation for the public relations practice and research. A couple of renown professors, from the public relation field, tried developing a couple of relevant measurements for the public relations between the organization and public and came across indicators like trust, mutual control, commitment, satisfaction, which can measure the quality of these relations[1].

Given the fact there were references made to the "organization-public relation" idiom, it is necessary to define this concept. Ledingham and Bruning describe this organization-public relation as being "the state which exists between organization and its target audiences, in which the actions of each party produce an impact on the well-being of the economic, social, political and/ or cultural state of the other parties involved." (Ledingham and Bruning, 1999, p. 62)

Research design

The literature points out the fact that most of the relation evaluations focus on the perceptions of one or both parties, on the relation between them. Being able to put one's trust on a common ground means observing a phenomenon, like the perceptions over the relations, more than once and in various ways, and having similar findings from these different measures. Practically, this means that if you ask different questions, in order to measure the same relation indicators, the answers shall be mostly correlated. For instance, the respondents will provide similar answers for the questions which link.

Taking into consideration the fact that the aim is carrying forth the way the citizens of Cluj-Napoca, included in this study, perceive their relationship with the City Hall, the research questions which set the starting point are the following:

Q1: How do the respondents perceive their relationship with the Cluj-Napoca City Hall?

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[1] Between 1997 and 1999, the Institute for Public Relations, from the United States of America, published a series of three guides which served at offering an orientation and several suggestions regarding the best way of evaluating the relations between an organization and its publics. These suggestions were made based on the findings of a research team formed of renown professors from the public relations area. The guides can be consulted at the following address http://www.instituteforpr.org.

Q2: Which are the most important elements in evaluating the relations between the City Hall and the citizens?

Q3: From the respondents' point of view, how is a mutually beneficial relationship characterized?

The convenience sampling was almost exclusively formed of Cluj-Napoca town citizens. A number of 140 people were part of it.

The applied survey is composed of 29 affirmations through which the respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement, on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents total agreement and 5 total disagreement. These affirmations are tied to the respondents' perceptions over the relation indicators: mutual control, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relation, mutual relation.

We emphasize the fact that by choosing a single case study, one accentuates the generality. What we will try to do is create a detailed examination of certain actions and events, which we believe that expose the functionality of some theoretical principles.

Hon and Grunig discovered, through their research, that the results of long-lasting relations between the organizations and their publics can be best measured through a focus on six extremely precise elements or dimensions (components) of the relations and these six dimensions are the ones we included in the survey. For each of these, the researchers offered a list of six elements (variables). (Hon and Grunig, 1999, p. 105)

In the upcoming paragraphs we will be presenting the six dimensions explained and the list of elements for each one of them, in the same manner they appear in the survey:

The *trust* dimension – it represents the degree of trust and the willingness of a party to be open toward another. The trust has three components: *integrity* – the assurance that an organization is fair and equitable; *dependability* - the assurance that an organization will do what it says it will do; *competency* – the belief that an organization has the capacity of doing what it states it does.

The dimension of *mutual control* – it represents the measure through which the involved parties are entitled to influence the others. Although some kind of imbalance represents the normal state, stable relations require that both organizations and publics have some sort of control over the alterity.

The dimension of *commitment* – represents gauging the level through which each party believes and feels that the relation deserves the energy consumption, in order to maintain it and promote it.

The dimension of *satisfaction* – it measures how favorable the relationship is between various parties, given the fact the positive expectations regarding the relation are strengthened.

The dimension of *mutual relationship* – in a mutual relationship, both parties bring benefits one to another, because they are interested in their well-being, even when there are no benefits to exchange.

The dimension of *exchange relationship* – in an exchange relationship, a party brings benefits to the other, only because it brought benefits in the past or it is expected to bring some in the future.

All statistical tests were conducted using SPSS 17.

Empirical results

After the completion of the survey, I reversed the negative indicators of each dimension and drew out an average of all the elements' answers which measure the results of the relations, so that the general means of the scores could be calculated.

The factor analysis was used in the research, in order to underline latent relations for a big number of variables. This analysis helps in summarizing the information in a smaller set of factors or components. In our study we aim at identifying structures of powerful correlations between variables.

Regarding the sampling size and its appropriateness for the factor analysis, we specify the fact that the sampling is formed of 140 respondents, which represents, according to the literature, an adequate size for the factor analysis.

We used the factor rotation procedure, known under the name of VARIMAX, because this centers on simplifying the factors' matrix shafts. Varimax offers a clearer separation of the factors.

When interpreting the factors' matrix, in order to identify the significant containment for each variable, we will look at each variable of the first factor, in the search of the most consistent containment. The factorial solutions are not always determined by a single variable, in such a manner that, after we emphasize most of the variable's content, we continue to evaluate the factor according to the variables with the next containment in dimension.

We mention that the difficulty in this part of the analysis is tied to defining the factor formed of several variables which represent separate concepts, under the umbrella of the same variable.

We shall further on explain the mean through which we made per se the analysis of the survey contained dimensions. We examined the factor matrix of the containment, more exactly the matrix with the containment for each variable of a factor and we identified the significant containment for each variable.

For the forecast of the commonalities of the variables, we examined the common traits of the variables, which represent the factor variant for each variable aside. We looked afterwards at the commonalities, to determine if the variables have an acceptable degree of explanation and we identified those variables with a threshold higher than 0.50, these having an explanatory value.

After obtaining an acceptable solution for the factors, in which all the variables have a significant containment in a factor, we tried assigning a significance to the factors' containment. The variables with higher content are considered to be more important and have a broader influence in determining the name of that factor. We named the factor, putting the emphasis on those variables which have a higher containment.

The next step in our analysis was verifying whether we used a valid scale. After assuring that the scale is compliant with the conceptual definitions, that it is unidimensional and meets the necessary fidelity standard, we tested the validity of the scale. The validity represents the measure through which a scale or a set of measures accurately represent the described concepts.

Conclusions and discussion

We mention, once more, that the sampling used is not representative for the whole population of the Cluj-Napoca city, therefore the presented results refer only to the 140 citizens from the sample. But, we dare to say that the results are logical and may coincide with the results obtained from a similar research, but with simple, random sampling.

In terms of perceptions over a mutually beneficial relationship, the citizens see as beneficial a relationship between them and the City Hall, if the institution is preoccupied with their well-being and wishes to help them. We could say the City Hall's concern for the well-being of its citizens can incarnate in this interchangeable advantage, because the prosperity of

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the community determines also the prosperity of the public institution which administrates this community.

The creation of the frequencies showed us, in an unsurprising manner, that the respondents perceive the City Hall as being a somewhat selfish organization which helps the citizens because it craves for something in return. We say this is not baffling at all, because we talk about a public institution which collects tolls, excise taxes and whose managers desire elective support from the community.

If we refer to the important elements in evaluating the relations between the City Hall and citizens, we can say the citizens consider that the City Hall shows its concern towards them when it makes decisions, by taking their opinions into account.

Regarding the trust issue, the provided results indicated that in order to consider the Cluj-Napoca City Hall as being a trustful organization, the citizens must, first of all, perceive it as being fair and just.

An interesting finding was bound to the idea of organizational success, which, concerning the Cluj-Napoca City Hall, it is tied to fulfilling promises, fairness, and the interest developed for the citizens. This perception over the success of a public organization, like the Cluj-Napoca City Hall, is interesting because we understand the different manner in which the success of a public institution is perceived, in contrast with a private one. We have seen that fulfilling the promises, fairness, and the interest toward the citizen define a successful organization, when we talk about the City Hall. And we may think that elements such as capitalization and visibility could define the success of a private organization.

Making a reference to the communication process between the City Hall and the citizens, the findings indicated that, from the citizens' point of view, in order to discuss about a relation in which each party has something to say, the City Hall must not impose its authority in a puissant manner.

The satisfaction toward the City Hall is given by the citizens' contentment level and the importance they give to their relationship with the City Hall. The positive expectations regarding the relationship between citizens and City Hall are strengthened, which leads to favorable opinions.

In literature we find the definition of a satisfying relationship as being that in which the benefits surpass the costs. Starting from this idea, we could say the citizens feel satisfied with the relationship with City Hall, when the money they give for tolls and local excise taxes are invested in palpable services, on behalf of the City Hall (putting asphalt on the streets, developing the city etc), which determines a feeling of contentment among citizens.

One important conclusion which can be drawn from the findings' correlation interpretation of the factors is that, if the City Hall will offer its citizens the opportunity of participating in making important decisions which might affect them, the citizens will feel that the organization does not try to take advantage of them. They will be satisfied and will appreciate their relationship with the City Hall, compared to those with other institutions.

Looking at the way the citizens from the sample regard their relationship with the Cluj-Napoca City Hall, we might say they consider themselves satisfied with their connection, should they be treated fair, should their opinions matter and should the City Hall keep its promises toward them. This feeling of gratitude determines, on the long run, a growth in the loyalty toward the City Hall.

The six dimensions, to which we referred from the beginning of our research, should show us the strong and weak point of the City Hall-citizens relationship, but we notice that each of the six dimensions matter in an almost equal manner in the perception of the relationship quality between the citizens and the City Hall. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: The main averages of the factors of each dimension
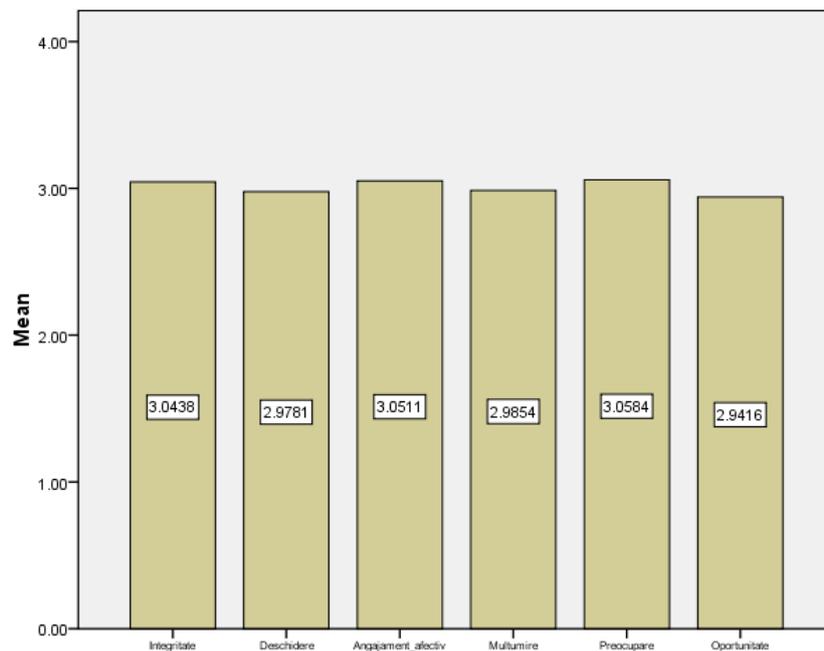
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