



The Use of New Technologies in Crisis Communication within School Organizations

Cornelia Tureac¹, Lidia Stanciu², Manuela Panaitescu³, Cristian Macovei⁴

Abstract: Living in an era where new technologies govern our entire activity, it goes without saying that managers of educational institutions must rethink the ways of approaching crises that can affect the organizations they lead. Rethinking communication in such situations will certainly be different from the “classic” methods recommended by the supporters of traditional approaches. Communication in the online environment is vital for any organization or person who wants to stay at the top, to be successful, to promote their services, offers, and image as well as possible.

Keywords: Communication; crisis; online technologies; organizations; education

1. Introduction

Through the Internet, any natural person can maintain permanent contact with all the people interested in his field of activity, in the promoted products or brands. The online environment is the ideal way through which messages and information reach the target audience, communication being essential for the development of an

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of Behavioural and Applied Sciences, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati, Romania, Tel.+40372361102, Fax. +40372361290, E-mail: tureaccornelia@univ-danubius.ro.

² Associate Professor, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, E-mail: lidiastanciu@univ-danubius.ro.

³ Senior Lecturer, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati, Romania, Tel.+40372361102, Fax. +40372361290, Corresponding author: manuelapanaitescu@univ-danubius.ro.

⁴ Assistant Professor, PhD, Danubius University of Galati, Romania, Address: 3 Galati Blvd., Galati 800654, Romania, Corresponding author: cristianmacovei@univ-danubius.ro.

organization and strengthening its image. A constant, fair, and professional relationship with users interested in the organization can only bring benefits, communication with them ultimately reflecting on the organization's image. Many make a mistake, considering that their presence in the online environment is enough, without other steps that aim at ensuring the consolidation and development of their image. Revolutionary technologies certainly have a great advantage - they allow early simultaneous warning of several categories of public or institutions that would have an important role in preventing and solving the crisis or could be affected in any way by the crisis in the educational organization. An important component of proactive management, this increased chance of early warning must be practiced by any educational organization that is aware of the risks that may affect its activity. Another advantage of new technologies is obtaining fast, permanent, and consistent feedback about the success or failure of the organization's actions, the attitude of the target audience, the attitude of public opinion, etc.

2. Research Method

The developed research method initially identified the relevant data sources in communication through IT techniques, the time frame, and the key teaching and learning points. The use of these technologies is, however, closely related to the existence and availability of quite sophisticated technical means and resources, therefore in crises caused by certain natural factors (earthquakes, large-scale fires, storms, etc.) there is a fairly high probability that these means and resources cannot be used. Consequently, when the plan for crises is drawn up, alternative communication solutions must be provided, solutions that do not depend so much on technological resources.

3. The Case Study

The central part of our research is the achievement of effective online communication that often involves a bilateral exchange of replies, regardless of whether these are simple appreciations, comments, or answers, good or bad for the organization. In this way, in addition to the fact that the Internet user shows a constant interest in the organization, you also have the opportunity to discover his opinions about the organization (with strong points or against), about the promoted

services, about the image and the way you are perceived, an ideal and free way through which you can change your strategies, adapting them and aligning with market trends. Maintaining contact with users is also important in web communication, as they appreciate periodic messages with concise, well-structured content. Online communication can be made more efficient by:

- Strategic planning - If multi-channel communication is chosen, online communication must be adapted for each used medium (detailed articles with more elaborate content are recommended on a blog, while on social networks is preferably a short, well-structured, and elaborated message, which leads to a possible website). Special attention is paid to the frequency of the messages, these being drafted especially for the intended target audience.
- As transparent, open communication as possible - Forums and impactful, active blogs with a large number of views are recommended. In addition, any comment, question, or request should be answered as soon as possible, in appropriate terms.
- Social media monitoring - Online communication media are a good benchmark for the positioning of an organization, the main search engines allowing us to periodically check the effectiveness or inefficiency of online communication. It is preferable that before any more important online communication, we have all the necessary information regarding the market trend and preferences in the field of activity, a permanent contact with customers offering us real support in this regard.
- The efficiency and importance of the message communicated online - Long messages, devoid of substance and information, distract the internet user who gets bored and directs his attention to other more relevant, more attractive things. That is precisely why it is ideal for the information distributed in the online environment to be well structured, to have an emotional layer, and to impress the users, who will focus their attention and retain exactly what they want.
- Constant communication - Communication in the online environment must be periodic, the user must be kept up to date with new information of interest to him. Every web user can be a potential client if he subscribed to the newsletter, if he signed up on the organization's website, or in the group on a social network, provided that his interest is kept awake, through specific, carefully elaborated messages.

In this context, it is necessary to mention the fact that the educational unit constantly benefits from the advantages conferred by the new communication technologies, listing only:

a) The use of electronic mail has become indispensable not only for internal communication but especially for communication between the educational organization and the various categories of the external public. The exchange of messages, which is constantly carried out through this means of communication, facilitates increased interactivity both during the periods of normality of the educational organization (respectively pre-crisis and post-crisis) and during the evolution of the actual crises. School e-mail addresses are used for this purpose. This method of communication has the advantage of engaging, simultaneously, several subjects; the electronic mail can provide a whole series of valuable information dedicated to the detection of signals of a potential crisis (including worries, dissatisfactions, concerns, conflicting states, etc.), particularly important in the framework of actions to prevent a crisis, but also during its triggering. During the entire period of a possible crisis within the organization, electronic mail succeeds in facilitating communication between the people who are directly involved in the complex process dedicated to managing the situation, as well as communication with the mass media, knowing the importance this represents, as well as the impact of quick answers it has on journalists on the questions asked, as well as the various information, requested clarifications. In this way, all members of the educational organization, as well as the external public, have the opportunity to benefit from the constant flow of information, which proves to be vital for the morale of human resources and the stability of the organization, in the event of a crisis.

b) Discussion groups, which include directors, as well as teaching staff who are part of the same department or curricular area group and who communicate - on a well-defined topic - via e-mail. It is worth mentioning that the messages are accessible only to the members of the group, in this way, communication is carried out between teachers of the same specialty or specialties from the same curricular area, without imposing periodic meetings of the group members, which sometimes could imply also interruptions of the activity, with all its consequences. It is necessary to specify the importance that these discussions represent in the pre-crisis stage, the opinions of some members focusing on the subjects that constitute the center of our organization's attention. Also, during the unfolding of the crisis, using the messages posted inside these groups, unmediated communication is achieved between the School and its internal audience. In addition, it is particularly useful for the managers of the organization to check the messages distributed among the members of these groups, in this way, the presence of a possible threat

to the reputation of the educational organization can be estimated, in parallel with the achievement of a quantification regarding the way of perception of the members of the school organization, about the respective crisis.

c) Social media - the Facebook social network facilitates an instant and complex transmission of all the information distributed to the group members, as well as to the fans of the official page of the school organization. In the pre-crisis period, social media turns into an inexhaustible source of communication, through which possible warning signals of the potential crisis can be identified in real-time, as well as internal dissatisfactions or misunderstandings. In the stage of the actual crisis, through the official page of the School, but also on the social media community, all messages can be transmitted without limit, through which it is possible not only to flatten/resolve/diminish the crisis but also to fade its potential effects, with triggering the consolidation/restoration of the organization's image, more or less affected by this crisis. In the post-crisis stage, social media is aimed at transmitting messages dedicated to the restoration of the normal climate specific to the school organization, with all the mentions, suggestions, and recommendations of the members and fans of the official page and implicitly of the community. It should be noted that the official Facebook page, as well as the community specially dedicated to the school organization, is handled by a member of the Board of Directors, who also fulfills the role of spokesperson.

d) The School's web page, specially designed not only for the presentation of our school organization but also for the distribution of newsletters, in their content aiming at the mediatization of our educational unit, the presentation of the special results obtained by students and/or teaching staff, the presentation of various projects in which the organization is involved or which it implements, making public announcements, etc. Considered to be an effective formula within the communication strategy developed by the School's specialists; the design and distribution of newsletters aims not only at consolidating and improving the school organization but also to raise awareness among the public that our organization needs or is interested in. The menu of the web page also includes an Archive section, where those interested can consult at any time all the information previously made public and subsequently archived.

e) Multimedia press releases are the best communication solution, preferred to traditional communication, especially in the context of inserting into their content not only text (which can sometimes tire or bore the recipient), but also representative images or sound, in this way succeeding in printing a special quality

to the message that is to be transmitted. Multimedia communications prove to be particularly attractive for mass media, especially for online media, in the context where their content includes text, images, animations, and sound.

f) Mobile communications - the WhatsApp group that manages to include the entire staff of the school organization, in this way giving them all the opportunity to keep in touch with their colleagues, at any time. In the event of a crisis, communication can be effectively ensured through this technological facility, the mobile phone turning into the bridge through which optimal cooperation is ensured between all the people involved in crisis management.

It is noted that several types of crises can be noted within various organizations, namely development crises, internal crises, communication crises, media crises, but also zonal crises. The magnitude of the various events or problems triggering these crises within organizations can be a special one, reaching a dark point for the entire duration of the crisis and all the activities that are carried out at the global level by the respective organization involved. A primary role in the management of the organizational crisis belongs to communication with the mass media, effective communication can ease not only the crisis itself, but also considerably improve the image of the organization involved, both during the crisis and after its completion.

Communication in an organizational crisis is considered by many specialists to be the more challenging form of communication at the same time, and this is because in such a crisis information is quite scarce, reaction time is limited, and stress and tension can sometimes reach alarming levels. Crisis communication has the role of reducing the negative effects not only at the level of the organization, but also at the level of the public of interest, in parallel with maintaining or even improving the image of the organization involved; it generally includes an assessment of newly emerging risks, communication planning, appropriate responses to the actions triggering the crisis, but also their reactions, as well as informing the general public as the events unfold. In the case of organizational crises, communication is practically inevitable, it takes place continuously, throughout the events, as well as after their completion, to consolidate the image and elucidate all aspects of public interest. Most of the time this type of communication involves various power relations between the dialogue partners, the first to start the communication taking over the advantage most of the time. Communication, however, also depends on the way the reaction is conceived, on its timing, and the perception it manages to impress on the public. During communication in such a

crisis, the dialogue partners try to impose or balance their positions, each permanently adjusting both their behavior and the way of reaction depending on the actions of the other.

Communication in crises has various strategies in mind which are elaborated either step by step (following a previously established plan for such situations), or on the go, the main purpose being to maintain or regain control over the situation, to provide the most accurate and timely information to the mass media, but also to elaborate and sharing appropriate messages with the public. Effective and prompt communication with the mass media has a vital role in preventing the provision of erroneous information and in controlling rumors that can sometimes aggravate an organizational crisis, increasing the pressure on the public. Also, very important in the case of communication in crises is the designation of the person who is going to interact with the mass media, his credibility, function, and image also have a decisive role in the positive resolution of a tense situation. In the case of a crisis, the duration of communications, the authority but also the authenticity of the communication sources, the communication distribution channels, the interest shown by public opinion, but also the impact of the information on the target audience are very important. Also, communication increases in effectiveness and efficiency depending on the accuracy and precision of the messages communicated through the media or official channels, with official speeches having the greatest impact on the domestic public and international public opinion.

The most serious crises are those generated by unforeseen events, the interest of the media and of public opinion becoming maximum in just a few moments after the announcement of the event and imposing maximum pressure on those responsible for communication in such situations. Communication in organizational crises can be very stressful and cumbersome, especially in the first hours after its initiation, but also after completion, when numerous explanations, clarifications, and answers to not-very-comfortable questions are requested most of the time. Ideal communication in such situations requires both the dissemination of correct and free information (quite difficult in the first phases of the rising crisis), as well as omitting or hiding as diplomatically as possible vital information for the security of the respective organization, information that, if it were to become known to public opinion, would increase or develop states of chaos, tension, fear, or confusion.

Many times, however, hiding some information can generate the phenomenon of triggering rumors, which can spread and develop negatively very quickly, particularly damaging the organization. Both the mass media and public opinion

risk becoming suspicious when they suspect that certain information (vital or not) is not provided to them or is hidden by the authorities, the effect being later felt by them in the lack of credibility, in various accusations (founded or not), but also in the deterioration of the image. Not infrequently, in crises, those responsible for communication can make a serious mistake, either by rushing to provide insufficiently verified information or by answering inappropriately to journalists' questions. Also, communication in the online environment is vital for any organization involved in a crisis, through the Internet the communication between a company and any natural person is carried out in the simplest and fastest way, as they can always be up to date with the latest news, information of interest.

The online environment is the ideal way through which messages and information reach the target audience, communication being essential not only for the development of an organization but especially for maintaining and strengthening its image. Effective online communication often involves a bilateral exchange of replies, regardless of whether these are simple appreciations, comments, or answers, good or bad for the respective organization. In this way, in addition to the fact that the Internet user shows a constant interest in the organization, this possibility also discovers the user's opinions about the organization (with strong points or the opposite), about the image and the promoted services, about how the organization is perceived, an ideal and free way by which the organization can change its strategies, adapting them and aligning with market trends.

4. Conclusions

It is well known that within the current Romanian education, the systems dedicated to ensuring the quality of education, as well as its specific procedures, do not represent "a plus", a "parallelism", concerning the systems and procedures through which the operation of a certain educational institution is ensured, respectively its development, but these are integral parts. In the situation where, deliberately, and consciously, both the functionality of an educational institution and the institutional development are put under the sign of quality, it is noted that the functioning/development systems and the functioning/development procedures are transformed into systems, respectively education quality assurance procedures. The development of the quality of education must be transformed based on the complex planning/design process that is carried out at the level of each educational institution, its development cycle is also considered as the quality cycle, using IT

methods and techniques. In this context, a special importance is granted to the communication process within any educational organization by achieving new educational strategies, which are constantly influenced by computer programs appropriate to educational requirements; the system dedicated to the constant improvement of the level of quality in education is directly dependent on the way the current activities are carried out within the institution (with the achievement of a permanent evaluation of the educational quality, to succeed in preventing the emergence of potential major dysfunctions, in parallel with the specification of the strong points and weak points noticed in the previous activities). For the various groups that are considered significant of interest - all the results of the various actions are brought to the knowledge of students, teachers, and managers, as well as to the knowledge of the community, in this way, they can analyze the "investment" (not only the financial one) and determine the achievement or not of the pursued objectives. In addition, the revision of the educational policies and strategies related to the educational institution is required, followed by their optimization, so that they can ideally serve the assumed mission. In addition to these, it is required that the education quality assessment system can provide various definite data regarding the extent of the changes that have been made, if the changes were only superficial, i.e. made through conformity, imitation, as well as if the changes have been deep, having the capacity to affect sustainably and concretely both the organizational culture and the totality of the activities that take place at the level of the educational institution. Respectively, this system for evaluating the quality of education must be built in such a way that it ensures objectivity (formal construction), but also subjectivity, in this way, it avoids triggering potential reactions of non-conformity or "doublethink" type reactions. In such situations, an external evaluation is not enough, it must be supplemented (sometimes replaced) with self-evaluation.

The application of various self-evaluation tools must ensure the best possible involvement of these previously mentioned groups at the level of the entire self-evaluation process, in all its phases noting the essential role held by the director of the educational institution, as of educational leader. At the level of any educational institution, the development process is carried out only by having the special project drawn up in this sense, the Institutional Development Project, considering the implementation of various changes at the level of the educational institution, without including the programs, as the various activities that consider a normal functioning of the institution, as well as the way it respects the various legislative provisions. It can be appreciated that the development of the quality of education,

related to the mission of the educational institution, represents the progress achieved in the manifestation of various fundamental values of the educational institution, the progress in the field of achieving a common vision in the field of education, a vision that is shared by all the members included in the educational community of which the respective educational institution is a part, as well as the coherent response to the various needs expressed by the members of the educational community, respectively the clients of the educational institution. In conclusion, it is noted that several types of crises can be noted within various organizations, namely development crises, internal crises, communication crises, media crises, but also zonal crises.

The magnitude of the various events or problems triggering these crises within the organizations can be a special one, reaching to overshadow throughout the entire duration of the crisis all the activities that are carried out at the global level by the respective involved organization.

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