METHODS OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OFFICES - ON THE BASIS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. The resources of an organization are represented not only by human capital, material resources and organizational processes, but above all by the professional competence of employees. All of these elements must co-exist with each other optimally. The result of this is the creation of added value in the organization, which provides a competitive advantage over other players operating in the same environment. Factors supporting or even enabling optimal use of the organization's internal communication include interpersonal relationships, based on formal communication in both horizontal and vertical directions, informal communication, and communication based on symbols. The most important role in internal communication is direct contact, in which verbal speech is complemented by nonverbal body language. The author intends to show the development of methods that are in use within public administration and present innovative solutions in the field of communication management in the organization.

Keywords: internal communication, public administration, professional competences, interpersonal communication, qualitative analysis.

JEL classification: M12.

1. Introduction

We spend our lives surrounded by family, friends, acquaintances and people we meet or pass on the street. Public, professional and personal life largely depends on the impact of the behaviour of other individuals, groups and communities (Aronson 1998).

No form of interaction and cooperation between people, and in the case of entities, between employees forming a unique value for the organizations, can take place without communication and without interference from outside. Communication in the form of informal communication processes is not optimal within organizations, in the sense of efficiency and standardization of communication within the organization. Effective communication allows the existence of the due process of interaction between people, which is not only advisable but even necessary for the proper functioning of an organization. Of particular significance is the communication process in organizations becoming „open" to the environment in which employees maintain permanent relationships with their customers. It should be noted that due to the stability of the composition of personnel (small changes in employment) it is easier to manage internal contact, a situation that is different in the case of relations with the public.

In the objective sense, a special category of companies is represented by public entities, which are an instrument of the tasks of the state and upon which the state has a particular impact on activities (Act on transparency 2006).

For the purposes of community law, it is assumed that a public undertaking is any undertaking over which the public authorities may exercise power directly or indirectly, to exercise decisive influence over the ownership of the company, financial participation in the company or under the regulations to which it is subject (Szydło 2006).

This effect can be achieved in many ways; through the introduction of innovative products or services, or the implementation of new strategicactions or organizational restructuring, which should be implemented and supported through effective internal communication, which can be described as corporate communication.

The patency of the communication process within the organization provides a strong foundation for the company functionality, based on tasks relating to (Marciniak 2007):

1. assisting the organization in the efficient and effective execution of operational tasks;

2. facilitating group decision-making processes;

3. unblocking the flow of information within and between organizational units and;

4. improving the daily operational activities of the organization;

5. facilitating creative problem solving;

6. playing an important role in creating the right atmosphere on the plane of team activities;

7. allowing for strong relationships to be built between employees;

8. assisting employees in resolving conflicts, especially those of a substantive nature;

9. strengthening the trust and loyalty of employees in dealings between the employee, on the foundation of building trust and loyalty of employees to the employer.

2. Analysis of the origin and meaning of communication in the organization

It is not easy to answer the question of where the concept of communication arises from. The evolution of the phenomenon of communication is closely linked to the rise and development of civilization, which would not have been possible without the mastery of techniques and forms of communication.

Lack of communication skills would not, at the simplest level, be a factor impeding the initiation of human technological progress and the development of civilization, but it certainly would exclude the phenomenon of people gathering in larger clusters and the formation of organized groups (Peleckis 2013; Wahl, Prause 2013).

Based on the analysis of literature conducted by the author, it can be assumed that the wording of communication has been widespread and has its origins in the Latin language.

Analysing the form of the verb concept of communication from Latin, we obtain „communicare", which means to make common, to connect, to give someone a message (Engel *et al.* 1998).

In contrast, the word for communication that occurs as a noun, „communion", loosely translated means freedom, a sense of communication (Mortensen 2008).

Communication is a process during which the sender of a message makes his thoughts, desires and knowledge known and understood by the receiver of the transmission (Dowgiałło 2004).

In turn, J. Stankiewicz (1999) sees the phenomenon of communication as a dynamic, two-way process of transmitting information in sym-bolic form through appropriate channels between the sender and the recipient, so that they can make contact with each other.

N. J. Adler and A. Gundersen (2007) believe that internal communication is a complex, multi-layered and dynamic process by which the exchange of meaning and content is achieved.

The literature research conducted by the author confirms a high degree of similarity between the definitions of communication. On the basis of such concepts, the author has assumed that communication is a process that occurs in a continuous manner, which is dependent on individual factors (human) and the external environment under which the communication process takes place. The bottom line is that the participants communicate in the same language and have similar vocabulary, minimizing the interpretation of one party's words, so that he is understood on the basis of what he wishes to say, rather than on the basis of the other party's judgement and what they want to hear.

Effective functioning in relationships with others is an essential skill especially for those people whose work requires constant interaction with people (Matczak 2001).

Communication in an enterprise must be free of any interpretation of its content, and serve solely to communicate the goals and tasks to be performed. The communication process taking place within an organization may take the following forms:

– operational information, resulting from the tasks performed in an operating process;
– traditional or computerized information systems, using traditional and modern tools and data storage;
– external communication related to the business and relationships with external entities operating in the immediate vicinity of the undertaking;
– informal exchange of information, which, according to the theory of network rumours by J. W. Newstrom and K. Davis (2004) can take different forms that affect the development of relationships in the employee community;
– internal communication, which is an important factor in shaping the identity and integrity of the employees of the organization.

The implementation of internal communication tools can allow several objectives related to the plane of the social community workers to be accomplished. In particular, this applies to sensitizing staff to the tasks of the company, creating a spirit of cooperation, or strengthening cohesion, determination or confidence, which is the first step towards effective cooperation.

A factor in strengthening an effective organizational process taking place within the organization is communication skills and the level of relationships between employees. Interpersonal relationships may be affected by stereotypes and professional groups, incorrect selection of teams, the phenomenon of „inferiority complex", „manic superiority" and emotional conflicts operating in the internal environment of the organization (Kęsy 2012).

Various forms for the exchange of information between sender and recipient can be adopted in the process of internal communication in enterprises.

Within organizations, both direct and indirect communication occur, but it is proven that the direct form of communication – „face to face" – is much more effective than the intermediate type because it uses non-verbal body language, which not only complements the verbal message, but can even, in fact, dominate interpersonal contact.

Typically, indirect communication takes place within the organization using communication tools, such as:
  − intranet;
  − e-mail;
  − newsletters and company newspapers;
  − posters, guidebooks;
  − telephone;
  − fax.

To achieve private computer networks, local area network (LAN), technology is primarily used for the electronic exchange of documents (EDI), electronic mail, file transfer, standard web browsers, websites and specialized programs insulated from the internet (Turek 2003).

In contrast, direct communication uses the following forms of contact:
  − face to face – the utility of this form is very important in direct management as a principle method of communication;
  − team meetings;
  − strategic trips;
  − discussion groups;
  − team meetings or large meeting, at which the participants have the opportunity to listen and ask questions to leaders;
  − explanation of team rules – to familiarize the team with the principles of effective communication and a joint information development scheme;
  − diagrams of award schemes.
  − Other effective ways of direct communication and practical types include:
  − employment of communication specialists - both at the beginning and end of a process, who help to identify the information, provide it in an appropriate manner to the tar-

get audience and obtain feedback from them;
  − the announcement of positive changes that are the result of proper communication;
  − coordinating the timing ot communications with staff in different teams to avoid demoralizing rumours being spread before formal declarations;
  − avoiding speculation - this method leads to a reduction of uncertainty among staff;
  − providing people with enough time to speak - this is essential, regardless of the issues raised, to allow free expression of opinion;
  − communicate with the team in a clear, fair and consistent manner: not avoiding sensitive topics but instead addressing all problems openly; information should be as simple and easy to remember;
  − creation of new communication media;
  − formation of an internal communication division;
  − participatory structures: groups, evaluation meetings, quality circles, groups of progress.

Information relationships in a group of workers are characterized by the types of communication networks, according to H. J. Leavitt (1951). He presented four variants of the communication network in different systems: a circle, a straight line, the letter X and the letter Y. Based on the results of the study, it was found that only the method of the circular structure of the group gives a number of advantageous properties (Smith *et al.* 2013):
  − provides the highest level of freely operating group members;
  − creates the smallest need for a formal head of the group, and the smallest probability of an informal leader;
  − introduces the smallest ossification of the organization;
  − the sense of being pushed to the periphery of the organization rarely occurs.

There are two types of communication channels or tasks depending on whether communication is analyzed in a vertical or horizontal manner. "Manager-employee" communication frequently takes the form of messaging in one direction (half duplex) (Noll 2007) and is usually implemented in the form of indirect communication.

On the other hand „employee-to-employee" communication is achieved by the simultaneous transmission of information at the same time in both directions in the case of direct interpersonal contact (called full duplex) (Jain, Nguyen 2009).

Messages communicated within the organization are divided into formal and informal commu-

nications (Ee *et al.* 2013). The first of these are characteristic of the messages occurring in the vertical form, usually between levels of government, in which employees and managers, operational managers or mid-level management are engaged in the process.

In contrast, informal communications are most commonly found in the process of horizontal communication that occurs between friends or colleagues in the workplace; often those sitting in the same room, or even „at the next desk”

3. Disturbances in the process of interpersonal communication

Every business needs to establish a relationship, which may have a different nature, frequency and form. An ongoing process of interpersonal communication results in, and is closely related to, organizational processes taking place in the internal environment of the organization. Interferences in the communication process between employees are twofold (Kęsy 2012).

Firstly, there are risks of an internal nature, resulting from the individual characteristics of the sender or recipient.

Secondly, there is risk having its source in the external environment associated with the space in which the process of interpersonal communication between two people takes place; disruption dependent on and created by third parties.

The group of internal disturbances, which are individual occurrences and result from the characteristics possessed by the caller, stands out: differences in perception, language barriers, emotions, conflicting messages in speech arising from unrelated nonverbal communication, distrust of the caller, the presence of semantic errors in speech (lisp, slurred speech) and social characteristics („morbid shyness", avoiding contact with others, incompetent integration with the team).

The group of external disturbances, which can be divided into dependent and independent persons, includes:
– independent of the participants: noises in the environment, the distance between the sender and the recipient, indirect contact with the participants without the possibility of the recipient interpreting non-verbal body language messages;
– participant dependent: occupational stereotypes and psychological groups (prejudice, adversity), social and semiotic bias.

All interference can be neutralized; however, due to the size of the organization and the time and cost effectiveness of these measures, it is not always possible to eliminate all the confounding factors of the interpersonal communication process.

Greater difficulty in closing the gaps caused by interference is related to the type of internal threats, as they have a source in the characteristics of the individual, and arise from the experience of individuals. In turn, the easiest way to neutralize external disturbance due to the physical characteristics of the immediate environment is interpersonal contact. The second group, external interference, creates communication barriers stemming from social divisions; groups based on occupation, gender, ethnicity etc. These cause interference based on negative stereotypes operating in the public sphere.

4. Characteristics of the field research

The state and the authorities and agencies representing it are an important link in the functioning of civil society. It is therefore important to understand what is meant by the term „public administration”.

According to the definition for public administration, it is a grouping of actions, activities, and organization and implementation of projects undertaken for the public interest by different entities, bodies and institutions under a relevant act, and certain forms of law or a system, consisting of people, organized for the continuous and systematic targeting of future realization of the common good as a public service mission consisting primarily (though not exclusively) of the current performance of acts, equipped for in the state administration and the required material-technical resources. It can also be said that the administration is that part of the state which implements its objectives, but which is not a legislative or judiciary body (Izdebski, Kulesza 1999; Błaś *et al.* 2003; Lipowicz *et al.* 2010).

Public administration authorities are ministries, central government bodies, provincial governing bodies and representatives of local government bodies, or mayors, governors, and marshals (Local government... 1999; Grabicki 2012). Their work on behalf of the authorities includes: municipal, county, provincial and marshal's offices, and subordinate units of local government and central bodies.

To achieve a high degree of satisfaction with the quality of public activities carried out by public authorities, the resources of these institutions should be improved.

The most important aspect of offices is the speed and efficiency of operations. In order to achieve these objectives every officer should be

equipped with the professional and social competencies that facilitate fast and effective action.

Due to the complexity of the task, the quality of business of the office is dependent not on the competence of individual employees, but on the whole group of office employees. Organizing the work process requires improvement of employees in the field of knowledge and relationship-building and good practices in the field of interpersonal communication.

The adopted assumption of the study identified the research body, which was limited to employees of the Marshal's office. For the object of study, selected interpersonal communication processes taking place in the internal environment of organizations in the horizontal and vertical directions were evaluated. This is due to the fact that the researcher had unlimited access to the research group and was able to complement the data collected through both participants and passive observation.

5. Research methodology

The considerations were tested based on implicit participant observation, which consisted of the direct participation of the investigator and observations of the work environment at the level of interpersonal relations between employees and managers and employees.

In this way, the researcher gained better access to tacit knowledge, which cannot be diagnosed and described in scientific studies. Additional arguments in favour of the chosen research method are the knowledge of principles and rules concerning the procedures and sense of action and continuous, uninterrupted access to the „research material".

Knowledge gained in the form of „tacit knowledge" doesn't allow the knowledge possessed by the respondents to be shown, but provides knowledge of how they do something.

As indicated by D. Silverman (2010), qualitative research is, for many scholars, more attractive than quantitative, which often involves the use of marginalized statistical techniques. For qualitative researchers, it is important to refer to the social attributes and establish a close relationship with the subject of research, in order to obtain a result relating to the actual situation in the field of the study (Denzin, Lincoln 2011).

Because this is a qualitative study and was carried out in a closed community of employees, the researcher did not set an upper limit on the number of observations, which would be analyzed, but assumed only that the study would include at least three departments: (the Department of Re-

gional Development and International Cooperation, the Department of the European Social Fund and the Department of Administration and Business) in the context of research into the relationship between the operations manager and employee, two departments (1 and 2 departments from the above) in the context of research into relations between mid-level and lower-level managers or employees, as well as employee relations in three departments.

The study was implemented over a period of one month (from 1st to 31st January 2014). In addition to the observations carried out at the place of study, interviews with the staff and the information from the Marshal's office internal media were used to collect data. The choice of research subject was dictated by the fact that the researcher is an employee of the organization and has unlimited access to the research group. Information was collected on an ongoing basis and reported in the form of quality by the investigator based on the following criteria: type of contact, contact form, the communication channel used in relationships and interference in the communication process.

All research data collected was divided into four groups of interpersonal communication:
Employee – Employee;
Head of Department – Employee;
Department Director – Head of Department;
Department Director – Employee.
The result of the study was to assess the level of interpersonal communication and the types of disturbances in the internal environment of the Marshal's office.

6. Research results

In the following section the author presents the collected results in terms of numbers. Under each of the graphs a qualitative description is presented that contains the most interesting findings of the individual processes of interpersonal communication.

The researcher participated in 285 conversations, in the period from 1 January to 31 January (23 working days), directly or indirectly with employees of the office. Of this contact, 73.7% of the analyzed processes of communication were direct; the rest were concerned with the information which the researcher obtained during the investigation and happened at the time of the survey.

It may not be a surprise that at the operational level contact is most frequently made between employees.
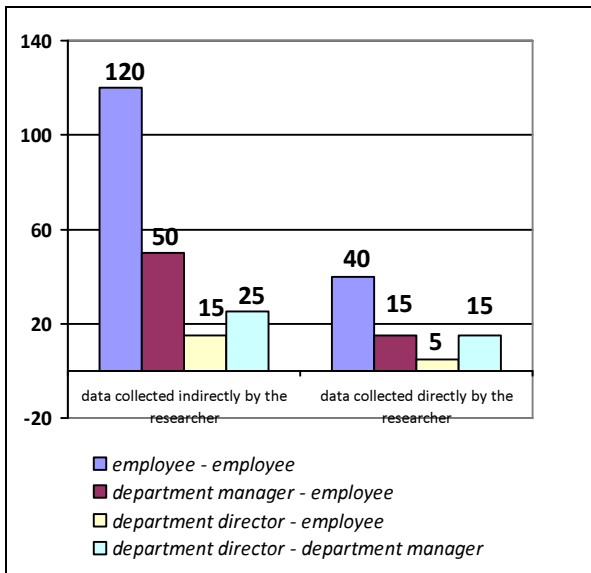
Fig. 1. The size of the research sample included in the study analysis (source: own work based on primary research carried out in UMWL)

Fig. 2. Types of contacts taking place inside the test subject (source: own work based on primary research carried out in UMWL)

The most common processes include interpersonal hierarchy communication compatible with the organizational structure of the office. This is supported by the rare occurrence of contact between the director of the department and the employee, the average of which is 0.87 contacts per working day.

In the case of contact between the director of the department and head of the department, the average was 1.74 per working day. Contact between the department head and the employee scored a value of 2.83 per working day. However, for employee – employee communication the ratio was 6.96.

Analyzing the collected data for the criterion of communication in the vertical or horizontal plane, it can be divided as follows: 160 (56.1%) processes of a horizontal nature, and 125 (43.9%) with a vertical nature.

The researcher adopted three criteria for data analysis. One of these was the type of contact in the research organization.

The data shows that the total of formal contact outweighs informal contact. Business bonds are called organizational ties. Of course, the result of observation for informal communication is very inaccurate and underestimated, due to the nature of this phenomenon, that is, its secrecy and limited coverage. However, within the study groups significant differences can already be seen to exist. In the case of employer–employee relations, informal messages prevail, representing 59.4% of all analyzed conversations. Most often, these discussions relate to personal issues connected with children, vacation, leisure, entertainment, interests, or health problems.
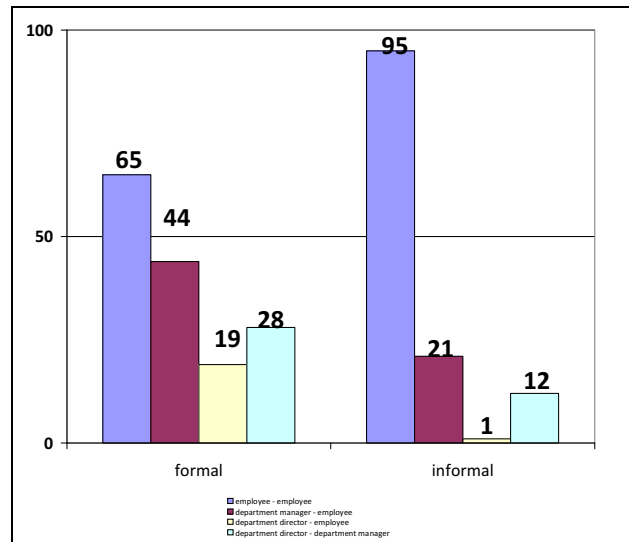
Contact of this type can be divided into two types: closer contact within the office or project and looser contact with other office employees. How rumours propagate depends on these criteria, according to the proposals presented in J. W. Newstrom and K. Davis (2004) network of rumours.

It should be noted that official relations between the director of department and employee dominate working relationships (Penc 2011) (95% of responses). Typically, messages transmitted relate to tasks (and, surprisingly, exclude the head of the department), which is unacceptable in the organization. The manager, knowing the intellectual and physical capabilities of team members, as well as the workload of his staff, should have full control over the work performed by the employees. Creating exceptions may result in destabilization of the organizational processes and consequently employee dissatisfaction and a reduction in the quality of work.

Vertical relationships 'between the rungs' should occur immediately following each other, for example, the director – manager, or supervisor – employee.

In organizations, formal and informal contacts should occur in a ratio of 2:1. A priority for any organization is the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. However, informal relationships build atmosphere in the workplace and positive relationships and lasting attachment to the workplace through a harmonious group of collaborators, who can be described as „work mates".

The author has attempted to create a definition of a new type of friends, which is different from that commonly adopted. A „work mate" is a person who one is very familiar with, likes and

even meets after work, but usually within a limited group of people called work mates. „Work mates" do not meet each other on the family level or for birthdays of colleagues from work. Friends from out of work rarely know friends from work; the groups do not intermingle.
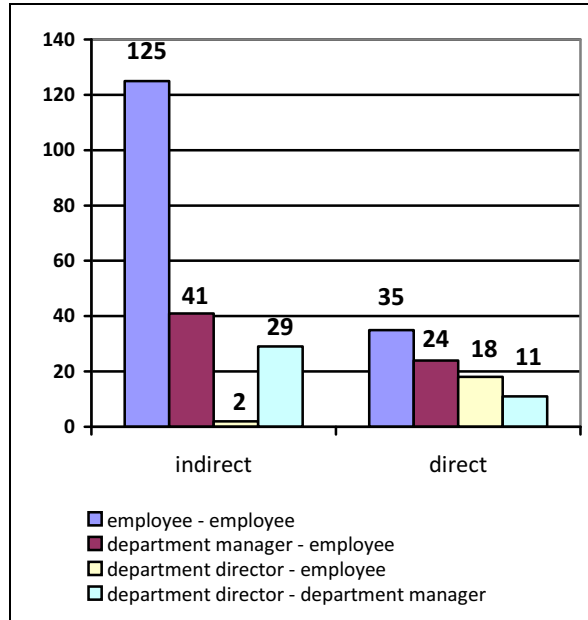

Fig. 3. Types of communication used by individuals on the test subject (source: own work based on primary research carried out in UMWL)

In 285 conversations, 197 were identified as immediate. This represents 69.1% of all described interpersonal contact.

The largest proportion of direct contact was recorded on the plane of employee-to-employee communication, at 78.1%. This was related to the nature of work and the participation of many employees in the common process of implementation of the tasks on the basis of official procedures.

However, dealings between director of the department-employee were outweighed by indirect contact and represented 90% of all relations between these professional groups. Usually the contact took place via e-mail or phone call.

These tools are the most common communication platforms within the Marshal's office. Addendum to them is the intranet and electronic newsletters.

One of the criteria for analysis was channels of communication occurring enabling to establish contact and the existence of a possible return of contact, based on the principle of synergy.
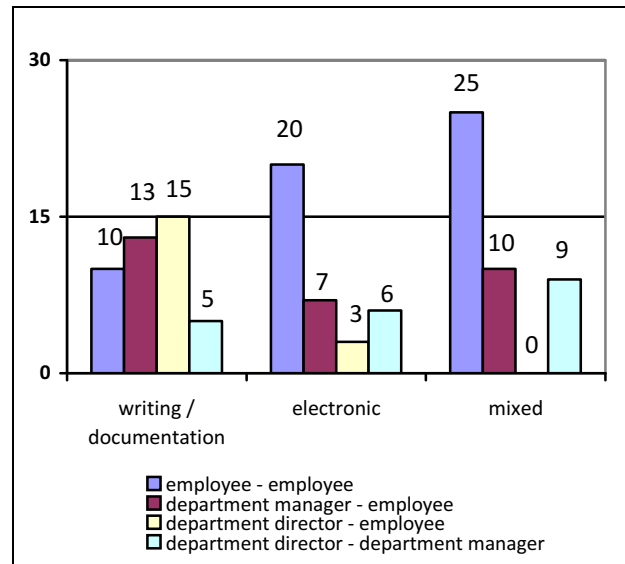

Fig. 4. Communication channels used by the individuals in the test subject (Source: own work based on primary research carried out in UMWL)

The author distinguishes four channels: oral, written, electronic, and mixed (used in at least two of the aforementioned channels).

Of the four channels, the oral form is most commonly used, occurring in 56.8% of established relationships within the organization. The usage of other communication channels was at comparable levels (12.6–15.4%).

The importance of verbal forms in the relationship between employees is shown by the fact that a large proportion of contact between the employees is informal. At this level, there is no control over contact between the employees, only self-control over their communication and the tasks they perform within the workplace.

In contrast, contact between the line manager and employee of the department is carried out in writing, that is, according to legal and formal norms and principles.

In turn, the use of the form of oral contact between department manager - employee is related to the effectiveness of the actions and the rate of transmission of information, avoiding so-called „empty runs".

In director-manager dealings, the main channel usually has nature of a conversation of a direct and informal style.

In the case of mixed channels, dual channels using a combination of the verbal channel with anelectronic acknowledgment dominate. Typically, they involve formal contact.
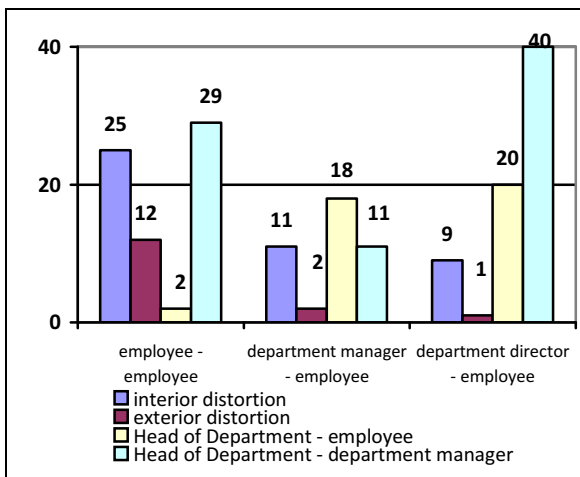
Fig. 5. Interference in communication within the organization according to the criterion of belonging to a professional group (source: own work based on primary research carried out in UMWL)

The above data shows the nature of the processes of interpersonal communication in the office. In contrast, graph 5 contains information specifying the types of disturbances occurring in the contact between employees of the research subject.

In all the types of contact, internal disturbances predominated as the type of disturbance. However, in the case of communication at the level of department director-employee, 9 cases were noted (representing 45% of contacts), which were distorted by mistrust and negative attitude towards the sender. This was the reason for which contact was conducted in an indirect nature, limiting relations to a minimum. The consequence is the abnormal flow of information and bad atmosphere at work in connection with the negative relationship with the director of the department staff.

The smallest level of interference occurs in the communication between the director of the department and the department head. Within 40 talks, disturbances affecting the content of the message were identified in five, i.e. a communication disruption occurred in every 8th contact. Their source was noise in the communication environment or misunderstanding of the command of a superior.

Contact between department manager and employee was affected by negative factors of an internal and external type in 20 % of communication processes. However, this was predominantly the first kind of interference. This included, in particular: Semantic noise and the social aspect (caller shyness).

The last analysis in terms of interference was communication emerging between employee - employee. Of 160 instances of contact identified, 37 of them encountered a communication barrier,

which resulted in every 4 calls not being optimized and efficient. The most common disturbances in this type of contact included: noise, semantic distrust of the caller, unrelated non-verbal body language accompanying verbal communication, group stereotypes and contact via the communication tools through which the caller does not have the ability to interpret nonverbal reciprocal body language.

7. Conslusions

Diagnosing the problem should be regarded as an important and responsible stage of research, but it is not until the last stage that value can be built in terms of implementation of activities. Data analysis should not be considered as the completion of research as a whole, as applications whose only use is in research, but should result in the recommendation of corrective actions to be implemented in the organization in order to improve its functioning.

It is clear from evaluating communication processes taking place inside the Marshal's Office that there are many reasons for disfunctionality affecting the organization.

The relationship that is easiest to eliminate, and is also unnecessary is that of the department director -employee. According to the rules of communication in the organization, direct communication should take place at the organizational level, i.e., director-manager-employee, where managers act as an intermediary, who is more aware of what is happening in his subordinate organizational unit.

It is important to point out that the channel has the mixed characteristic of a young organization, with a low level of mutual trust. Greater use should be made of the oral-electronic channel as part of these activities. This makes it easier to control the course of the task and obtain confirmation of the transfer.

Informal relations in the organization can be summed up in the following framework: the higher the status in the organization, the lower the number of transfers of informal information.

Analyzing the internal communication process, it can be noted that the most common type of interference is that resulting from the internal characteristics of individual callers.

Every organization is different, as is the internal or external situation; there are differences in its financial, organizational or personnel possibilities that may enable organizational restructuring.

The author, on the basis of his examination of the case of the Marshal's office, suggests the following corrective actions:

1. avoiding senior management relationships with employees, that is, those omitting a management level;

2. increasing the proportion of information provided via mixed channels, which is an effective tool for communication and control of tasks carried out;

3. lower the level of management in the organization, with more cases of informal conversations, which creates a positive atmosphere at work, and staff who are more willing to assist in the implementation of tasks;

4. neutralizing external interference dependent on third parties; a good starting point is to exclude the negative group stereotypes within the office;

5. avoidance of external factors beyond the control of people through repetition of information technology, reporting and building good extra-professional and extra-group relationships;

6. implementation of internal training in the field of interpersonal communication with the division of participants; managerial and employee; because of the different objectives in the communication process;

7. creation of a single dictionary of phrases used in the organization for all participants;

8. integration of the entire team by organizing staff meetings to assimilate „crew" within the organizational entity.

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