MARKÉTA SANALLA[1] – VĚRA PLHOŇOVÁ[2]

New Challenges of E-government: The Use of New Media in Public Administration

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INTRODUCTION

It has become a cliché to say that today's managers, wherever they work, must focus on their customers. They must understand their needs. But how can they find out what a customer wants? They need information.

Communication is one of the principal means of information exchange. However, this exchange occurs not only in our personal and professional lives, but communication also accompanies us when managing our assets and operations, namely in our civil lives. Therefore, it is essential during a negotiation process with the government. In the last twenty-five years, many indicators have changed in this area. A new phenomenon, the Internet, has appeared. This situation joints our lives more and more frequently. During the day, every day, routinely, even such age groups as seniors.

From this point of view, state administration is changing its approaches itself. The state administration tries to ease the citizens' interaction in the official acts in this area. Kovaříková says (2016), that in an organized institution, the communication is partly formal and partly informal. The second is based in the company independently and often spontaneously, and it should be taken into account, when an information exchange is taking place and creates a platform for the correct process of service providing, especially in public administration.

The new trends of modernization and a so called e-Government have been breaking through administration in the local public sector since the early 1990s. The phenomenon can be called the modernization of public administration and it, together with others, represents part of the reform in the Czech Republic. Some phases of the reforms have been completed more or less successfully. Now, the most important priority of the current reform is to improve the services of the government, which can improve the citizens' communication with the authorities.

[1] Markéta Sanalla, assistant professor, Private College of Economic Studies Znojmo (sanalla@svse.cz).
[2] Věra Plhoňová, assisetant professor, Private College of Economic Studies Znojmo (plhonova@ svse.cz).

In line with the global trends in public administration, there are new integrated tools. In this article, among the major challenges, mainly the area of the New Media or the so-called New Media is included. Nowadays, the classic definition, used for the specification of the new media e.g. in. the Oxford Dictionary, is the following: "Means of mass communication using digital technologies such as the Internet: *the new media has become central to the political* arena" *(http://www. oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/new-media)*. This new and emerging field of the media is not only a tool for building the information society, but it also arranges communication with the public and the administrative management in an electronic format. The modernization of the public administration, together with its essential terms of computerization, is still in progress and other service tasks are appearing together with new challenges and problems.

In the research, it is supported by facts, that the technologies of public administration are becoming more and more accessible and are spreading much more quickly than before and that the new media is a useful tool of communication. This mean of communication is, however, used mainly by the younger citizens of the municipalities so the public administration must also bear in mind the elderly age group which prefers mainly the classical means of communication, such as local newspapers. Therefore, the task of the municipality is to choose a combination of means of communication through which the information can reach all the citizens.

THEORETICAL BASIS

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The paper analyses the current challenges in the sphere of public administration with an emphasis on the new media issues. The basic issue is communication. Communication is the act of transferring information from one person to another. This is the main tool to be used to exchange information between the residents and the authorities. The means of transfer can be very different.

Public service organizations are often characterized as being slow-moving bureaucracies, bound by red tape, dominated by rules and slow innovation.[3]

This is the reason why it is necessary to clarify the terminology in the beginning of the text. There are many definitions of public administration. The same feature of all the definitions postulates that, in essence, it is an activity that provides the management of public affairs. Petr Prucha and Karel Schelle define public administration in their book, the Foundations of Local Government. Therefore, public administration is supplemented by a definition that "public administration in a society, organized in the state, means governance, implemented in its role as a

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[3] Lawton, A. – Rayner, J. – Lasthuizen, K. (2013): *Ethics and management in the public sector*. Routledge masters in public management. Routledge, London.

manifestation of executive power in the state. For this executive power, it is characteristic to be a predominantly public authority."[4] Pavel Káňa adds that administration has its roots in the Roman law. "Public administration is the management of human society organized by the state in the state system."[5]

Nowadays, the reforms and all the complex changes in public administration are so extensive that the public administration system brings a whole new set of challenges. The leading experts on this topic are Richard Pomahač and Olga Vidláková who talk about a social problem. "Public administration is a social problem. People have long believed that this is a problem that requires a solution, and therefore, it is not strange that there are widely developed theories about it, in many forms, that created other problems. For example, not everything written and taught about public administration corresponds to reality, or that the public administration theory is virtually unknown to all those who act as experts in the matters of public administration."[6]

Responding to the public administration reform and the constant new-coming innovations that address municipalities and regions, the newly emerging tools of modern management are used in public administration. Thus, these tools of modern times contribute to a public administration of a higher quality and efficiency and support the democratic principles of governmental and citizen satisfaction.[7]

The new dimensions of public administration introduced the possibility of electronic communication, which is "the transmission of data messages between public authorities and between these authorities and other third parties" (Macek – Štědroň). Legislation carries a general provision. The general provision is carried by Law no. 40/1964 S., the Civil Code, in section 40 Article 3 provides that if a legal act is done by electronic means, it can be signed electronically in accordance with the special regulations. Moreover, certain legislations can regulate the possibility of electronic communication precisely, but only in specific cases and agendas. As an example, the Act no. 500/2004 Coll., The Administrative Code, which in Section 37, Paragraph 2, provides that filing. An act directed against the administrative authority can also be made in an electronic form signed by an electronic signature.

There are a lot of ways to understand the social media. This research works with the most commonly used definition, which describes social media as part of New Media connected to internet-based technologies (Jirák – Köpplová). Social media means applications that carry consumer-generated content and networking. We could also use a common definition worded by Pete Blackshaw, who says that "media impressions are created by consumers, typically informed by relevant

[4] Průcha, P. – Schelle, K. (1995): *Základy místní správy*. 1st ed. Iuridica Brunensia, Brno.
[5] Káňa, P. (2004): *Základy veřejné správy.* 1st ed. Montanex, Ostrava.
[6] Pohamač, R. Vidláková, O. (2002): *Veřejná správa.* Praha: C. H. Beck. p. 3.
[7] Http://www.grapes.cz/nove-metody-rizeni-ve-verejne-sprave/, [online]. [Cit. 14/11/2013].

experience, and archived or shared online for easy access by other impressionable consumers".[8]

The fact that the social media offers a unique opportunity to form a relationship between government and citizens, from a mono- or bidirectional information exchange into a many-to-many communication process, is very important for public administration.[9] Social media means very powerful tools to improve communication in public administration that can develop the quality of services.

Finally, it should be noted that effective communication is only one side of the coin. It must be simple and enjoyable for all involved, and this can be achieved only under the condition that all the ethical assumptions of negotiations are retained, such as the sources of information process and actual recipients of information.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, the research works with a unique link between public administration and social media. The aim of this paper is to define options for the public administration concerning the use new media in the networks of modern municipalities. New media is managed by smaller municipalities, and limited by the abilities of their users, namely the citizens of these communities, but also by the elected and non-elected officials.

This present research was conducted in the academic years 2014 and 2015 in the Znojmo region. A research area was defined, the former district municipality of Znojmo, in the questionnaire survey. The questionnaires were distributed online and in paper form, too. Another part of the research was directed to the residents of the village Znojmo, administration type number III. In this section of the survey, 150 papers of the relevant questionnaires were returned. The second component of the respondents were the municipalities, administration type number II, in the region of Znojmo.

The total number of municipality respondents, asked electronically, was 78. The filling benefited 38 municipalities to complete the questionnaire in a text document took advantage of.

Seven municipalities, using paper forms, did not respond to any communities. The total number of the returned questionnaires was 45. This number is adequate in relation to the number of municipalities regarding this public administration type in the Znojmo district. The information, obtained by data collection, was evaluated and analysed statistically. The results are shown in the graphs.

[8]   Blackshow, P. (2006): *The consumer-generated surveillance culture.* http://www.clickz.com/showPage.html?page=3576076 [accessed 28.06.2014].
[9] Agostino, D. (2013): *Using social media to engage citizens: A study of Italian municipalities.* Public Relations Review, 39. 232–234.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Znojmo's municipality communicates with its employees by using many ways of the media. One of the possible communication forms, through which the employees can communicate, is the internal network. The department of the municipality utilizes the classical forms of communication, such as phone and e-mail. Some also prefer personal contact. New media, such as Skype and Facebook, which improve the efficiency of the work in public administration, are also very important.

Efficiency is one of the most important parts and the primary goal of the reforming of public administration. The reform widely affected the operation of the domestic institutions, particularly in the early 1990s. However, in the last decade, a wide range of new possibilities based on New Media, was typical. This fact gave scope for conducting researches in the Private College of Economic Studies in Znojmo, too. This paper presents partial results of the research. The answers are illustrating and summarizing the current knowledge that focuses on the public administration, specifically in the region of Znojmo.

One of the possible forms of communication is internal network. In this network, important pieces of information are recorded, e.g. meetings that can be shared with the employees. Facebook is also a very popular method of communication.

This means of communication was initiated by the employees. Facebook is primarily used by the press department, but other people, who are engaged in various town projects, such as "Znojmo – town of green vegetation", or "The healthy town of Znojmo", also use it.
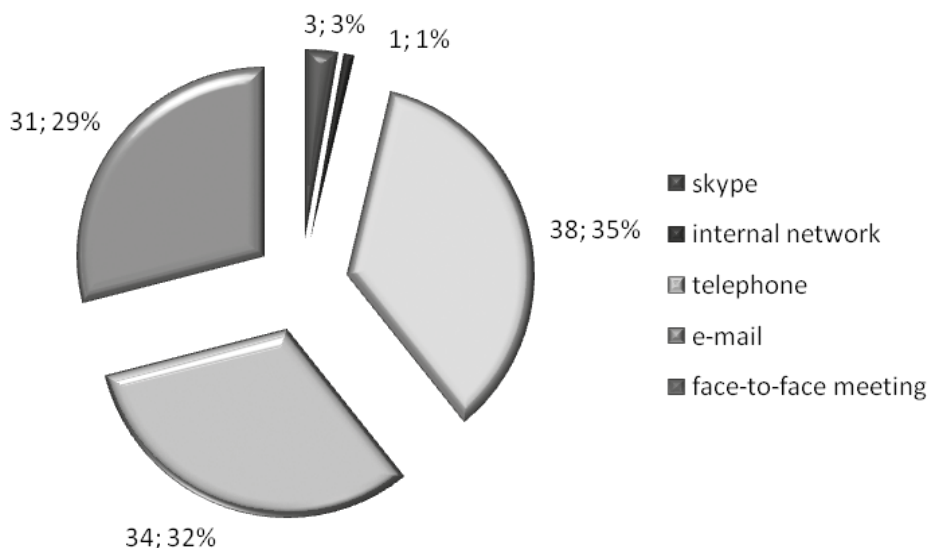
Just these employees have an internal work group in the social net of Facebook. They use it for communication very effectively, particularly because they get an insight into which staff member is online and who are those who have already read their messages. This kind of communication is also very useful because in the beginning of the information process, it is necessary to convey the information to only one person, but sometimes it is essential to pass on the information to more people. In fact, it is also advantageous to use it because we can disclose the information only to the head of department first, and then, in case more people are needed to be involved in the conversation, it is possible to share the information with them, too, without any problems.

The city police and the fire fighters communicate with the town via SMS. Regarding the communication between the security forces and the municipality of Znojmo, there had not been any problems recorded, until a recent tragedy that happened in Uherský Brod, when the mayor complained about the lack of information originated from the police. There was a police raid in a restaurant where a man with mental problems shot nine people including himself at lunchtime. It was a public threat, but police failed to give sufficient information to the government of the town about the affected organization. In case the police or the fire fighters are managing a problem in Znojmo, they send information through

text messages to the municipality management, with information reports. The communication between these organs is very well organised.

The communication of the management with the employees of the municipality can be set in different ways. The results of the research, which asked about the employees' preferences in this process, are shown in Figure 1.
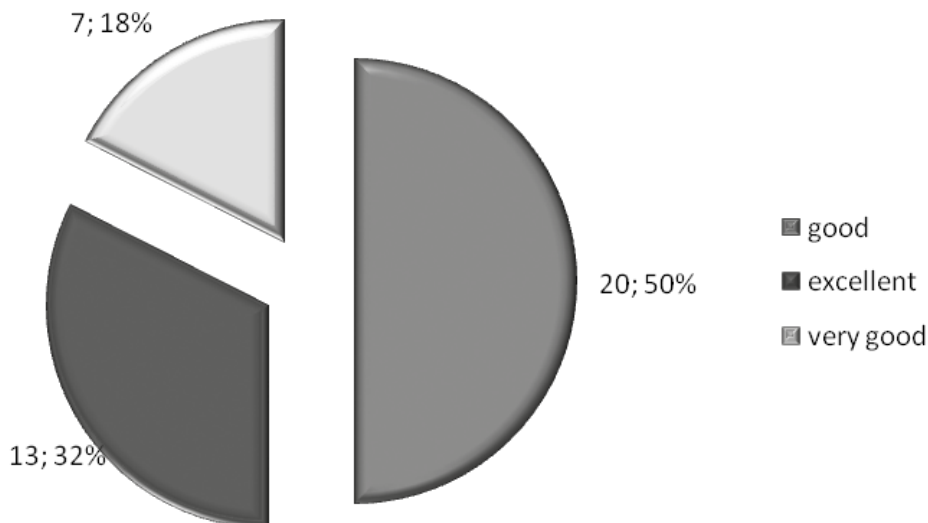
Figure 1: The means of communication preferred by the employees when communicating with the municipalities

Source: own research.

According to the results of the survey, based on the answers of the 38% of the respondents, the majority of the employees consider the telephone as the main form of communication, when communicating with the municipality. According to the 34% of the respondents, the second most preferred way of communication is sending e-mails. It is the cheapest and fastest way to exchange information. 31% of the respondents prefer personal contact, 3% Internet calls (Skype) and 1% the internal network.

Figure 2: Valuation of the quality of communication with other employee of the munici-
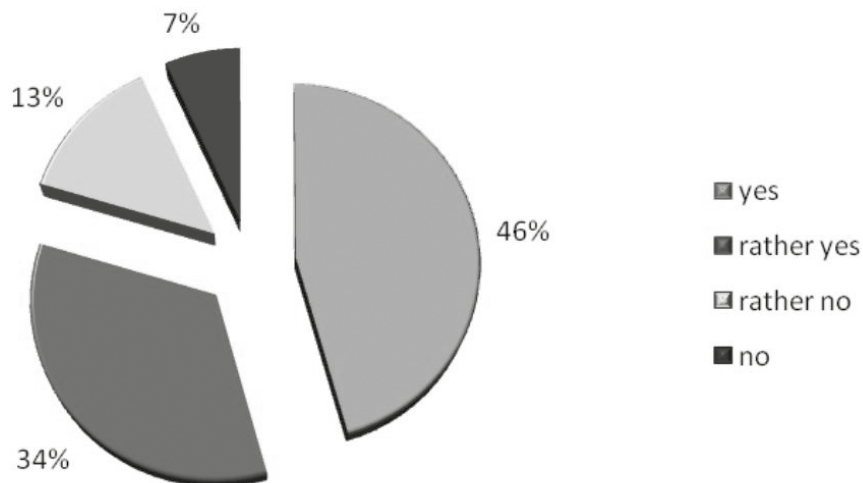pality of Znojmo

Source: own research.

The other task was to find out how officers assess the quality of communication with other employees or the management of the Municipality of Znojmo. Officials had to grade the quality of the communication by marks, e.g. from excellent to insufficient. Exactly half of the respondents rated the quality of communication very good. 32% of the officials valued the quality of communication as excellent. The communication was assessed as good by 18% of the officials. None of them gave insufficient or sufficient rates.

The research also focused on the citizens. The following figure summarizes the willingness of the citizens to use the social media to communicate with other citizens in the region. The willingness to communicate through new media is clearly visible in all age segments of the respondents.

Figure 3: The reference of electronic communication to personal conduct in office

Source: own research.

DISCUSSION

The communication within the municipality is more formalized than the communication in the private sector or in other state organizations. It is caused by the fact that public servants may do only what is allowed by the law. Inside the organization, during communication a linear communication model is applied. This model is typical for both the public administration and most of the private organizations. The linear model of communication means that the superiors communicate with inferiors by orders.[10]

Communication within the bureaucratic organization depends on the political governance and the legal environment. Decision-making must be performed in accordance with the international standards, laws, and codes, but also by the internal regulations of the authority and the instructions of the superiors. Pomahač writes in his book that the officer can make decisions in two ways, on his own, because he thinks it is the correct one, or because it is told him by his colleagues or superiors to do. Pomahač calls the decision situation the customary law (Pomahač).

Novotná presents in her book that within an office there is the principle of precaution. On the basis of the social contact, the principle suits both the office management and the ordinary employees. When dealing with each task,

[10] Heger, V. (2012): *Komunikace ve veřejné správě*. 1st ed. Grada, Praha. 96.

a rigorously formal procedure is to be followed. In case of any uncertainty, the numbers of critical steps are increased and a lot of consultation control mechanisms are used. Not only the application of this principle can last for long, but it can also lead to the indecision of an official. For example, in a situation where the problem is caused by lack of regulation, which one should be followed by the officer (Novotná). According to Novotná, in the organization a so-called vicious circle of bureaucracy takes place. This can be seen as a preference of the organization struggling to fulfil the goals of the organization. The form is preferred to the content, which takes away the organization from reality, and it can also bring misunderstanding to the public (Novotná).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the communication inside an office is hierarchical. So, it depends on the powers, the authorities, the competence of the elected representatives and the office staff. Therefore, it is logical that different positions have different information availability. Nowadays, electronic communication prevails in official relations.

CONCLUSION

E-government represents a significant shift forward in the organization, which allows a high level of comfort for a wide range of clients, i.e. those citizens who use the services provided by the government or municipality. In addition to the basic technological security, both the hardware and software have to be able to secure the usage of the service as the most qualified employee - office worker. Data protection is also connected to these two factors. It is closely related not only to the provider of the electronic services but also to the user, who is informed and equipped with the necessary knowledge to be able to avoid the opening of an imaginary gate by his actions for an attack coming from outside or let an unauthorized access get the data used.

As the main task of the state, or by extension, public administration appears next to data protection and security and creates the appropriate conditions of comfortable services that are provided for clients, i.e. citizens. Comfort is easily available both in time and space. The accessibility of the services via Web portal can make even the officials' work easier. They do not have to be overwhelmed by their clients' demands, only in office hours, but they can spread processing in the slots that fit them best, so they are able to satisfy the residents' needs and use the time given or best suits the law, but always in favour of the clients. As for innovation in general and for communication, it must be simple.[11]

Only the new media with its client accessibility can break through the biggest problem of today's society, and by the extension of public administration, which

[11] Drucker, Peter F. (2008): *Classic drucker: essential wisdom of Peter Drucker from the pages of Harvard business review.* 1st ed. Harvard Business Press, Boston.

is the reluctance of the citizens in participating in public life. We can also discuss another step in the public administration reform: the extension of public administration in the form of user-friendly applications, e.g. a smart phone. Public administration should not merely be a means to handle the necessary administration, but it should be a mediator between the political and civil sphere. It could offer a wide range of possibilities for the civil society in participating in the public affairs. What is, by the way, one of the fundamental principles of democracy? Modernized public administration must stand on the strong pillars of a conscious civil society.

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HUNGARIAN SUMMARY

Korunkat olyan túlzsúfolt információs források jellemzik, amelyek gyakran nem relevánsak. A nyilvános adminisztrációnak és a szerkezetének kellene felelni azért, hogy az adminisztrációs folyamatokkal és azok felépítésével foglalkozó polgárok dolga könnyebb, az információáramlás egyszerűbb, gazdaságosabb és hatékonyabb legyen. Ezen célok elérésére jelenleg lehetetlen kellően fejlett technológiai és technikai platformot (felületet) használni. A polgárokkal való kommunikációban az E-government (internetes kormányzat) ezen a területen egy lehetséges eszköz. A többoldalú kommunikáció egy lehetőség a reform során, mert kiemeli a polgár státuszát mint klienst a nyilvános adminisztrációban.