

The Role of Effective Communication in the Prevention of Labor Conflicts within an Institution of Local Public Administration

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Abstract

The paper presents the role of an effective communication process in a small public institution that is part of the local public administration in preventing and/or managing possible labor conflicts that may arise between employees and their senior hierarchical bosses. With the help of a questionnaire implemented within the public institution, the main aspects related to the efficiency of institutional communication are highlighted, starting from the fact that many authors have previously identified the need for an adequate communication climate to prevent conflicts in the relationship between employees, as well as relating employees to their superiors.

Keywords: public communication, public institution, conflict, sample, local public administration, climate of communication.

JEL classification: H83, M10, O43

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1. Introduction

Communication is, along with motivation and professional competence, the key to efficiency in an organization. All members of an institution spend most of their time communicating in one form or another, regardless of their position in the hierarchy. Since today the number of employees in services and offices exceeds that of the workers in production, there is a greater need to improve communication because greater collaboration between colleagues and hierarchical levels is needed, and teamwork has been generalized that cannot be effective without good collaboration between all team members.

Moreover, changes in technology have led to transformations in the structure and activity of organizations and, in particular, public institutions. This is why communication practices and technologies have become increasingly important for all types of organizations. In addition, the role of the manager in the organizational communication process is increased, he is the one who processes the internal and external information, and on the other hand the manager communicates this information to subordinates (he is in the position of disseminator) and to those outside the organization (he is a spokesman.)

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Public institutions carry out an important social activity, launch debates, communicate proposals, regulate the different areas of activity of economic and social life, monitor the application of legislation, gather feedback, communicate the results of the activity. Due to the large number of people whose living conditions are directly influenced by the decisions of public institutions, both local and central, public communication is one of the main components of the activity of public institutions. A climate in which cooperation should prevail must be one that has as characteristics flexibility, respect, spontaneity, empathy, mutual trust or focus on the tasks received.

Arsith, M., (2018), speaking about the climate of effective communication within an institution/organization says that: „in such a climate, participants have every interest in solving problems of service that arise, respect each other and appreciate each other and do not come to manifest themselves on the basis of „hidden agendas” (“one say and the other think and do”). Instead, a climate in which mutual trust between employees does not exist, where there is a feeling of suspicion and betrayal, where there is a tendency to dominate and control others, is a defensive climate in which recourse to the „hidden agenda” is manifested. In such a climate, the participants’ attention is directed more toward existing conflicts and tensions and less in carrying out their tasks, thus they become manipulative, blocking and filtering information in the desire to gain greater personal power for themselves. It is not only the size and nature of the organization that determines the existing communication climate, but also its traditions and values, the existence of power groups and the relationships established between them, the nature of managerial policies or the rigidity of the communication networks used by the organization.

Pierre Zémor (2008) defines public communication as an official communication aimed at exchanging and sharing information of public interest, maintaining social links and the responsibility of public institutions to their publics.

Bessières. D. (2019) says that communication in public institutions can be considered a hybrid communication, which develops through the practice of organizations, beyond the milestones of theoretical definition. For institutions, this means making themselves known (identification) and recognized (legitimation), and at the same time strengthening the approval of their action by the publics to whom they are addressed.

Popa M. (2024) states that public administration is an area that deals with the implementation of government policies and the management of public programs, being an important part of a good government. In this context, the human resource in public administration, be it local, too, as well as the way in which it manages internal conflicts is, from my point of view, an important component in achieving good governance.

2. Research methodology

Undoubtedly, there are deficiencies in internal communication within public institutions, which determined me that in the study that is going to focus on the manager-subaltern relationship in the internal communication and consequently I implemented a questionnaire within a public institution in Hunedoara County, namely within the Crișcior City Hall.

In order to prevent the conflict situation that might occur at some point, it is good not to let the grievances become frustrations, then they extend to the conflict, so effective communication is needed. Conflict has its role, which is not always a harmful one, but only under certain special conditions, of controlled supervision of a conflict. To track certain effects and their consequences requires a lot of experience and special skills, and the risks must be established before the experiment.

Effective communication has the role of preventing conflict. It can be done in a harmonious, organized, imperceptible way. Of course, this requires efforts from all those involved, starting with education, training at work, the character of people, their seniority in work, their involvement in training at work, as well as the help they all receive from the public institution/ organization in which they work (psychological counseling sessions, personal development counseling sessions, more frequent working sessions in which to constantly touch this topic, meetings with a communication specialist. etc).

The main objective of the implementation of the questionnaire is to harmonize the communication, prevent conflicts by organized means: Meetings with specialists in preventing conflict states, specialized trainings, short and frequent meetings at the workplace, a suitable approach of people, without veiled threats, without high voices, calling their seniority in the work field, by emphasizing their value, by human approach, showing them their mistakes and consequences on the institution so that they are fully clarified by them, penalties where appropriate (but not before discussing with the person in question face to face), etc. The questionnaire contains 13 questions and the main purpose of data processing following the implementation of the questionnaire is to draw attention to the importance of preventing conflict by streamlining communication and raising an alarm signal about the consequences that could occur after neglecting this aspect.

3. Results and discussions

Crișcior City Hall has 34 posts in the organizational chart, namely: 2 public dignity, 2 public, 2 Management (these 4 are excluded from the questionnaire as a result of the fact that the questionnaire's objective relates to the relationship of employees with management positions), 11 public execution functions and 19 contractual execution functions. Of the 30 execution functions participated with answers to the questionnaire implemented 25 people.

1. At the first question we collected data on the age of employees with execution functions, the data obtained being presented in the following figure 3.1.

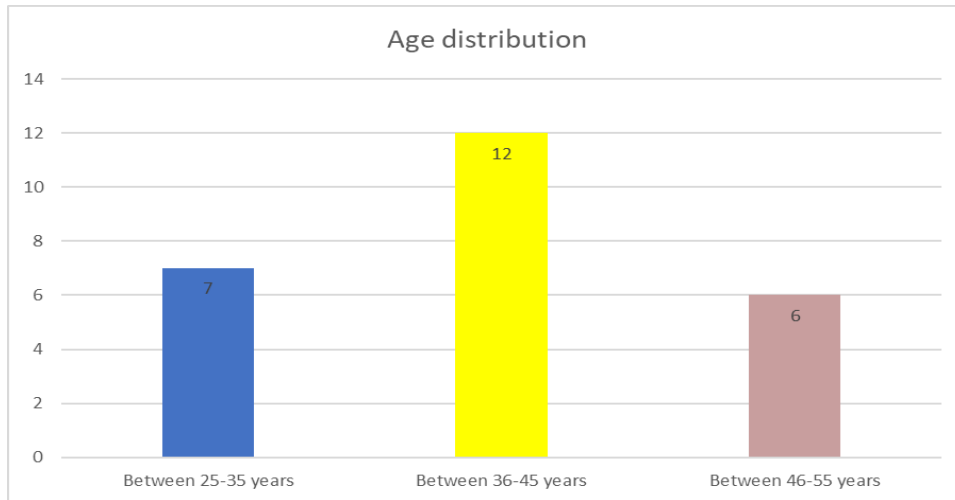


Figure 3.1 Age distribution of the sample surveyed

The distribution of respondents by age highlighted the following: 7 persons, respectively 28% of respondents are aged between 25-35 years, 12 respondents and 48% they are aged between 36-45 years and 6 of the respondents and 24% are aged between 46-55 years, therefore over 70% of those surveyed are under the age of 45.

2. Following the completion of the answers to this question, which refers to the age of the 25 respondents of the questionnaire, the data on their work age were highlighted in the figure 3.2.

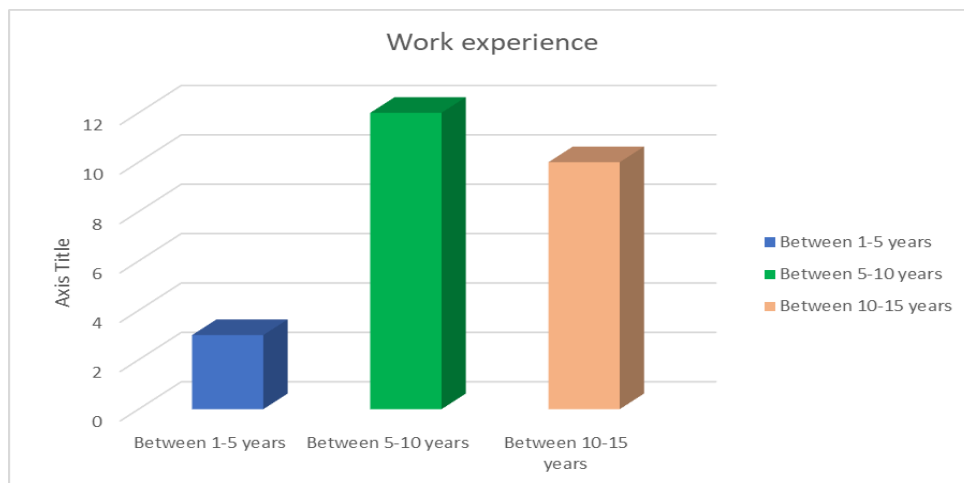


Figure 3.2 Age of the sample

Based on the answers of the employees with execution functions in the City Hall, a high degree of homogeneity of the sample regarding their age and work age can be found, homogeneity due to the fact that 48% of those surveyed, respectively 12 people fall into the middle category, with a seniority between 5-10 years, as in the case of age categories, the second category being the most representative. 10 of the respondents, respectively 40%, have a work experience of over 10 years and only 3, that is 12% of the respondents have a work experience of 1-5 years.

3. At the 3rd question, employees were asked to express their opinion on the atmosphere within the public institution, their answers being presented in figure 3.3.

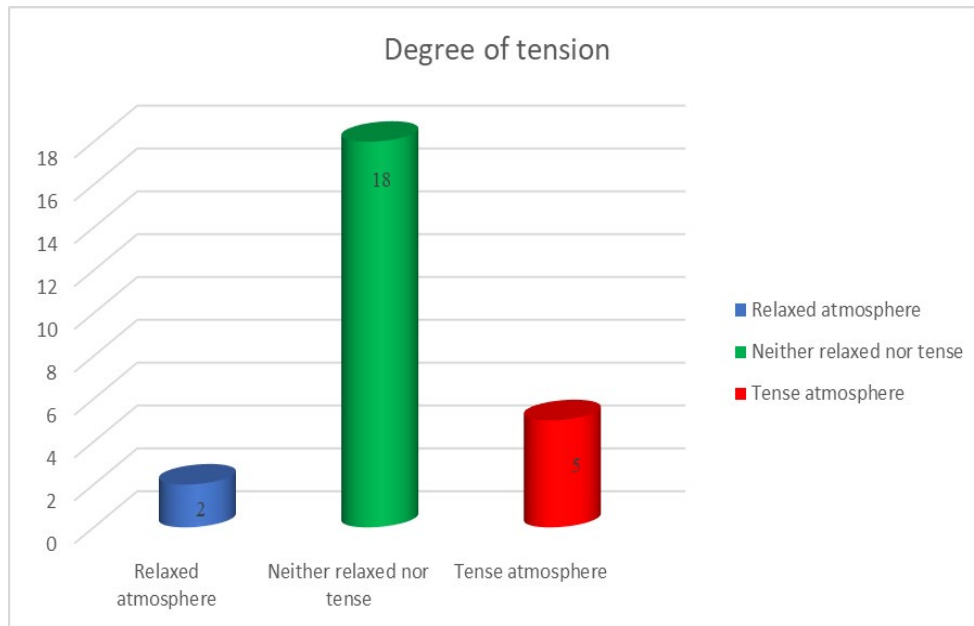


Figure 3.3 The atmosphere within the public institution perceived by the employees

Based on the responses received, we can say that the atmosphere within the institution is balanced, and 72% of respondents consider the atmosphere within the public institution to be neither relaxed nor tense. Only 2 of the respondents consider the atmosphere to be relaxed while another 5 consider it tense. Their responses, which represent 28% of respondents, do not cause the balance to be tilted to either of the two extremes. Even if there are small tensions within the institution, which is normal, through good communication with the hierarchically superior boss they get „sting” quickly.

4. This question aimed to obtain feedback from respondents on how they are encouraged to engage in open dialogues with their hierarchical superiors (figure 3.4.):

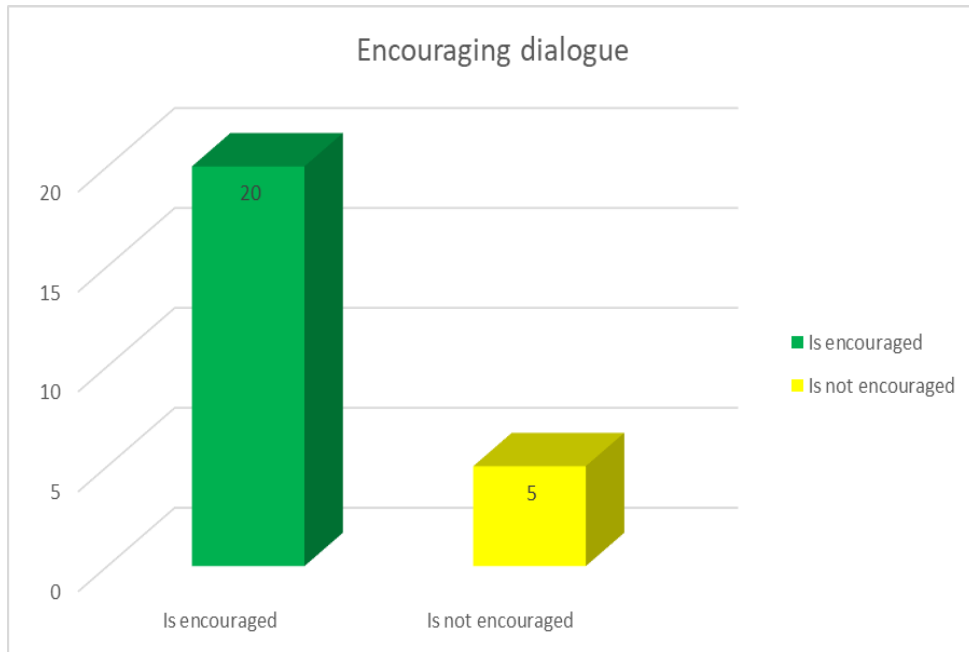


Figure 3.4 The extent to which employees are encouraged to have open dialogues with hierarchical superiors

Analyzing the responses received, we find that 80% of the employees of the public institution believe that they are encouraged to have open, honest and honest dialogues with the senior hierarchical heads, this is an undeniable advantage in creating a conflict-free atmosphere within the institution and in creating an appropriate communication climate between employees and their superior hierarchical heads.

5. A description of the communication relationship with the hierarchical boss was required in its own words.

The purpose of this requirement is to see how the employee relates to his/her hierarchical boss, what language he/she uses, how involved he/she is in making communication more efficient, how much respect there is for the image/merits of the boss. It seems that, even in this case, there is openness to employees from the higher hierarchical staff and the employees are quite open to the bosses.

6. This question was aimed at highlighting the most important results of good communication between employees and their superior hierarchical bosses, the purpose of the communication being materialized in 4 results by the employees, presented in Figure 3.5.

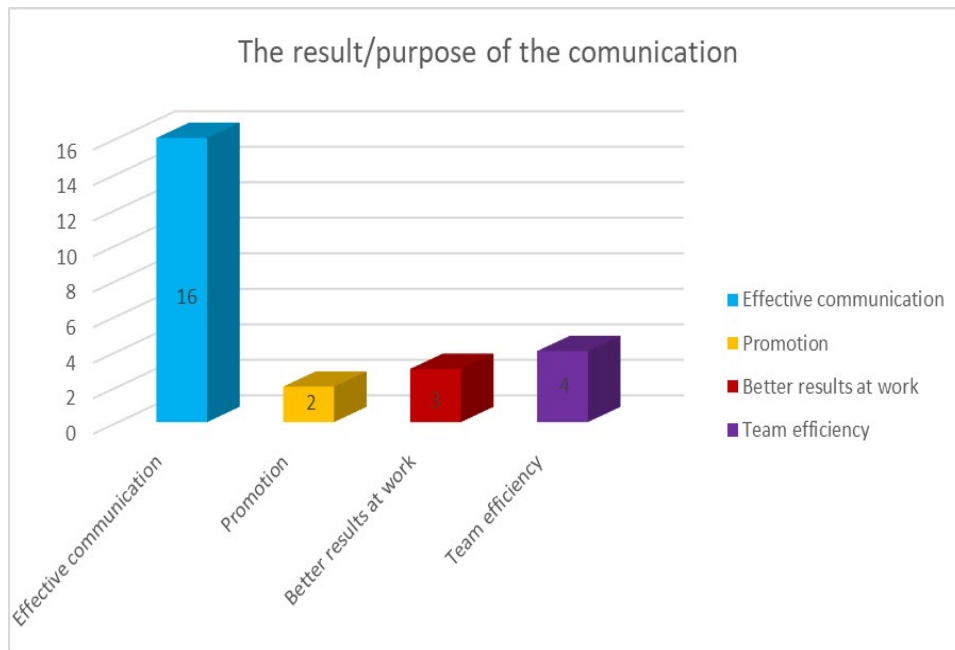


Figure 3.5 The purpose/outcome of the collaboration relationship, at work, with the hierarchical superior

The four results of the conflict-free communication process are in order: more effective communication within the institution (16 respondents, 64% of them in the sample), team efficiency (4 respondents, 16% of the sample, respectively), better results at work (3 respondents, 12% respectively) and support by management of the promotion on higher grades by employees (2 respondents, 4% of the sample surveyed).

7. The institution's employees' answers to this question concerned the persons with whom they are most frequently in contradictory situations of disagreement, the grievances being shown in Figure 3.6.

There are disagreements, but there is no conflict. The effectiveness of communication is still desirable, but it can be remedied by working with each employee individually by: Specialized persons (trainers, personal development advisor, psychological counselor, communication expert, etc.), daily group meetings at the office. There are strengths: Most of them have known each other for many years, some are family friends, they are educated people, they are people who care about the public image. Working with the public can also create tensions between colleagues in the office if there are difficulties in managing stress. It also requires an impartial, polite attitude, because these people are the image of the public institution where they work.

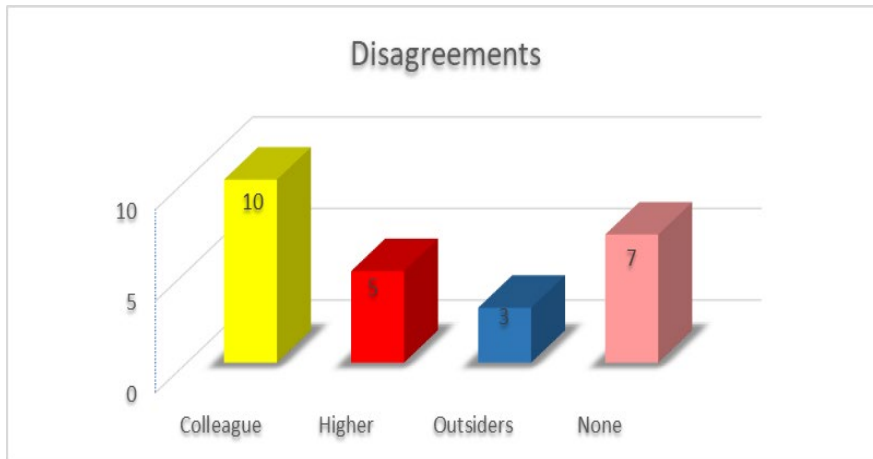


Figure 3.6 The people with whom employees often disagree

Analyzing the received answers we can say that there are disagreements, but there is no conflict. The efficiency of communication leaves more to be desired, but it can be remedied by working with each individual employee through: specialized persons (trainers, personal development counsellor, psychological counsellor, communication expert, etc.), daily group meetings at the office. There are advantages: most of them have been known for many years, some are family friends, are educated people, are people who care about the public image. Working with the public can generate tension and between office colleagues are the most disagreements (40% of disagreements are about collegiality relations), and, most likely this is due to the difficulty that most feel in managing stress.

8. This question focused on concrete answers on the importance given to nonverbal, paraverbal and verbal language, in this order, in the internal communication within the public institution, employee responses are shown in Figure 3.7.

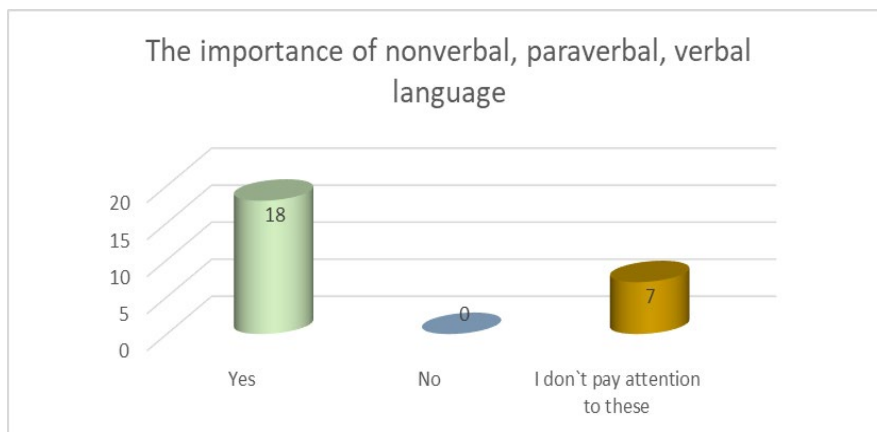


Figure 3.7 The importance of the 3 communication languages in the institution

Knowing that most people communicate over 70% through nonverbal and paraverbal languages and only ultimately through verbal language, the fact that 18 respondents, 72% of them consider important these 3 types of languages in the communication process is another asset of the institution in mitigating any conflicts that may arise. Even if the other respondents, respectively 28% they have not paid attention to these aspects of communication, there is a possibility that in the future they have attracted their attention through the questionnaire on the importance of these languages of communication in any working relationship.

9. On the efficiency of the communication process between employees and their superiors, the answers are shown in Figure 3.8

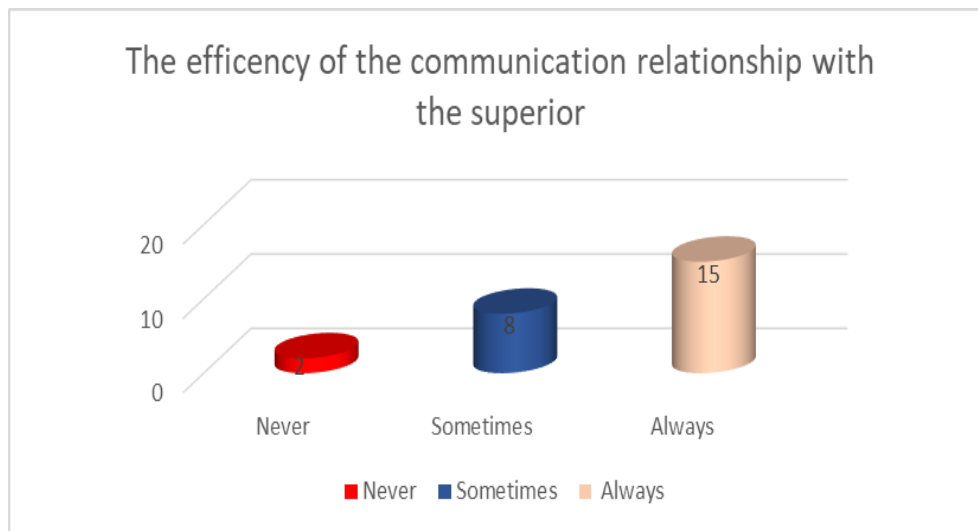


Figure 3.8 Communication with the higher hierarchical head of the institution

We notice, from the analysis of the answers in the questionnaire, that there are people who do not get along with the hierarchical chief in a small proportion of only 8%, people who only sometimes get along with him (32% among respondents) and people who always communicate well with the hierarchically superior head, representing the highest category of 60%. Therefore, there are 10 people, 40% of those surveyed who identified difficulties in communicating with the hierarchical head from the perspective of communication issues, questions such as: What are the reasons? These can be from meetings reports, working with communication specialists? etc.

10. In this questionnaire, the employees were asked their opinion on the correlation they perceive within the institution between an efficient communication, and the subsequent ease of solving the problems occurred (figure 3.9).

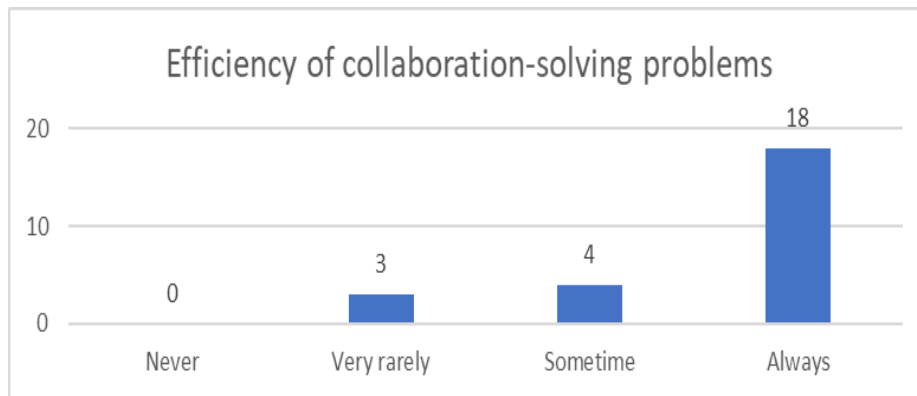


Figure 3.9 Relationship collaboration through effective communication - degree of problem solving

Based on the answers we can conclude that there is no employee who considers indifferent the nature of the communication relationship in solving problems, while 28% I perceive only very rarely and sometimes good communication is necessary in order to achieve the highest possible degree of problem solving. A positive aspect that emerges from the interpretation of the answers to this question is that 72% among the employees, they believe that the more effective the internal communication, the greater the degree of solving various problems that can lead to conflicts.

11. Given that the employees have identified the importance and the need for effective communication within the institution to this question, we have received answers on how the process of communication with the hierarchical superior takes place in the light of the clarity of the messages sent to employees by them (figure 3.10)

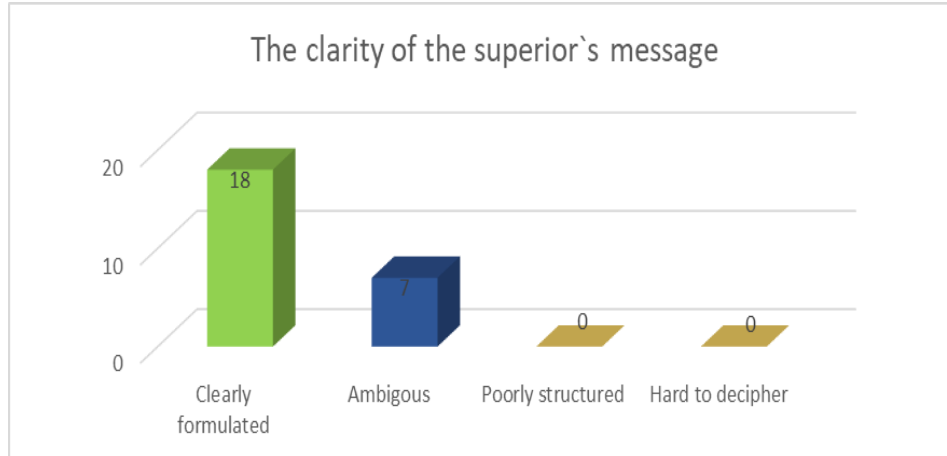


Figure 3.10 Clarity message sent to employees of the institution by the hierarchical superior

Similar to the previous question, where the same 72% of those surveyed identified the need for effective communication, replied that the messages received from the hierarchical superior are clearly formulated, while 28% consider primed messages ambiguous.

12. To this penultimate question were collected information on the type of message used in the manager-employee communication in work situations where problems arise that require solving by means of an interactive process communication (figure 3.11)

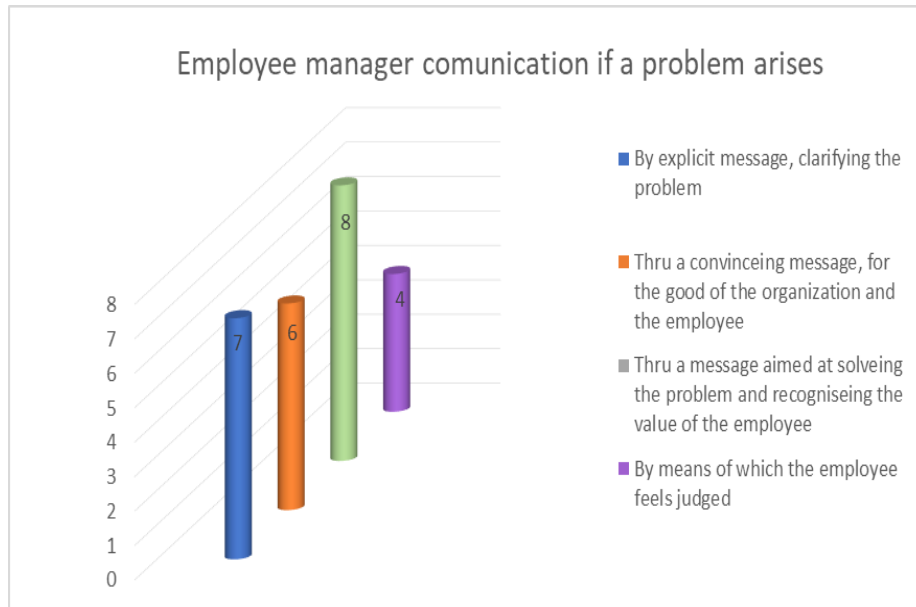


Figure 3.11 How to address the hierarchical superior to the employee if a communication problem occurs

According to the answers presented in the diagram above, we can see that 32% of employees say that the message used by the manager is oriented towards solving the problem and recognizing the value of the employee, 28% say that the message is an explicit one that clarifies the problems, 24% say that the message is a persuasion type, oriented towards identifying the institution and the employee's „bine and 16% respondents believe that the message used by the manager in solving problems is one in which the employee feels guilty. We can say that these responses regarding the type of message sent by the manager to the employees correspond to the communication style prevailing in the institution, namely, the problem-solving and persuasion style.

13. Knowing that the meeting is one of the most used organizational forms in creating a productive and conflict-free communication climate, on the last question, the employees provided answers regarding the time frame they consider appropriate to hold meetings (figure 3.12)

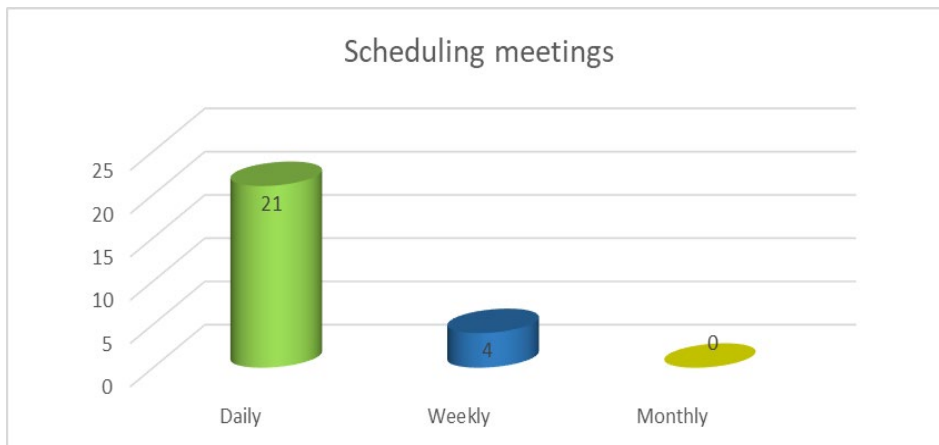


Figure 3.12 The role of meetings in conflict resolution through effective communication

From the perspective of the answers received, we can say that employees consider the meetings scheduled daily (84% of those questioned) as being the key to effective communication in a public institution and the efficiency of this process depends overwhelmingly on preventing conflicts in internal labor relations.

4. Conclusions

In everyday life, but also in the workplace, people communicate in different proportions both formally and informally. Following the exchange of messages between people, communication can lead to the obtaining of the agreement, but it is also not excluded the variant of disagreement that can sometimes even lead to the generation of a conflict. Based on the results obtained in the case study in the public institution that was the subject of the study, although there are disagreements between the employees and their superior hierarchical heads, in general, there is no conflict because hierarchical leaders are open to dialogue and are willing to take into account the small shortcomings of the communication process within the institution being even willing to hold daily meetings to resolve possible conflicts.

The emergence of conflicts in labor relations is, however, an aspect that cannot be eliminated entirely, but through a managerial style of communication type „resolution of problems”, problem, as is the style perceived by the employees of the institution as the most used in the relationship between them and their superior hierarchical bosses, potential conflicts may be mitigated from the initial phase of their occurrence. However, we cannot generalize the situation found in the public institution presented, which has a small size in terms of the number of employees, at the level of all public institutions in our country, but at the same time, we cannot minimize the importance of effective communication in ensuring working relationships where the emergence of conflicts can be easily prevented

through languages, appropriate tools and types of communication used by managers of public institutions and employees.

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