

THE PROBLEMS OF THE PROFESSION OF COMMUNICATION SPECIALISTS IN THE PROCESSES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHANGES AFTER THE ADMINISTRATIVE TERRITORIAL REFORM IN LATVIA

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Abstract. In recent decades, Latvia has been affected by several administrative and territorial reforms, the last of them in 2021. Consequently, 43 new municipalities were created instead of the previous 119 municipalities. One of the reform's goals was to reduce local governments' administrative costs, which meant reducing the number of deputies and employees, including communication specialists. However, reorganizing the work processes of the new administrative territories created new professional challenges for the municipal communication specialists, as there was a need to explain these often problematic processes to the public.

The study aims to identify the problems of the profession of communication specialists in the processes of changes in local governments after the administrative-territorial reform in Latvia. Research question: what are the most common problems in the professional activities of communication and public relations specialists of Latvian municipalities in the period after the implementation of the administrative-territorial reform? Both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods are used in the research. A survey of these specialists was conducted to clarify the professional activity problems of communication specialists, which have arisen under the influence of the municipal change process. The results of the focus group discussion supplemented the survey results and showed the nature of the problems by looking at them from a deeper perspective. The interviews of local governments and communication experts provided insight into public relations and communication problems in the industry, both in local governments and in Latvia as a whole.

As a result of the study, the authors conclude that, in general, the administrative-territorial reform in Latvia has mainly addressed issues of an economic and infrastructural nature. In such a situation, the role of vital professional communication specialists is increasing. Currently, it can be observed that, in general, communication specialists' involvement in managing municipal change processes in Latvia is low. It is hindered by factors such as the lack of understanding on the part of the municipal administration, as well as the inconsistency of the skills and knowledge of public relations specialists.

Key words: administrative territorial reform, change processes, municipalities, organizational communication, public relations.

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Introduction

Today, corporate communication has become an essential function of organizational development and occupies an important place in organizations of various types and fields. This function covers all aspects of communication-related to an organization's identity, reputation and goals. It affects many areas, including process efficiency, productivity, employee relations, management and company culture, and it helps to increase credibility with different audiences both inside and outside the organization (Cornelissen, 2020). In addition, the importance of corporate communication is growing year by year – thanks to the development of new forms and channels of communication, including the Internet and other media, the communication environment of the 21st century is inclusive, diverse and dynamic, and the possibility of rapidly reaching the required target audience through various channels has increased (Ohme, Araujo, Boeschoten, Freelon, Ram, Reeves, & Robinson, 2023). Nevertheless, it also creates problems. For example, the amount of information in the public environment has become immense, the information environment is oversaturated, and in the last decade, the formation of information overload can be observed at various levels when the audiences to whom the communication is directed no longer perceive

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the content of the communication, and even actively avoid it. In turn, this problem in corporate communication can be prevented by creating a smartly coordinated and precisely focused strategic management of communication content and channels. Thus, corporate communication has become essential not only for the organization but also for strategic functions.

One of the branches of corporate communication is public relations. The term "public relations" was conceptualized in the 1970s by one of the central public relations theorists and practitioners, James E. Grunig, to denote a specific part of corporate communication: "Public relations (PR) is a strategic communication process that aims to build mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its various stakeholders, including the public, customers, employees, investors, and the media. The primary goal of PR is to manage and shape the public perception of an organization, brand, product, or individual. This involves creating positive publicity, managing crises and negative publicity, fostering goodwill, and enhancing the organization's reputation. PR professionals often use a variety of communication channels and tactics, such as media relations, social media, events, speeches, newsletters, and community outreach, to achieve these objectives" (Grunig, Hunt, 1984). In essence, public relations is about managing the flow of information between an organization and its audience to maintain a positive image and cultivate trust and credibility. It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing consumer behaviour, and ultimately contributing to the success of an organization.

Both Grunig and his predecessor PR classicist Edward L. Bernays and other authors emphasize an essential aspect of public relations – to achieve an effective result, public relations must be implemented as a management function, and not only at the operational level (Grunig, 1992; Bernays, 1952; Cameron, Wilcox, Reber, Shin, 2008; L`Etang, 2008). However, in practice, this has turned out to be one of the fundamental problems of the profession, about which there have always been discussions among PR industry professionals – how to achieve that PR is a management function in every organization and company. In addition, often, even PR specialists themselves do not understand their functions because they do not always have good two-way communication with the management; therefore, they do not perform management-level tasks, and the questions arise: "Why am I in this organization at all? Am I here just to follow the instructions, or to be present at management decision-making moments, to explain the impact on society and its possible impact on the organizations' reputation?" From this connection and mutual understanding of public relations, the role of a public relations specialist in the organization is also formed.

The purpose of this study is to identify the problems of the profession of communication and public relations specialists in the processes of change in municipalities after the administrative-territorial reform in Latvia. Research question: What are the most common problems in the professional activities of communication and public relations specialists of Latvian municipalities in the period after the implementation of the administrative-territorial reform? Research tasks and methodology: 1) to analyse literature and documents on public relations, corporate communication, change processes, and communication in municipalities; 2) to analyse the data obtained from the previously conducted research – a survey with public relations specialists of local governments in Latvia, chairpersons and executive directors of local governments; 3) to conduct a focus group discussion of municipal public relations specialists in order to find out in depth the problems and possible solutions of the mentioned specialists in their professional activities in change processes; 4) to conduct interviews with the municipality and communication experts in order to evaluate not only the problems faced by municipal PR specialists in municipalities and search the reasons for this, but also to examine the PR industry in Latvia as a whole.

Research results and discussion

1. The concept of public relations in organizational communication

In the Latvian National Encyclopedia, public relations is defined as "a component of communication that includes organized relations between the organization and its target audience. The purpose of public relations is to influence society or a part of it. Public relations are used to build reputation, crises, receive public support, motivate employees, find cooperation partners etc." (Petersons, 2019). So, the main thing that follows from this definition is – relationships and their formation. In relationship formation and reputation, it is necessary to receive public support, which, for example, in the case of municipalities, is very long. In order to build relations and communication with the public, this process must be managed, and this is a public relations specialist, which is also confirmed by the following definitions in the encyclopedia: "The organization ensures its public relations using the specialists employed in it (press secretary, public relations manager, public relations manager. head of a structural unit, adviser), or by buying them as an outsourcing service (managers of public relations projects in public relations companies)." (Petersons, 2019).

The duties of PR specialists include a wide range of both external and internal communication tasks, which are succinctly called "key processes" in their book "Public Relations. Concepts, Practice and Critique", and are also mentioned by public relations professor Jacquie L`Etang: research, goal setting, publicity, news, development and implementation of strategy and tactics, evaluation (L`Etang, 2008). In order to carry out such duties qualitatively, a public relations specialist must have both professional skills and a specific role in the organization. "Over time, public relations professionals develop patterns of how to behave in different situations and adapt to the perceptions of the people around them about what they should do in the performance of their duties," states the book "Public Relations" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006), in addition the authors have also distinguished several roles, which are most often performed by PR specialists in organizations, which in the end also most often determine the scope and quality of the work performed by these specialists. "With the help of the description of the four main roles, it is possible to give an idea of the main roles of this profession. At different times and in different situations, public relations workers perform all these and many other roles to varying degrees, but in their daily work and interactions with other people, one role usually stands out – the main role" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). Such roles in daily work can be attributed to local government PR specialists, mainly because they often have to perform several roles and many others in their daily work, which is also mentioned by the authors of the book and which is confirmed by further research carried out by the authors of this article.

Cutlip, Center, & Broom distinguish four prominent roles of PR professionals in an organization.

1) Communications technician – the main feature of this role is a more technical performance in his position, without involvement in the decision-making process, so in this case, the PR specialist is not a management-level specialist. "Communications technicians are hired to compile and edit employee newsletters, press releases and descriptions, manage website content, and liaise with mass media. Public relations staff in this role are not usually invited to participate in management-level staff meetings where problems are clarified and solutions are sought. They get involved in the work after the decisions have been made, and their responsibility is to ensure communications and implement the program" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). The authors of the book attribute this role more to PR specialists – beginners; however, in this role, different competencies are expected from the PR specialist.

2) Expert organizer – as the definition of the role shows, these PR specialists are given a higher priority both for the role of the specialist in the organization and for the organization of the work to be performed. "Those public relations employees who assume the role of expert organizers are considered by other employees as authorities in identifying and solving public relations problems. Senior managers leave public relations management to an expert organizer and play a relatively passive role in this area themselves. Those employees who work as expert organizers themselves determine the issues to be resolved, develop the program for solving these issues and are fully responsible for the implementation of the programs. The rest of the leaders believe that only an expert organizer is responsible for public relations" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). In addition, the authors of the book point out that this role is highly prestigious among both PR professionals and employers. In particular, this role is relevant from the point of view of employers because every head of an organization wants to have high-class specialists working in his organization who perform their work as professionals, which is also pointed out by Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Senter, and Glenn M. Broom. The negative feature of this role is that the leaders of the organization are too passive, not getting involved in PR issues believing that only the expert organizer himself has to deal with everything. From the point of view of the organization's management, an expert organizer should be involved only in crisis situations, which does not contribute to the structured and long-term, well-thought-out development of the organization and the creation of the external image as a whole. "If the role of an expert organizer is requested only in crisis situations or periodically during the execution of a specific program, the end result is that the understanding and implementation of the importance of public relations throughout the organization is hindered. In addition, public relations specialists are not satisfied with this situation because they are the only ones responsible for the results of the program, but at the same time, they are almost unable to influence the critical points of the situation and the factors that have brought public relations problems to the fore" (Cutlip, Senter, & Broom, 2006). The situation when a PR specialist is attracted only in case of crisis communication is not rare in Latvian organizations, and it is understandable that this does not satisfy the PR specialists themselves because, in such situations, they often feel not as experts but as executors.

3) Communication coordinator – the main task of PR specialists in this role is to create two-way communication, both internal and external. "In the role of a communication coordinator, a public relations officer's duty is to listen carefully and fulfil the duties of an information intermediary. Communication coordinators are coordinators, interpreters and mediators between the organization and its related public. They maintain two-way communication and coordinate the exchange of information, breaking down relationship barriers and keeping communication channels open. The purpose of their activity is to provide both the organization and society with the information necessary to ensure mutually beneficial decision-making" (Cutlip, Senter, & Broom, 2006). So, as the name of the role suggests, the PR specialist is a mediator between the organization and its target groups, including the organization's employees, and also in internal communication. His role as a mediator also largely determines the quality of decisions made by the organization and the level of public awareness.

4) The problem-solving coordinator – as the role definition says – is the PR specialist who identifies problems in the organization and is the main driving force in solving them. However, the essential difference between the three roles described above is that he is a problem-solving coordinator and a member of the strategic planning team; namely, he is also a management-level specialist. "The problem-solving coordinator helps other leaders of organizations, and the organization as a whole has its own public relations management process – step by step – which is used when solving other

organizational problems" (Cutlip, Senter, & Broom, 2006). Namely, in this case, the active involvement of the managers themselves in the strategic planning process of public relations is provided. So, in this case, it is a matter of close cooperation between the PR specialist and management. "Problem-solving coordinators are brought into the management team because they have demonstrated that they have the skills and knowledge to help other managers avoid or solve problems. Thus, the factor of promoting public relations is involved in management decision-making" (Cutlip, Senter, & Broom, 2006).

The authors of the book also mention that studies have been conducted on how PR specialists adapt to different roles in organizations. There are several determining factors, but the most important of them are opportunities for a salary supplement, the opportunity to move up the career ladder, opportunities for growth, the opportunity to participate in the decision-making of the organization, and, therefore, to be management-level specialists. Undoubtedly, the knowledge and professional skills of a PR specialist are also necessary, which Olga Kazaka calls "competencies" in her book "The First PR Book". According to Kazaka, "Successful development in the field of public relations is ensured in three important directions of development. First of all, it is important to understand the processes – everything related to the strategic vision of the situation, the ability to combine individual actions into the overall work of the organization, and the ability to analyse and logically reach the right decision. Secondly, important practical skills are the ability to write, speak, persuade, and create new ideas. Thirdly, process management skills are essential: time management, skilful project management, working with your emotions" (Kazaka, 2019). Thus, the PR specialist must be competent, with the ability to analyse and logically reason about the various processes that are necessary when performing the PR as a management function, as well as the practical skills that form the daily work of the PR specialist, which are essential.

2. Professional problems and challenges of municipal public relations specialists in Latvia

After the municipal elections of 2021, Latvia switched to 43 municipalities instead of the 119 local municipalities. This is stipulated by the Law on Administrative Territories and Settlements, which entered into force on 23 June 2020. The work of the new municipal council began in July 2021. As a result of the unification of administrative territories, public relations (PR) and communication positions were also optimized; namely, the sphere of responsibility of PR specialists increased in many places due to the creation of larger administrative units, while in other places PR and communication specialists lost their jobs. Therefore, the aim of the research is to find out the problems of PR and communication specialists after the reform, taking into account that this is not the only administrative-territorial reform that has taken place since Latvia regained its independence in 1991.

One hundred seventy-four respondents took part in the survey of municipal public relations specialists, 101 respondents in the survey of chairpersons and executive directors of municipalities, but six municipal PR specialists participated in the focus group. Two public relations specialists specializing in public sector communication and public relations, as well as a long-term local government employee, were interviewed as experts.

Table 1

List of experts

Nr.	Name	Status
1.	Andris Jaunsleinis	Ex-Chairman of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments
2.	Inga Latkovska	Strategic Consultant of Communication company LEAD
3.	Līga Mirlina	Turība University, lecturer, Communication Specialist

Source: created by the authors

In general, there are approximately 200 public relations specialists in all municipalities in Latvia, whose positions are called differently: public relations specialist, communication specialist, senior or public relations manager, head of the information department, editor of the municipal newsletter, marketing specialist or manager, communication project manager, website administrator, secretary, HR specialist, tourism affairs specialist, youth affairs specialist etc. However, the functions of these specialists are more or less related to public relations.

The role of communication in any change process is high, which was also proven by the time of the COVID-19 pandemic – timely and professional information was most expected among the population. Likewise, in the daily life of local governments and especially during the reform, it is essential for local government residents to understand the progress of the reform and its impact on the future fate of the specific local government. In local governments, just like anywhere else, and in the private sector, PR specialists are the ones who prepare and distribute information to citizens or target groups. However, the speed and quality of communication may be reduced if PR specialists cannot or are unable to perform their duties because there are objective reasons for this.

The survey of public relations specialists revealed that the majority – 71.83% or 125 respondents – have more than three years of experience in the PR sector; of these, 16.1% or 28 respondents have more than 15 years of experience in this sector, which is very a lot of experience, if it is assumed that entered Latvia in the last 30 years or so. In contrast, only 28.2% or 49 PR specialists have less than three years of experience, which could be called a small or beginner's experience. Experience in the industry is one of the decisive factors in being able to perform one's job professionally – to see and analyse processes, to find the best and most appropriate communication solutions for the situation, to form long-term PR, thus to see the impact of any process on the reputation as a whole.

The survey revealed that Latvian municipalities have a broad understanding of the PR position title. This can be explained by the fact that PR specialists as a profession were included in the classification of Latvian professions relatively recently – around 2004. Therefore, the interpretation of the title of the PR position of the local government management is to be explained.

The different understanding of the PR profession is also reflected in other survey questions. For instance, the answers to the question "Do you combine several positions?" reveal that 126 respondents or 72% of local government PR specialists, combine several positions. This is a large number and is closely related to both the scope of the duties to be performed, the quality of the work performed and the overall feeling of well-being while performing the duties of a PR specialist in the municipality. The correlation between these aspects can be seen in the following survey questions.

Some of the mentioned positions can be attributed as part of public relations, for example, website administrator editor of the municipal newsletter (although in some municipalities, this publication is very voluminous and filled with diverse content, which requires a lot of time and investment), event organizer (in some municipalities this position includes work in a cultural institution of a municipality, therefore it is not about events as a function of PR, but as a separate job unit), social media administrator (for large

municipalities, communication on social media is very active, so these duties are even defined as a separate position etc.

However, most of the mentioned positions are full-time – in the case of municipal PR specialists, they are combined with the PR position. Basically, it means managing of two full-time positions. The following serious positions: tourism organizer, youth affairs specialist, personnel specialist, clerk, external relations specialist, office manager, PR specialist also in another municipal institution or capital company, sports methodologist, IT specialist, head of the Development Department, teacher, assistant to the chairman, deputy etc. connecting requires not only much time but also high-stress resistance, because the management of the municipality undoubtedly expects that the results of both positions will be in accordance with the settings of the management and the municipality.

Answers to the survey question "Do you have to perform duties not related to your position?" show a completely different situation – 68% or 119 respondents answered "yes" and only 32% or 55 answered "no", so in this situation also it becomes clear that the PR specialist must combine not only several positions but also fulfil non-official duties. One of the answers to the open-ended question accurately describes the problems raised in this article: "In small municipalities, every employee performs several functions and is involved in events and activities in order to achieve the common goal of the municipality – to create good governance and provide the best range of services to citizens. In this case, you should be involved in the technical support of events, maintaining the website, creating publicity, customer service, improving the business environment, and youth affairs".

The range of duties not related to the position is vast, and the tasks to be performed are time-consuming and often as responsible as the direct duties of a PR specialist. From the variety of additional responsibilities, it can be understood that PR specialists are entrusted with more than even one person can do, which undoubtedly leads to overtime, work, and the specialist feels stressed. Respondents in the survey indicate that most of them work more than what is stipulated in the contract; six but six respondents, or 3, or .5%, work up to five or more hours a day. As a result, 58% of the respondents emphasize that the work of PR requires high resistance to stress.

According to the results of the survey, internal and external communication are also among the most popular duties of a PR specialist, respectively – 75% or 130 and 82% or 143 responses. In external communication, municipalities use different types of meetings as the most popular tool for creating a dialogue with the public, which should usually be organized by a PR specialist, which is also consistent with the duties mentioned in question 9 of the survey – organizing various meetings is generally very popular in the activities of PR specialists. Many of these meetings are related to direct duties, but some, such as the organization of entertainment events at the local cultural centre, are not related to non-mediated events.

In the answers to the question "Please indicate what, in your opinion, will be the most pressing challenges in public relations and communication management in municipalities in the next three years (please choose the five most important trends)", the respondents see the following challenges as priorities: the need to simultaneously address different audiences using different channels with limited resources – 124 responses; building and maintaining trust with target groups – 112 responses; managing digital evolution and social platforms in daily work – 110 answers; closer connection between the municipal strategy and its internal and external communication – 95 answers etc. Therefore, the survey participants anticipate that the multifaceted role of PR will continue to grow, and the issue of reputation building and maintenance will become more and more important, increasing the respect of the target groups for the organization. The challenge that is relevant for all industries in the 21st century is also highly valued – the

rapid development of the digital environment and the diversity of communication in it. PR specialists are also aware that a strategic approach to communication is necessary to implement all of this successfully.

To the survey question "Do you think that public relations is a management-level function in the work of your municipality?" the opinions of the respondents are divided almost equally in half. However, there are more of those who believe that in the municipality where the specialist works, public relations is a function of the management level. Eighty-nine respondents answered in the affirmative; however, 39% or 68 – do not consider PR to be a management-level function in their workplace.

Undoubtedly, it is a positive trend that in more than half of cases, PR specialists in their municipality feel that it is a management-level function, which also agrees with what was mentioned in the theoretical section - this is one of the most critical prerequisites for public relations to be a strategically thought-out function. However, 39% or 68 respondents express that they are not involved in management-level discussions and decision-making processes.

The respondents' answers to the final question of the survey, "Do you think that public relations should be a management-level function in the work of the municipality?" reveal that the majority – 93% – of respondents believe that PR should be a management-level function, therefore the author concludes that in this matter there is an understanding of how important a role public relations play in the work of the municipality. A slightly different picture is revealed in the results of the survey of chairpersons and executive directors of local governments, where only a little more than half, namely 52 respondents, believe precisely the same. Thirty-four respondents believe that the PR specialist does not need to be a management-level specialist, which is only about a third of the total number of respondents; however, this is a lot in the context if you consider that every case when a manager treats such a position negatively is subject to discussion and research – it is essential to understand why there is such an opinion that does not agree with what was mentioned in the theoretical part. Likewise, the municipal administration is not transparent in its answer as to whether the PR specialist is invited to make meaningful and strategic decisions. Almost half of 42 respondents answered that everything depends on the situation, which, however, is not the direction of strategically formed communication. A few more respondents, respectively - 67, admit that they consulted with the PR specialist on communication issues.

The results of the focus group discussion complement the results of the survey and show the nature of the problems, giving them a deeper perspective. Thus, for example, five out of six focus group participants confirmed that, when working in one of the municipalities of Latvia, it is necessary to combine several positions or perform duties unrelated to the position. Such results were also shown by the public relations specialists of Latvian municipalities.

Among the problematic issues, the following aspects were mentioned:

- it is difficult to cooperate with the management, because the management does not understand the functions of public relations, are also mentioned among the problematic issues;
- the management avoids communication with the public, which contradicts the aspects mentioned in the theoretical part, that communication with the target audiences is primary for local governments – its decisions must be aimed at the welfare of the public, and this must also be explained in order to form a dialogue between the local government and the public; the management does not inform about essential meetings, therefore there is no possibility to reflect them or participate in order to professionally support the management;

- the PR specialist is also not invited to employee meetings and thus is not informed of what was discussed in them, therefore the PR specialist cannot fully participate in the creation of internal communication, which, as also stated in the theory section, is one of the duties of every PR specialist.

Summarizing the opinions of three experts, it should be concluded that the vision and understanding of PR and communication functions is much broader and more correlated with the theoretical positions. Key takeaways from expert interviews:

- over time, the influence of PR specialists has changed – it has become more assertive;
- PR specialists must be loyal to the head of the municipality;
- the PR specialist is primarily the one who takes information to the public; thus, the reputation of the municipality is formed;
- “communication is effective if you are the first”;
- the PR specialist must be a mediator between the management and the team, between the municipality and society;
- public relations is intellectual work, so flexible working hours and remote work are crucial so that the specialist can work at the time and place that suits him best;
- PR specialists in many areas are often under evaluated;
- if the management appreciates the importance of public relations, the PR specialist will definitely be a management-level specialist;
- if the PR specialist has to combine several positions and perform duties unrelated to the position, he can only be an executor and not a specialist;
- if the manager does not understand the importance of the PR specialist, the one must go and speak, defend one's existence, and stop complaining;
- high stress and long-term dissatisfaction with the situation can lead the PR specialist to decision to quit his job or even change his profession;
- considering the fact how different municipalities are, their management's perception of public relations can also significantly differ;
- if the PR specialist sees his role in the municipality in the way that significantly differs from manager's expectations, a clash of opinions may occur;
- for local governments, communication with the public is almost mandatory, whereas for companies, it is optional;
- the main task of the PR of municipalities is to provide information about their goals, plans, budget execution, and other topical issues of the municipality.

Summarizing the research results, it can be concluded that public relations specialists in Latvia undoubtedly fulfil the functions described in the scientific guidelines; however, in practice, the real work in this profession has introduced corrections, especially under the influence of reforms, which on the one hand should be seen as a transformation of the profession in accordance with the requirements of the era, but on the other hand, it increases the risk that the lack of understanding about this profession is increasing, the number of problems is increasing – the amount of responsibilities is increasing, but the salary does not change, there are uncertainties about the goals and tasks of this profession; thus the reputation of the public relations profession as a whole is suffering.

Undoubtedly, a big problem in the creation of communication is differences in opinions of PR specialists and municipality management about the nature and necessity of public relations and communication. The

research findings conducted globally on PR issues show that the creation and delivery of communication content to the target audience can be timely and of high-quality only provided that PR specialist is a management-level specialist as, during the creation of the content, PR and communication specialists must be well informed of the strategic decisions of the management.

Any reform – external or internal – is a process of change, in which the management of the organization plays an important role, as well as PR and communication specialists. Their joint cooperation forms a synergy. However, synergy is impossible if there are various hindering factors – not only in the understanding of the communication goals, but also related with the overload, extra duties, lack of time, burnout etc.

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

- 1) It is vital for organizations today to be approachable, open and available in creating beneficial and meaningful corporate communication, therefore both private and public sector organizations are increasingly aware of the need to be present and involved in communication processes, thus getting closer to their target audience.
- 2) There is a frequent turnover of public relations specialists in local governments, which does not allow local governments to plan strategic long-term public relations. In order to reduce this, the primary duties of the position of PR specialist should be explained, which would change the attitude of both sides – the administration and specialists, and thus increase the understanding of PR as a complete, part-time position, where additional duties may be an exception rather than permanent practice.
- 3) Latvian municipal PR specialists and municipal chairs and executive directors often do not have a common understanding of the goals and tasks of the PR in the work of the municipality, which hinders professional cooperation between the two parties. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the heads of municipalities to show the main problems of PR specialists, including combining several positions, which causes overload and stress and reduces the quality of communication, which in turn affects the reputation of the municipality and corporate communication.
- 4) The performance of duties that are not directly related to their position should be an exception, not a system; therefore, in the meetings with municipal chairs and executive directors, a solution should be found to change the situation, possibly by delegating some additional duties to other municipal specialists, thus relieving the workload of PR specialists and giving them the opportunity qualitatively perform their duties, which is directly related to the formation of the reputation of local governments. A uniform of the PR specialist's job description should also be developed, which would be an example for all local governments.
- 5) Only half of the municipal leaders in the survey indicate that the PR specialist should be a management-level specialist in the municipality, which means that often PR specialist is not invited to participate in the decision-making process, therefore, cannot fully communicate these decisions to the public. At meetings and seminars, municipal managers and CEOs should be given an understanding of why a municipal PR specialist should be a management-level specialist and participate in management-level meetings - to advise the management on the impact of decisions on target audiences, their reactions and the necessary PR activities, corporate communication tasks, it generally refers to the reputation of municipalities.
- 6) It is difficult to manage change processes in both the internal and external environment of the organization if there is a lack of shared understanding and a common vision of the organization's achievable goals and their impact on the well-being of the population, so it is necessary to strengthen

the role of PR and communication. This function can be undertaken by PR specialists and industry experts, as well as by relevant non-governmental organizations, such as the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments and the Latvian Association for Public Relations Professionals.

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