

Theories and principles of organizational communication in public schools

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Synopsis: The focus of this paper is to present the theories and principles of organizational communication. Special emphasis is put on communication in public schools. The author of this study tried to establish which model of organizational communication may constitute the basis of effective communication in public schools. Alongside the analysis of communication processes in schools, forms and directions of organizational communication were identified.

Introduction

Constant changes in the system of education concerning its organization and models of management, but also all educational processes, cause public schools and their personnel to face new challenges. The market of educational services, which comprises both public and private schools, places a burden upon the public schools management bodies effective administration of those institutions. Head teachers strive to improve the functioning of schools they manage. They prepare a number of analyses and reports and send them to the founding body, education supervisory body and the ministry of education. They constantly monitor the functioning of schools paying special attention to upgrading the process of education. They often face the issue: what to do to recruit as many students as possible for the upcoming school year.

Taking into account the dynamics of changes in the system of education, one should pay special attention to the process of communication in those organizations. It is good communication that guarantees high results of education and formation achieved by a school. The increase of communicative competencies which influence the interactive culture may cause that both financial and organizational problems faced by school will turn out surmountable.

The aim of this paper is to characterize communication in public schools, especially to identify the forms and directions of organizational communication and to establish the model of organizational communication which reflects that specificity best.

This analysis is based on academic studies in the domains of management, communication, education management and on the analyses of normative acts and sets of regulations. The method of participant observation was also used: in the years 1997–1998 and 2007–2010 from the perspective of internal subjects and in the years 2000–2007 and 2011–2013 from the perspective of external subjects.

The definition and models of communication

Good mutual communication based on a reliable flow of information is the primary requirement for collaboration between people [Barańska, 2007, s. 163].

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The professional literature provides a number of definitions of communication. According to one of them, communication "is a process in which a person causes his or her thoughts, wishes or knowledge to become known and comprehensible to another person" [Pszczółowski, 1978, s. 100]. Another definition states that the aim of communication is to create a communicative community, i.e. to create such a social condition in which people understand each other easily and they feel needed [Mikułowski-Pomorski, 1999, s. 52]. The process of communication described in the abovementioned definitions proceeds in a few stages. It starts when there is a person who wishes to pass a message to another person. By transmitting that message the sender encodes its content in a form relevant to the situation, e.g. in words, facial expression, gestures or physical acts. Then the sender passes the message on by the relevant channel or means of communication. The recipient receives and decodes the message. The process of communication may be unidirectional or multidirectional. The general model of the process of communication presented in fig. 1 depicts the bidirectional process in which the sender sending the message is at the same time geared towards receiving the message from the recipient. This form of communication allows the sender to figure out whether or not his/her message has been correctly understood by the recipient.

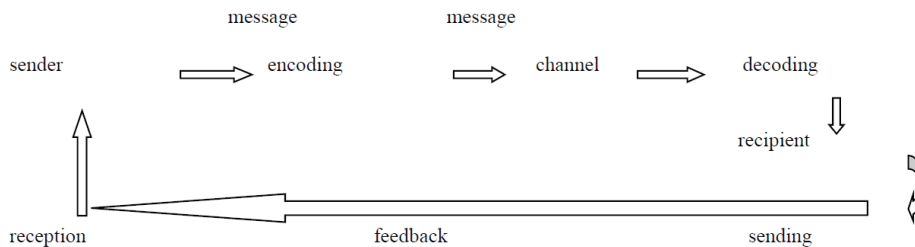


Fig. 1. General model of the process of communication
Source: Adapted on the basis of Piotrowski [2006, s. 187].

The theory of communication depicts the structure of this phenomenon in a form of more or less detailed models. In his model of communicating in verbal communication R. Jakobson (as shown in fig. 2) presents the process of verbal communication exclusively in one direction: sender – recipient.

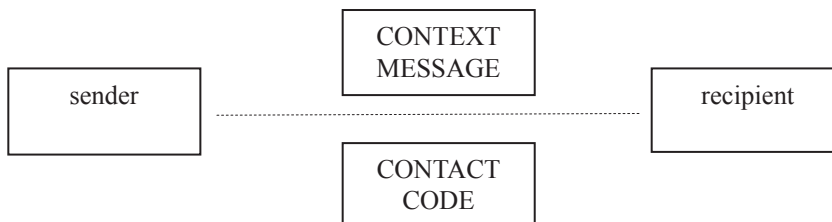


Fig. 2. Model of communicating in verbal communication
Source: Adapted on the basis of Mikułowski-Pomorski [1999, s. 53].

The sender is the person who speaks, the recipient is the person who listens, reads or watches at the given moment, and the message is the transmitted information. The code is the language of communication which should be common for the sender and the recipient. Communication takes place in a given context. Contact is possible due to the means of transmitting the message, i.e. the channel of communication. Another model of communication is presented by H.D. Lasswell. The author depicts five elements of the communication

process: sender – message – channel – recipient – result (fig. 3). Each element in this model answers a specific question: who, what, how, i.e. how it is communicated, to whom it is communicated and what is the result of the whole communication process.

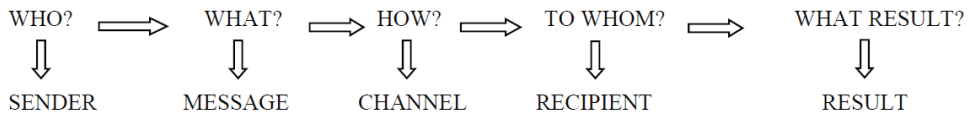


Fig. 3. Classic model of communication
 Source: Adapted on the basis of Mikułowski –Pomorski [1999, s. 54].

In the classic model of communication the sender is the person communicating something, the message is the information transmitted via the channel (by use of technical means) to the recipient, i.e. the person who directs his or her attention towards the message. The outcome is a collection of the effects of the communication. Yet another model of communication, in which some interferences between sending and receiving the message were taken into account, was presented in the 1940s by C. Shannon and W. Weaver. In their model they point at the source of information, in which the message is formed, which in turn in an encoded form is transmitted via the relevant channel to the recipient. It can be noticed that the person receiving the message can only decode it and has no impact on its sender. This model is presented in fig. 4.

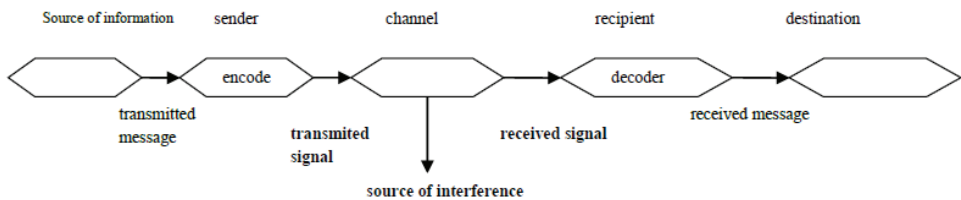


Fig. 4. The model of the process of communication according to Shannon and Weaver
 Source: Adapted on the basis of Moczyłowska [2006, s. 94].

The interactive and interpersonal nature of communication is emphasized in the model proposed by Ph. I. Morgan (see fig. 5).

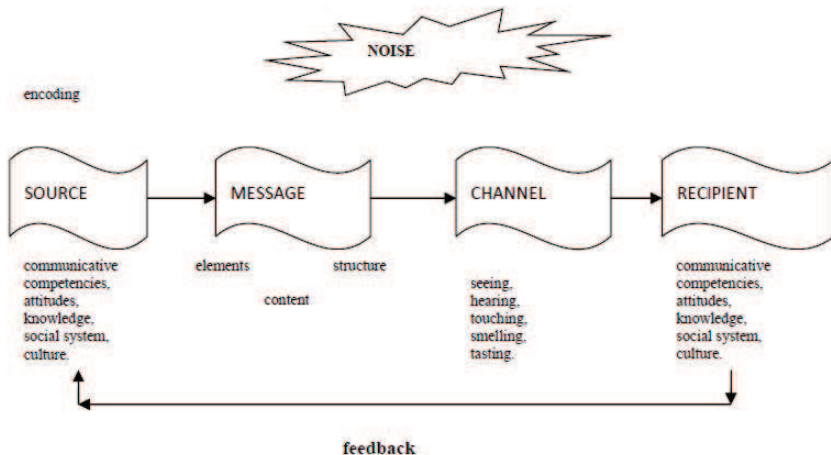


Fig. 5. The interpersonal model of communication by Ph.I. Morgan
 Source: Adapted on the basis of Sikorski [1999, s. 195].

The author shows processes related to bidirectional communication. In the case of such communication the recipient, having decoded the received message, has a possibility to send a reply to the sender. It can be also noticed that communicative competencies and belonging to social and cultural systems, as factors significantly influencing the process of communication, are taken into consideration by both the sender and the recipient.

In the analysis of the presented models and the definitions of the process of communication quoted above, three significant properties of the organizational communication process become clearly visible. First of all, it can be noticed that this process concerns people. Understanding of this process depends on understanding mutual relationships between people. Secondly, communication is based on the use of a common or agreed collection of meanings. It means that people who want to communicate with each other can do that effectively provided that they stay within the same culture and share similar socializing experiences. That leads to the third property of communication, i.e. the symbolic nature of this process. Only the gestures, sounds, letters, digits and words used and recognized by the participants of the communication process can be visualized and can familiarize the participants with the transmitted thoughts or intentions. It must be also stated that communication filters (the physical, semantic and pragmatic filter) play an extremely significant role in the communication process, as occasionally they can block communication entirely. This issue is widely discussed by J. Sasak [2010].

The organizational communication system in each organization embodies processes of communication at individual, group and inter-group level, and also at inter-organizational level. It must be pointed out that individuals partaking in the process are people who voluntarily joined the organization which often has got hierarchical structure and consists of members with specified roles, i.e. a small management group and a large group of subordinates. What can be inferred from that model is that contacts and relations between the partakers of this system are of an involuntary, formal and organizational nature [Dobek-Ostrowska, 2004, s. 113]. Communication is then transmitting information between individuals and groups occupying the same or similar positions in the given organizational structure or between individuals and groups occupying different positions. Effectiveness of such a process of communicating in an organization depends mostly on the following factors [Stoner, Freeman, Gilbert, 1998, s. 515-516; Potocki, 2011, s. 34-35]:

- formal channels of communication such as: circular letters, notes, instructions, time-tables, regulations, the ethical code, reports, and meetings with the employees,
- management structures reflected in the organizational structure,
- specialization of tasks within diverse groups,
- ownership of information which means that particular individuals in the organization possess information and knowledge which concerns exclusively their work.

Forms of communication, with regard to factors influencing their effectiveness, proceed along horizontal and vertical connections in the organization. The most common form of communication in an organization is the up-and-down vertical pattern which usually follows the lines of the official assignments [Winkler, 2006, s. 121-122], and the horizontal pattern which encompasses people who occupy equivalent posts in the hierarchy of the organization. It can be also noticed that the process of organizational communication is strictly linked with management and its basic functions such as: planning, organizing, executing and monitoring. The importance of the process of communication is emphasized by the fact that none of the ten basic roles fulfilled by a manager can be done without communication. Performing interpersonal functions requires from a manager the process of contacting his or her supervisors, subordinates and external organizations. Making decisions requires leaders to communicate their decisions to others, and informative roles concentrate mostly on gaining and distributing information.



Establishing which model reflects the specificity of communication in public schools best requires prior characterization of the forms and directions of organizational communication in educational institutions.

Forms and directions of organizational communication in educational institutions

The school as an educational institution has always been regarded as an important part of social life. Schools are organizations with predominance of the human factor over technology and the material and technical elements. What distinguishes school from other public organizations is the functions it performs – educating and forming children and youth – and the predominance of the human factor. According to the Education Act 1991 the main authority managing an educational institution is the school head teacher. Administration personnel guarantee the process of education, teachers are responsible for the realization of the process of education and formation, students realize the curriculum, and parents support the school in the process of education, formation and care [Drzewowski, 2009, s. 155]. School is appointed to fulfill the society's educational needs and is included in a wider network of social institutions, in culture. The complexity of this situation can be easily noticed in the quantity and nature of communicative links both inside and outside school. The activity of the school head teacher is undoubtedly the most significant element in the process of creating those links. That aspect can be substantiated with the variety of management functions performed by a head teacher and is clearly visible in the H. Mintzberg's concept of "set" of management roles.

This author listed ten various roles grouped into three basic categories: interpersonal, informational and decisional [Kozuch, 2001, s. 109]. Almost every aspect of the roles listed by Mintzberg has references to communication (table 1), though the author characterizes the informative role of a manager separately.

Tab. 1. Aspects of communication in reference to the school head teacher management role

Category	Role	Examples of tasks	Aspects of communication
Interpersonal	Representative	Participates in scientific conferences organized by universities and colleges	Communication during events and spreading information about events important for the school
	Leader	Appropriately motivates teachers to upgrade the quality of education	Constant source of information for teachers and the environment
	Liaison	Maintains continuous contact with the founding body and the educational supervisory body	Communication with the public organizations sector
Informative	Monitor	Constantly monitors the report concerning the quality of education at local and national level	Communication focused on innovative undertakings
	Disseminator	Forwards information about students' successes at school to the bodies of local authority and to the board of education	Official communication
	Spokesperson	Forwards information concerning events and achievements outside e.g. using the media	Communication with the environment by forwarding information to the press, television. Creating the schools image (PR)



Decisional	Entrepreneur	Creates the school's plan of functioning for every new school year	Creating a network of inter-personal relations
	Disturbance handler	Solves conflicts occurring at school	Communication with teachers, employees of administration, students, parents and authorities
	Resource allocator	Controls school's expenditure	Communication with the specialized sector of school management
	Negotiator	Helps in negotiations with trade unions and decides how problems are settled	Communication with unions as a source of information about the atmosphere and possible tensions at school

Source: Adapted on the basis of Jung-Konstanty [2011, s. 99–100].

The informative role of the head teacher encompasses two levels of communication: communication with internal and external subjects. It is the head teacher's responsibility to ensure effective communication inside the organization, as well as between the school and its surrounding. He or she must collaborate with other school bodies, i.e. the School General Council, the Teachers Council, the Parents Council and the Students Government. Only a well-organized process of communication ensures effective collaboration of all school bodies. What influences that process at school is both normative acts such as the Education Act, decrees of the provincial Board of Education and the founding body, the Teacher's Charter and the plan of communication drafted by the head teacher.

It is the head teacher's obligation to build positive relations between all members of the organization. He or she must establish tasks which need to be realized as well as ways to achieve their realization and their goals. Some examples of directions of communication between a head teacher and other members of the organization are presented in fig. 8.

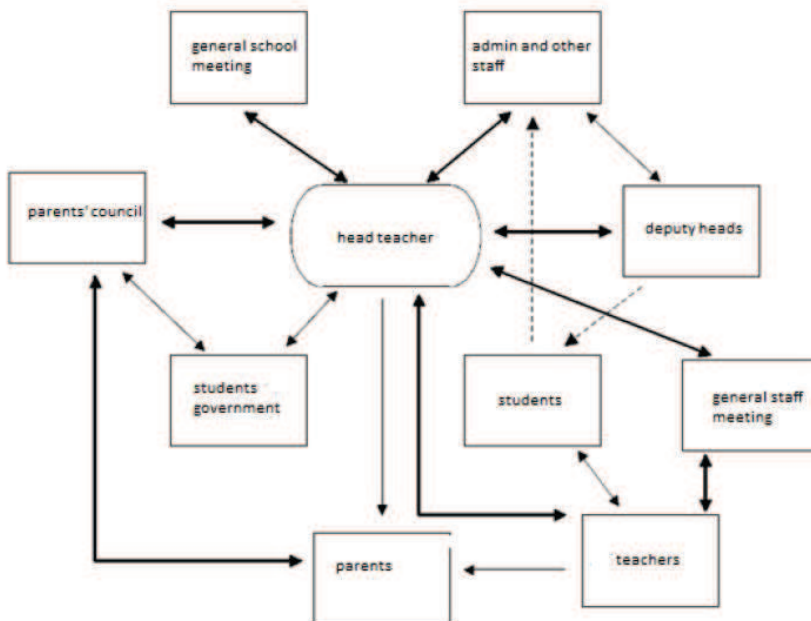


Fig. 8. Directions of communication at school

Source: Own study.



The presented directions of communication show communication processes which in academic literature are referred to as internal communication. In other words, it can be stated that the system of internal communication comprises both an orderly group of people with their communicative skills, attitudes, knowledge, culture and sense of belonging to a certain social system and all the devices and procedures used for exchanging information inside the school system. The goal of this system is to exert such influences on all members of the organization that will allow for relevant understanding of all aims and assumptions of the school's policy. Not only should it contribute to acceptance of actions undertaken by the head teacher but it should also become an important factor motivating all members of the organization (both students and teachers) and should be the basis of their engagement in the process [Olszyńska, 2002, s. 167]. The head teacher coordinates the flow of information between various school bodies. He or she should also remember that school is a specific educational institution. It embraces people of different social systems, with various levels of knowledge and more often than not with various attitudes and communicative competencies. Referring back to the model of communication proposed by Ph. I. Morgan, one can notice that the parameters of senders and recipients of messages at school are placed at different levels. The knowledge of diversity of senders and recipients should be used by the head teacher to establish who, when, with whom and via what channels communication should flow. The approved set of media and communicative techniques used for transmitting the information should also take into account such parameters as: the size of school (the number of teachers, administrative and other staff and students), the nature of interpersonal relations, the culture of the organization and available financial resources. Good internal communication integrates the teachers and students and eliminates activities unnecessary in the process of the realization of goals. The relations between the head teacher and the School General Council, the Teachers Council, the Parents Council and the Students Government are established in the Education Act. It should be especially emphasized that the Education Act gives quite vast competencies to the Parents Council. The Council has a right to submit motions and express opinions in all issues regarding the school. Figure 8 shows that bidirectional communication occurs only between the school bodies and deputy heads on one side, and administrative staff (reception staff) and teachers on the other. The process of communication between students and parents looks worse. It is usually unidirectional communication based uniquely on passing information. The fact that recipients are not sufficiently interested in receiving the message becomes the reason for many conflicts, especially in the student - teacher and parent - teacher relations. As it was mentioned before, the head teacher is responsible for the system of communication at school. One must remember that each school has the right, but first and foremost, has the duty to draw up normative acts, development programs and to create their own grading systems. The rules of internal communication are usually included in:

- the school's statute,
- regulations of school bodies,
- regulations arising from the Labor Code,
- school's curricula and school's formative programs,
- the preliminary budget estimate and special sources plan,
- the observations plan,
- the school's operations plan,
- head teacher's and deputy heads' specifications of responsibilities,
- clear organizational structure.
- Significant tools in the process of effective communication are:
 - the school's timetable,
 - agendas of school bodies meetings,
 - texts of the school's acts,
 - the report regarding the quality of school's operations.



The school head teacher should keep all members of the organization up to date regarding changes in the regulations of the school's functioning. He or she should also clearly establish rules of communication at the student – teacher, student – school's bodies, parent – teacher and parent – school's bodies levels. In the to date practice, the communication at the parent – teacher and student – teacher level embodies:

- one-off meetings between the head teacher and class teachers, and parents and first grade students,
- class teachers meetings with parents (usually four meetings in a year),
- individual meetings between parents and teachers and class teachers,
- forwarding information to parents via letters, emails or telephone conversations regarding punishments, awards and current regulations regarding students,
- exchanging information during General Staff Meetings attended by representatives of other bodies,
- head teacher partaking in Parents Council Meetings and Student Government Meetings.

Alongside communicating with internal subjects, according to legal regulations (the Education Act), the school head teacher is obliged to communicate with the external environment (fig. 9) encompassing the task environment and the general environment [Griffin, 2005, s. 76].

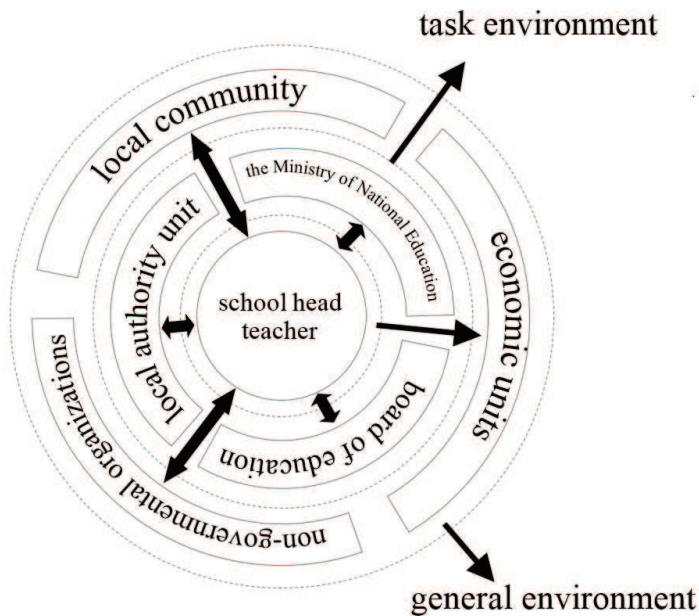


Fig. 9. Directions in the process of communication between public school and external

Source: own study.

The following elements, being parts of the task environment, affect the functioning of school:

- the Ministry of National Education, which is the central authority coordinating and realizing the educational policy of the state,
- the local government unit, which is responsible for realization of the educational policy in the local administrative area,
- the provincial Board of Education, which performs educational supervision over schools.



It can be noticed that communication with the Ministry of National Education usually occurs in one direction. It is usually limited to issuing legal acts and decrees. Bidirectional flow of information can be noted at the Board of Education – local government unit level. A school collaborates closely with the provincial Board of Education and local government units. It is obliged to submit reports, analyses and provide information to both the founding body and the Board of Education. In the course of pedagogical supervision, the Board of Education forwards its decrees and supervises the process of education. Out of the three organizations listed in the external environment, the founding body has got the strongest communicative links with the school. The founding body is the most interested in the school's functioning. Providing funds for the school's functioning it tries to monitor how the school is managed. It influences the process of employment at school and the school's technical resources. Through its undertakings it also indirectly influences the general atmosphere in the school.

Conclusions

Communication in public schools is a complex and extremely dynamic process. It shows in the variety of forms of communication, the number of persons acting in the process, including the external and internal subjects, and in the diversification of the process, as well as specificity of the management roles of the head teachers, which to a large extent is dependent on successful communication.

From the specific directions and forms of communication in public schools it can be concluded that the impact of communication on the effectiveness of school management is essential. The success of an educational institution, i.e. realization of all assumed tasks and goals, depends on effective communication. Also the atmosphere at in the workplace is dependent on a good system of communication, and that in turn is reflected in the quality of work and facilitates creating the school's positive image. Due to all those factors, there is a demand for communication processes management including creation and realization of policies and strategies of communication.

The model of organizational communication which best depicts the specificity of communication in an educational institution and which can be used as an initial model for creating communicative strategies for public school is the model proposed by Ph. I. Morgan. It arises from the fact that this model largely takes into consideration the diversity of factors influencing the effectiveness of communication. It especially emphasizes the importance of communicative competencies and the social and cultural context of the process.

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Teorie i zasady organizacyjnego komunikowania się w szkołach publicznych

Streszczenie

Ciągłe zmiany w systemie oświaty, dotyczące zarówno systemu organizacji i zarządzania, jak również wszystkich procesów pedagogicznych stawiają przez szkołami publicznymi i ich pracownikami nowe wyzwania. Rynek usług edukacyjnych, na którym funkcjonują zarówno szkoły publiczne, jak i szkoły prywatne zmusza organy zarządzania szkołami publicznymi do sprawnego kierowania tymi placówkami. Dyrektorzy szkół starają się doskonalić pracę zarządzanej przez siebie szkoły. Sporządzają cały szereg analiz i sprawozdań, przesyłając je do organu założycielskiego, nadzoru pedagogicznego i ministerstwa. Stale monitorują pracę szkoły, zwracając szczególną uwagę na podnoszenie jakości procesu nauczania. Często zadają sobie pytanie: co zrobić, aby pozyskać jak najwięcej uczniów na kolejny rok szkolny?

Mając na względzie dynamikę zmian w systemie edukacji, zwrócono szczególną uwagę na proces komunikowania się w tych organizacjach. To właśnie dobra komunikacja jest gwarantem osiągnięcia przez szkołę wysokich rezultatów kształcenia i wychowania. Zwiększenie kompetencji komunikacyjnych oddziałujących na kulturę interakcyjną może sprawić, że zarówno problemy finansowe, jak i organizacyjne, z jakimi musi się zmierzyć szkoła, będą do pokonania.

Celem pracy jest charakterystyka komunikowania się w szkołach publicznych, w tym w szczególności identyfikacja form i kierunków organizacyjnego komunikowania się oraz określenie modelu organizacyjnego komunikowania, który najlepiej odzwierciedla tę specyfikę.

Opracowanie oparto na studiach literatury przedmiotu z zakresu zarządzania, komunikacji, zarządzania oświatą oraz na analizie aktów normatywnych i regulaminów. Wykorzystano również metodę obserwacji uczestniczącej: w latach 1997–1998 i 2007–2010 z perspektywy interesariusza wewnętrznego, a w latach 2000–2007 i 2011–2013 – zewnętrznego.

Szkoła, jako placówka oświatowo dydaktyczna była i jest postrzegana jako ważna instytucja życia społecznego. Jest organizacją posiadającą zdecydowaną przewagę czynnika ludz-



kiego nad technologicznym i materialno-technicznym. Zarówno stawiane przed szkołą zadania – kształcenie i wychowanie dzieci i młodzieży, jak i nacechowanie znaczną przewagą czynnika ludzkiego wyróżnia szkołę spośród organizacji publicznych. Zgodnie z ustawą o systemie oświaty głównym organem zarządzającym placówką oświatową, stojącym na jej czele, jest dyrektor szkoły. Pracownicy administracyjni zapewniają proces kształcenia, nauczyciele – odpowiadają za realizację procesu nauczania i wychowania, uczniowie – realizują program nauczania, rodzice wspomagają szkołę w realizowanym procesie kształcenia, wychowania i opieki [Drzewowski, 2009, s. 155]. Szkoła jest powołana do zaspokajania edukacyjnych potrzeb społeczeństwa i jest włączona w szerszy układ instytucji społecznych, w kulturę. Złożoność tej sytuacji widać wyraźnie w liczbie i charakterze więzi komunikacyjnych zarówno wewnątrzszkolnych, jak i zewnętrznych. Niewątpliwie w organizowaniu tych więzi komunikacyjnych największe znaczenie ma działalność dyrektora szkoły, co można uzasadnić m.in. różnorodnością ról menedżerskich, jakie on pełni. Korzystając z koncepcji „zestawu” ról kierowniczych H. Mintzberga, zaprezentowano aspekty komunikacji w zależności od roli kierowniczej dyrektora szkoły.

Dokonując analizy wybranych modeli organizacyjnego komunikowania się, zauważono, że modelem organizacyjnego komunikowania, który najlepiej opisuje specyfikę komunikowania się w placówce oświatowej i który może posłużyć jako model wyjściowy do opracowania strategii komunikacyjnej szkoły publicznej, jest model Ph.I. Morgana. Wynika to z faktu, że model ten w największym stopniu uwzględnia różnorodność czynników wpływających na skuteczność komunikacji. W szczególności kładzie nacisk na znaczenie kompetencji komunikacyjnych oraz społecznego i kulturowego kontekstu komunikowania się.

Dokonując także analizy procesów komunikowania się w szkole, zidentyfikowano formy i kierunki komunikowania się szkoły publicznej zarówno z otoczeniem wewnętrznym, jak i zewnętrznym. Z określonych kierunków i form komunikowania się w szkole publicznej wynika, że wpływ komunikowania się na sprawność zarządzania szkołą jest bardzo istotny. Bowiernie to od skutecznej komunikacji zależy powodzenie placówki oświatowej, czyli zrealizowanie wszystkich sformułowanych przez nią zadań i celów. Od dobrego systemu komunikowania uzależniona jest również atmosfera w pracy, która z kolei przekłada się na jakość pracy, a to ułatwia budowanie dobrego wizerunku szkoły. W związku z tym istnieje potrzeba zarządzania procesami komunikowania, w tym poprzez tworzenie i realizację polityki lub strategii komunikowania się.

Podsumowując, można powiedzieć, że komunikowanie się w szkołach publicznych jest procesem złożonym i bardzo dynamicznym. Świadczy o tym zarówno różnorodność form organizacyjnego komunikowania się, liczba podmiotów uczestniczących w tym procesie, w tym interesariuszy wewnętrznych i zewnętrznych oraz wielokierunkowość tego procesu, a także specyfika ról kierowniczych, opartych w dużej mierze na skutecznym komunikowaniu się, pełnionych przez dyrektorów placówek edukacyjnych.

