

THE IMAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS WITH A NATIONAL VOCATION

Yuri-Alexandru COVALEOV¹

¹Lecturer, PhD, "Apollonia" University of Iași, Romania

Corresponding author: Yuri-Alexandru Covaleov; e-mail: iuri_covaleov@yahoo.com

Abstract

This essay analyses the importance of the image of organizations with a national vocation for their functioning within society, emphasizing the fact that at the international level, most of the time, their image is associated with the image of the country. Often, in international practice, the perceived image of states was one of the elements that determined the substantiation of political, economic and military-strategic decisions towards them. Free access to information, the authentic affirmation of the freedom of expression of mass information means and the multitude of sources of information impose the need for a scientific approach regarding the image of organizations, in general, and public institutions in particular. The present essay illustrates the fact that the image of organizations with a national vocation is extremely important for its functioning within a society; they can be perceived as viable and reliable social partners or as unviable social partners that waste society's resources, without substantial results for its benefit. Therefore, the management of the image of organizations must be conceived as a function of their management, in order to ensure their normal functioning and to avoid communication dysfunctions within organizations and between organizations and their external environment.

Keywords: *image, organizations, national vocation.*

1. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IMAGES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations are born when certain groups want to achieve goals that they cannot achieve through their isolated action; For this, it calls for the division of tasks through the division of labour and the creation of a hierarchy of responsibilities and authority, the members of the organization being guided by a system of values and unanimously accepted norms.

The image of the organization conditions its performance. The larger organizations are and carry out more complex activities, the more their situation depends on the connections they make, on their social image.

Although the concern for the management of one's own image dates back to ancient times, the science concerned with the study of the image has emerged as a relatively recent field of study. The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language offers the most concise definition of *imagology*, as follows: *a branch of sociopsychology that systematically researches the representations that peoples or social classes have about themselves* (Dexonline, n.d.). The term is used in many areas, but its basic meaning is the analysis of how we "construct" reality in our minds, beyond facts.

Taking into account the above, we can say that *imagology* represents the subject that studies the images, representations and clichés (mental, visual or literary) that an individual, a group or a culture has about themselves or others.

The term image became popular in the 1950s, especially in the USA, and was used to describe the aura of a person in public life, a party, a product, a nation, etc. The image is something created and cultivated by its owner, that is, something that can be active, influenced by public relations activities.

At the same time, according to studies carried out especially by French psychosociologists in the field of social representations, it can be said that any individual or collective social actor has a social representation, so one can talk about the representation and social image of a company, a community, state institutions or a political figure.

The image of organizations has become an object of heritageⁱ, being able to be inherited (the image of companies that has crossed several decades, being during this time a factor in promoting the company's products on the market) or included in all the organization's assets (the image of some companies can be considered more valuable than all their fixed assets; for example: Rolex, IBM, Pepsi, etc.),

whether it is considered as a non-material, subjective dimension, but which can be appreciated in money, since it has market value.

Being an object of heritage, the image is managed like any other patrimonial asset of the organization; a good image of the organization has an overwhelming influence on business success while a negative image affects or can bring incalculable damage to the organization. In Romanian society, too, the role of the organization's image has gained due importance, with managers also taking this aspect into account.

The image formation process is a long one, to which the information obtained from the press, advertising, from the comments of the staff/organization, as well as the satisfaction obtained from the use of services and products, through what buyers say about them, contribute over time.

We can say that the image has a subjective and psychological character, marketing studies demonstrating that people eat, drink and dress in images and, at the same time, choose those products that best express the role and status they hold in society. Thus, the person's self-image influences the choice of a product with a good image, because the image of the product must correspond to the buyer's opinion about himself. Also, the image is closely related to the prestige of the individual, who will choose prestigious brands, that is, brands with a strongly positive image. In order to choose a product, it is not enough for the individual's image of the product to be good, it must be perceived positively in the collective mind, because the individual needs appreciation, esteem and belonging to the group.

A special role in the field of images is represented by the image of organizations with a national vocation, which is decisive for their functioning within society. This is imposed, first of all, on organizations in the field of education, health, culture, security and national defense, whose social situation gives their public image a high degree of relevance.

In order to function effectively in society, the organizations listed above need broad social support, determined, first of all, by the population's trust in these organizations, trust that is conditioned by the way they are perceived in society. Organisations can be perceived as

viable or non-viable social partners, depending on how they manage society's resources, with or without substantial results for its benefit. The image that citizens, political parties and parliamentarians have regarding the use of the resources made available by society has an important role in allocating budgetary resources to those organizations.

In the case of organizations with a national vocation, the image is linked to the public interest. Such an organization does not just sell a product, but it represents a pillar of the society. Therefore, its benchmarks must necessarily include transparency and ethics.

At the international level, the main purpose of public relations is to create or maintain the positive image of a nation, in order to gain and maintain the trust of the other actors of the world system. The image of organizations with a national vocation is, most of the time, associated with the image of the country and contributes to the formation of the overall image, of the social image of the state, which determines the substantiation of political, economic, military-strategic decisions towards them.

In order to ensure the normal functioning of an organization, to avoid communication dysfunctions within the organization and between the organization and its external environment, it is necessary that image management is conceived as a function of the organization's leadership (Coman, 2001).

2. THE IMAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS WITH A NATIONAL VOCATION

2.1. Image of public institutions

The image of public institutions represents the collective perception of citizens on the functioning, efficiency and integrity of these entities, influencing public trust and social support. Opinion polls in Romania indicate that in our country the image of public institutions is often negative, often marked by stereotypes related to bureaucracy, corruption and lack of responsibility (Mediafax, 2023).

The social image of a public institution, as a global image, cannot be conceived as a unitary and stable whole. The population does not have

a single image of a particular public institution, but a lot of images. Thus, several images of citizens and organizations coexist, depending on age, gender, religion, belonging/not belonging to political organizations, level of culture and school education, environment of residence (urban, rural - with and without military garrisons, in the case of the army), areas with ethnic problems, areas with historical and military traditions, central areas of the country, border areas.

In this situation, it is important to identify the dominant image of citizens based on the positive/negative appreciations expressed about the institution and their attitudes transformed into actions under the conditions of normal relations with the evaluated organization.

The identification of dominant-positive and dominant-negative images is based on the opinions expressed by citizens, their attitude and behaviour when they make assessments about the evaluated organization or when they are in direct or mediated relationship with the respective institution. Citizens can express themselves directly or when questioned, through opinion leaders or through the media. The analysis of the opinions, attitudes and behaviours expressed by citizens has a much higher degree of relevance than the expressions of opinion leaders and the media about what citizens think, say, have and do in relation to the institution.

2.2. Identity elements of an organisation

The main identity elements of the organization are: the purpose of the organization, the objectives of the organization, the structure of the organization, the personnel of the organization, the organizational culture. The image of the organization depends to a large extent on the way of manifesting its identity elements.

The organizational purpose is the very reason for the establishment and existence of organizations. The existence of purpose is necessary, but not sufficient. The affirmation of the goal, its enunciation, the construction of a goal, even achievable, is only a first moment. In order to achieve a clear and distinct image, the procedure for achieving the goal is important. The transformation of the general purpose into final practical results implies: the compatibility between the general purpose and the individual

goals, between the interests and aspirations of the individuals who make up the organization; the participation of the members of the organization in the reshaping and redefinition of the organizational purpose in relation to organizational change and the dynamics of individual goals; correspondence between the general purpose and the specific purposes (objectives of the organization).

The objectives of the organization must ensure the translation into practice of the general purpose, its operationalization by fields of activity, which make possible both the responsible assumption by the members of the organization of the general purpose, and their convergent action for the fulfilment of each objective.

The organizational structure decisively influences the nature of human interaction and the way the organization is perceived. The size of the organization, the number of hierarchical levels (vertical differentiation of the organization), the number of departments, functional substructures (horizontal differentiation), the complexity of the activity (division of labour, specialization) leave their mark on the entire organizational activity, determining the content and meaning of the messages resulting from organizational behaviour. Structure is the element of identity with direct consequences on all organizational components. It gives distinction and specificity to the organization's image.

The organization's personnel are defining for its identity and image. Essential for the organization are, simultaneously, the relationships between people (human interaction) and the relationships of each person with the overall structure of the organization. The quality of people determines the quality of the organization and, therefore, a major concern is required for the socialization and professionalization of each person.

Organizational culture includes: myths and beliefs; symbols, ceremonies and rituals; specific language; the system of values and norms that guide behaviour.

Myths and beliefs include the history of the facts that determined one behaviour or another, the successes of the past, the basic people of the organization, those visionaries who transformed the organization, giving it another direction.

Symbols, ceremonies and rituals highlight what is important to be respected in the organization. The flags and logo of the company reveal the importance and place that certain ideas (force-ideas), events and symbols occupy in its life and activity. Ceremonies and symbols give symbolic and emotional valences to significant actions in the organization's relations with the social environment in which it operates and with its own members: investiture ceremonies, ceremonies for receiving important guests, initiation ceremonies, ceremonies for leaving people, etc.

Organization-specific language includes specialized language and language codes. The acquisition of specific language is achieved through organizational socialization and is essential for the integration of the individual and for its ability to communicate effectively inside and outside functional and hierarchical structures.

Values and norms are reflected in the structure, rules, and procedures that determine what is and what is not allowed for members of the organization. They are included in organizational communication, define the assigned and assumed statuses and roles, the desirable organizational behaviour and the limits of the competences and attributions of the members included in structures and hierarchies.

2.3. Images with a degree of relevance

The degree of relevance of the images of an organization differs depending on the information processors (citizens, organizations, institutions) that have a certain effect on the existence, development and performance of the organization and whose influence overtime is possible and probable.

The following social images may be relevant: a) images of organizations and categories of citizens that are in functional relationships with the organization; b) images of organizations and categories of citizens that may be affected by the organization whose image is evaluated; c) images of organizations and citizens who may have interests in relation to the organization we are testing; d) images of the organization that functions within it and belong to its vital subsystems (people, groups, leaders) (Chiciudean & Țoneș, 2002).

In order to orient the investigation towards what is significant in the sphere of manifestation of social images, it is important to rank the image of organizations according to the degree of relevance. The way in which the organization knows, interprets and evaluates the field of relevant images depends on its adaptation to the social environment, the modelling of the environment in which it operates and the perspectives of the organization.

The relevance of the social image of organizations and categories of citizens who are in functional relations with an organization is given by the importance that their images have in materializing the relations with the organization. A distinction is made between: dependency relations and control relations (with the organisations that set the organisation's tasks and resources); informal control relations (with the media); cooperation relations (with organisations and institutions that contribute to the achievement of the organisations' purpose and objectives); collaborative relations (with organisations and citizens in different fields).

The organization must continuously issue messages addressed to organizations and citizens, messages that must be of quality and particularly elaborate: they must have specific content and form for each type of organization and citizens, they must be transmitted on all channels accessible to them and pursue specific objectives. The evaluation of the representations that tend to be fixed as a result of the messages generated by the organization's functionality is necessary in order to undertake systematic actions to correct the situations that induce negative representations and to broaden the range of information received, so that the images that are constituted in the partners are not erroneous.

It is advisable that the messages to the organizations and citizens with which the organization maintains functional relations are made through channels that can be controlled by the specialized structures of this organization.

The social images of the organization of citizens and organizations, which are or may be affected by it by limiting access to information, by specific actions of the organization, by restricting the right of access to some areas, etc.,

acquire relevance due to the consequences they have on those involved and by the attitude of those who benefit from or suffer deprivations from these involvements.

The positive or negative images that the organisations or citizens involved have are associated with the type of effects (positive or negative) they face. Also in this situation, the messages must be appropriate in relation to the type of organisations and the category of citizens, so as to preserve the positive images of the organisation. For example, special attention must be paid to messages, which explain the need for actions with polluting, destructive effects, with high consumption of resources. They will be followed by the promotion of humanitarian actions and the organization's concerns for rationalizing the consumption of resources, greening some areas, sponsoring actions for the benefit of the community. Such goals can be achieved through press events, which will be intensely exploited by the media.

The social images of organizations and citizens who have or may have interests in relation to the organization differ in relation to the nature of the interests and their place and social role, with their orientation as image bearers. These can be political or apolitical organizations during the election campaign, economic organizations and citizens in relation to land or assets owned by the organization, interest groups in the country and abroad that adopt a certain attitude and carry out actions according to interests.

The activity of these organizations and groups may aim to impose their image on the power structures in Romania, international bodies, public opinion in the country and abroad through lobbying actions, through the media, through public debates, through the actions of companies specialized in the field of image and public relations, etc (Neculau, 1995).

The organization's specialized structures must identify citizens and organizations with interests in its activity, study the image they promote and act according to the image generated by these interests.

The images of the organization, which are constituted and function within it, have special meanings for the overall image of the organization

in society. The self-image of the organization represents the result of numerous perceptions made by its own personnel, it has a stratified character and crystallizes depending on: the status and role of different categories of personnel in the organization's structures; the hierarchical organizational levels in which the image bearers function; the closeness or the removal of image carriers from decision-making structures; the place and role they have within the information structures; respect and loyalty to the organization; knowledge, acceptance and internalization of the norms, values and culture of the organization, the concordance between aspirations, expectations and the possibilities of satisfying them, the organizational climate; the influence of the educational potential of the organization on its members (Chiciudean & Ţoneş, 2002).

The state of affairs of the organization, the degree of discernment of the receivers (people and structures), its functionality and dysfunctions are expressed by the self-image of the members of the organization.

Self-images are conditioned by the characteristics of the performers and, most of the time, they are products of the evaluation of particular realities, depending on the position of employees or professional groups within the organization.

The relevance of self-images emerges from: the performance of staff motivated by positive images; the influence of self-images on the crystallization of images about the organization in citizens and social groups outside it; self-images can become landmark images if they are validated and supported by objective reality; self-images penetrate the social network accompanied by the authority and prestige of the organization's leading personalities who express them (Miculescu, 2001).

3. IMAGE OF THE ARMY

Since 1995, the army has been constantly monitoring how its image is reflected in society. We can talk about two types of information: the historical portfolio and the current database. The information after 1989 has been reconstructed and the everyday information is classified according

to modern methodologies. Almost the entire spectrum of public attitudes regarding the Army can be accessed and researched for current use.

Professional review of the evolution of the profile of the army's image on each means of mass information or each institutionalized communicator ensures the understanding of the mechanisms of relating to society. Press relations with the military institution, the position of the parties, of the image bearers also allow the recognition of the sources that generate attitude. The calculation conditions include the degree of transparency of the army at the time of the communication, the speed with which it provided information and the relationship between reality and the mediatized message. Over time, the communicator's profile, its degree of objectivity and real motivation can be observed. The circulation of the publication is taken into account or the number of hits of the article online, in order to determine the likely impact on public opinion. Besides this, some phenomena independent of the Army appear as obvious, aspects that are related to the Romanian press market, but which are constituted in the environment for the evolution of the public image of the army.

The social image of the army, as a global image, cannot be conceived as a unitary and stable whole. The population does not have a single image of the army, but a lot of images. Thus, more images of citizens and organizations coexist, depending on age, gender, religion, belonging/not belonging to political organizations, level of culture and school education, environment of residence (urban, rural - with and without military garrisons), areas with ethnic problems, areas with historical and military traditions, central areas of the country, border areas.

In this situation, it is important to identify the dominant image of citizens based on the positive/negative appreciations expressed towards the army and their transformed attitudes in actions under the conditions of normal relations with the military organization (Chiciudean & Halic, 2003).

The identification of dominant-positive and dominant-negative images is made on the basis of the opinions expressed by citizens, their

attitude and behaviour when they make assessments about the army or when they are in direct relationship or mediated with the military institution. Citizens can express themselves directly or when questioned, through opinion leaders or through the media. The analysis of the opinions, attitudes and behaviours expressed by citizens has a much higher degree of relevance than the expressions of opinion leaders and the media about what citizens think, say, attitude and do in relation with the army.

The dominant-positive image can be associated with citizens' trust in the army, and the dominant-negative image with the distrust shown towards it. However, any diagnosis has a certain degree of relativity, since it can only partially capture the manifestation of the image over a period of time. Thus, people's trust in the military institution cannot be properly investigated, unless the declared opinions of citizens are compared with their behavioural attitudes, expressed by presenting/not presenting to the enlistment, the completion of active military service or opting for alternative military service, attending/not attending military training after completing the military service, supporting/not supporting the army during natural disasters, number of applications to become military on a contract basis, number of candidates for military institutions education.

The social images of the military organization reflect the direct consequences of the relationships and reactions generated by the military institution in the global social system. The nature of these relations with the elements of the social is expressed through functional relationships, relationships of influence (the army affects organizations and citizens through its actions), relationships of interests (citizens or organizations have or can have interests in relation to the army). In this sense, the social images that are formed at the level of the types of organisations and categories of citizens who are in functional relations with the army are relevant to the military organization, which can be affected by the army and who may have interests in the military.

The relevance of the social images of the organizations and the categories of citizens who are in functional relations with the army is given

of the sometimes-decisive importance that their images have in the materialization of relations with the military organization. These can be: relations of dependence and institutional control, official (with the organizations that establish the tasks and resources of the army, namely the Parliament, the Presidency, the Government, the Supreme Council of National Defense); non-institutional, unofficial control relations (with the press and civil society); cooperation relations (with ministries and services that contribute to solving the problems of national security, with institutions and organizations that research and produce military means and specific services or other means necessary for the army, with political, cultural, religious, health, local administration institutions and organizations); collaborative relationships (with organizations and citizens in different fields).

The images formed at this level are important not only for the realization of the functional relations of the army, but also because these organizations - especially those with which the army has established relations of dependence and control relations - are representative in the Romanian state; they drive, regulate, own and occupy a large segment of the communication channels in Romania, forms and guides the public opinion in our country and provides the main opinion leaders of political, cultural and scientific life and of public life in general.

Particularly relevant are the images of citizens who have maintained or maintain functional relations with the army: reserve cadres, military in the long term, people of culture, war veterans. The relevance stems from the characteristics of this segment of Romania's population: it comes from all areas of the country, from all social strata and from all backgrounds, it has a Martian influence in primary and secondary groups (working groups, school instruction, creation), and in small urban localities, and in rural areas because, traditionally, the population invests trust in these citizens.

Social images about the military of organizations and citizens who are or may be affected by the military organization - by restricting the right of access in some areas (border areas, where military activities are carried out, under military authority), by

degrading the ground or air (tactical applications, experiments, testing), by limiting access to information, by peacekeeping actions in crisis areas, through actions aimed at accessing zonal or continental military structures, through social or humanitarian assistance actions, through intervention in disasters and catastrophes - acquires relevance through the very consequences they have on those involved and through the attitude they manifest those who benefit from or suffer deprivation from these involvements.

The positive or negative images of these organisations or citizens involved are associated with the type of effects (positive or negative) they face. Therefore, each case must be professionally analysed and supported by actions to potentiate the positive effects, diminish or eliminate the negative effects, by providing deliberate messages of information, explanation and documentation.

Social images about the military of organizations and citizens who have or may have interests in relation to the military organization differentiate depending on the nature of their interests, their place and social role, and their orientation as image carriers. For example, political or apolitical organisations during the election campaign, economic organisations and citizens in relation to with land or assets owned by the army, interest groups in the country and abroad that adopt a certain attitude and carry out action's interests, in relation to with the activity of the army for Euro-Atlantic integration, for collaboration and cooperation with the armies of other states, with international bodies.

These organizations and groups of citizens can act to impose their image on the power structures in Romania, international bodies, public opinion in the country and abroad through lobbying actions, through the media, through public debates (conferences and seminars, national and international congresses) through the actions of specialized companies in the field of image and public relations, through audience actions, petitions, public demonstrations, hunger strikes, etc (Chiciudean, 2000).

Images of the army being formed and functioning within the military organization have special meanings for its perception in the

Romanian society. The self-image of the army is the result of numerous perceptions made from within the military body. It has a stratified character and crystallizes depending on status, military role and military groups in the structures of the army, by the hierarchical levels in which the image bearers operate, their proximity or distance from decision-making structures, the place and role they play have within the information flows, respect and loyalty towards the military institution, by the knowledge, acceptance and internalization of military norms, values and culture, by the concordance between aspirations, expectations and the possibilities of satisfying them, by the perception of social protection within the army, by the organizational climate, by the influence of the educational potential of the military institution on its members.

The self-images of the military and of the army compartments express their degree of discernment and the state of affairs of the army, the functionality of the military organization and its dysfunctions. The relevance of self-images emerges, First of all, from the fact that they can become landmark images, if they are validated and maintained by objective reality, they can penetrate accompanied by the authority and prestige of the military personalities who express them and the authority of military symbols that are part of national symbols.

The public promotion of positive self-images must be accompanied by facts in order to support them. It is preferable that positive evaluations are not expressed explicitly, but only suggested by associating positive messages with prestigious facts and actions. For the same reasons, it is pertinent to avoid evoking positive images in association with negative events.

Negative self-evaluations should not be expressed, as far as possible, in public. If exposed by the military, they have a great adherence to all categories of population, they deeply penetrate all social strata and can often be considered an affront to national symbols or a direct attack on the taxpayer's efforts to materially support the army.

The negative evaluations of the military body erode the social image of the army the most, if expressed by military personalities in crisis situations.

The analysis of the types of image that are formed at different levels - of citizens, public organizations in the country, of the press, of organizations outside the country that maintain relations with the military organization, of international public opinion - allows the activity of public relations structures to be oriented towards what is significant and relevant in the manifestation sphere of social images. Relevant images form an area that the military organization must know, evaluate and interpret correctly. This influences, to a large extent, the adaptation of the army to the social environment, the environmental modelling in which it works and its prospects in the future (Blaga, 1969).

4. CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that the image of organizations with a national vocation is very important for the functioning of the society, as they can be perceived as viable, reliable social partners or as unviable social partners that waste society's resources, without substantial results for its benefit.

The image management of organizations must be conceived as a function of their management, in order to ensure their normal functioning, to avoid communication dysfunctions within organizations and between organizations and their external environment.

Relevant images form an area that organisations have to know, assess and interpret correctly in order to be able to adapt to the social environment and to shape the environment in which they operate.

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10. Endnotes

Endnotes

i Patrimony represents “the totality of assets inherited by someone from parents, ancestors; the totality of the assets belonging to a community; the totality of one’s rights and obligations and which can be valued in money.” (Small Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Bucharest, 1974)