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**TECHNOLOGIES FOR CONSTRUCTION OF GENERAL  
COMMUNICATIVE SPACE OF REGIONAL AUTHORITIES AND  
SOCIETY**

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***Abstract***

The article substantiates the necessity of establishing a constructive dialogue between the regional authorities and society in the conditions of growing social tension and crisis of public trust in political institutions. According to the authors, this process should be facilitated by the use of a number of social technologies aimed at maintaining a full-fledged continuous discourse between the participants of the communicative field on the part of authorities at all levels and representatives of civil society. In order to substantiate the main technological elements, the authors use the results of their own empirical research conducted in the capital of one of the Russian regions. The proposed range of communication technologies is aimed at regular diagnostics of dispositions of communication participants, support of civil initiatives, including crowdsourcing projects and active use of virtual communication space. In addition, the authors analyze the likely risks, the occurrence of which may hinder the creation of an effective communication system between the government and society. The most significant risks that negate the effectiveness of the state-public dialogue are: the probability of formalization of the applied technologies, inconsistency of values and priorities of communication participants, social passivity and lack of intellectual and material resources. The article offers certain recommendations how to minimize the impact of the above risks.

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**Keywords:** Government and society, communication technologies, crowdsourcing, image making, information space.



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## 1. Introduction

The issue of interaction between government and society has become acute due to the process of virtualization of modern public policy, on the one hand, and, as a consequence, the change in the nature of political communication. Researchers noted the serious influence of media technologies on social processes even in the XX century (Curran & Liebes, 2002). Today the progress of information technologies has significantly stimulated the expansion of specific characteristics of this impact. Castells (2007) described the prospects for the emergence of a global information community, in which all actors of society will be able to create channels of communication quickly and effectively and engage in the process of interaction, including the most ambitious political level, using mobile technologies. There is no doubt that the process of constructing a common communicative space with the participation of representatives of civil society and authorities has national and territorial features (Bosch, Chuma, Wasserman, & Pointer, 2019). However, in any case, we can talk about a global trend of the expansion of communicative possibilities of all participants.

On the other hand, in Russia the interest in the issues of political communication is determined by the fact that a relatively small part of concerned citizens has articulated a request for dialogue with the authorities while preparing, making and implementing management decisions. Representatives of civil society seek to take an active part in this process through the means of information communication. As a consequence, political authorities have to take new technological realities into account in the course of implementing management actions affecting the public interests: "Modern communicative environment changes the features of political dialogue, which specifies strengthening of horizontal social ties both in real and virtual space, what may lead to unpredictable social processes" (Evseeva, Bashkarev, Pozdeeva, & Tarakanova, 2017, p. 354). It is obvious that in the future, providing for the development of portable mobile means of processing and transmitting information, the citizens' communicative possibilities to be included in social and political processes will only increase. In this regard, researchers from different countries speak about the need to include regional and local authorities in the digital communication space. Thus, Firmstone and Coleman (2015) emphasize: "digital media might be used in the future to enhance the role of citizens in local governance" (p. 680). They underline that, if the authorities, including regional ones, try to ignore public opinion and activists' attempts to "reach out" to officials through various communication channels, the result may be an increase in social tension, a drop in confidence in pro-government structures and activation of the protest movement in the streets already (Enikolopov, Makarin, & Petrova, 2019).

Despite the fact that various practices, including effective ones, are currently used in the process of organizing the interaction between the government and Russian society, their use is not systemic (Budnikova, 2015), many aspects of political communication are not investigated in theoretical and praxeological terms and – most importantly – they do not meet the criteria of technologization.

## 2. Problem Statement

The need to technologize the process of interaction between government and society, along with the above-mentioned processes - virtualization of modern public policy and gradual growth of active

Russian society members' interest in it, is determined by the necessity to develop reflection in management. In practice, there is often a desire of the authorities to formalize the process of interaction with public associations, to limit themselves to declarative measures and patronage of quasi-civil structures loyal to the administrative bureaucracy (Isaeva & Palagicheva, 2016). As a result, Russian civil society is actually becoming more and more embedded in a single vertical of state power and does not perform its main function of defending public interests. In the authors' opinion, it is possible to change the current situation by applying a socio-technological approach, which has already gained a good reputation in management practice. The main idea of the approach is that performance efficiency depends much on the correspond of its essential properties to the essential properties of technology (operationality, economic feasibility, modernity, integrativity, integrity, self-sufficiency of methods, transformative nature, guarantee of achievement and reproducibility of results).

This article attempts to substantiate the use of social technologies in interaction between government and public institutions and proposes their algorithms. In the future, each of these technologies requires in-depth development of the procedures included into it, testing and methodological support during implementation into management practice.

### **3. Research Questions**

In the authors' opinion, formation of an effective and functional communication system between the authorities of all levels and society in modern conditions of a dynamically changing social environment involves bringing the currently used communicative practices to the level of social technologies. Social technology is an optimal way to achieve the goals of social development, which is based on a consistent and systematic dismemberment of interrelated social processes into separate formalized procedures and stages in order to obtain a certain social effect (Krivchenkov, 2015). Social technologies are essentially designed to optimize the processes in management systems by introducing all necessary technological elements into them, while eliminating non-productive non-social activities.

The main procedures of social technology are: analysis of the problem field; setting specific tasks and choosing the best way to handle them; making decisions and fixing them in programs and plans; evaluation of the effectiveness of management actions taken and correction of management strategy and tactics with the return to the analysis of the problem situation. Thus, the technology has a cyclical nature, other authors agree with it (Zezyulko & Kuzmin, 2016), each change, which is made after implementation of management actions, is followed by a stage of monitoring and evaluation.

In the case of state-public dialogue we are talking about the development and implementation of a complex of social technologies, which, in turn, assumes the subordination of technological processes with a single goal and their mutual coherence.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the current study is to substantiate the communication technologies applied in the dialogue between regional authorities and society in an unstable social environment, which ensure local community consolidation, prevention and resolution of social conflicts and minimization of

deviations. In this case the object under study is public policy, and the subject - practices of communication between representatives of authorities at different levels and public.

## 5. Research Methods

In the framework of this study the authors applied a set of scientific tools of cognition, including empirical and theoretical methods. Empirically, in 2018 the authors analyzed the current communicative situation in the framework of interaction between regional and municipal authorities in the capital city of one of Russian regions; namely, the indicators of the residents' satisfaction with the government's activities, its information openness, the quality of relations with power structures were evaluated. A total of 1,200 respondents were interviewed.

While designing promising social technologies of communication between government and society, the socio-technological approach was applied, which involves the change of control regime from empirical (manual) one to conceptually grounded and algorithmically constructed one. The authors believe that in the structures of power organization of work with public has to be built in accordance with the proposed technologies.

## 6. Findings

The results of empirical research indicate that at present the dialogue between the authorities and the population is characterized by a number of problems, which are primarily related to the fact that the policy-makers still have great difficulty with crossing over from their traditional closed nature of their activities to an open model of interaction with the population. This is partly confirmed by the low level of population's satisfaction with the activities of authorities and officials, as well as their information openness. Thus, for example, the residents of the regional center of Belgorod region – one of the most steadily developing regions of Russia - are more satisfied with the activities of the Governor of the region, who has been ruling it since 1993, than with the performance of the Head of local administration. However, even the Governor's indicators are still extremely low – only 41.3% of the respondents were satisfied with his activity in 2018. This is partly due to the steady decline in the standard of living of the population over the past 6 years, which is associated with the inefficiency of governance at all levels. Thus, among those, who are dissatisfied with the Governor's activities, the vast majority are not satisfied with the current economic situation. Besides, apart from the specific regional and city problems, unpopular actions of the federal authorities, for instance, carrying out “garbage” and pension reforms, are also projected onto the Head of the region. As a result, distrust and rejection of the government, in general, and the Governor, in particular, are formed. Similar situation is observed with regard to the indicator of information openness of the authorities. To a greater extent the respondents are satisfied with the information openness of the Governor of the region, although there were only 33.8% of such people in the total array of respondents. As a result, in general relations with the authorities have the lowest satisfaction indicators in comparison with other indicators of the conditions of human relations, and low efficiency of people's appeals to the authorities reduces trust and communication activity.

According to the results of the study, about 40% of the respondents sometimes follow the authorities' acts, which suggests a low level of their political activity. In fact, the majority of the population has no interest in the activities of regional and municipal authorities, which is determined by the lack of interest in politics in general in the absence of a real opportunity to influence something or participate in it. In the mass media one can read that the elections at all levels are fake, that those in power will never give it up, and the standards for the results "come down from above", that democracy is decorative. All these create a situation of hopelessness, senselessness and political apathy, cause people to go into purely personal problems. Thus, most of Belgorod residents are excluded from the dialogue with the authorities and still do not have any desire to participate in the territory management, although such opportunities have been expanding recently.

In the authors' opinion, technologization of the process of state-public interaction will serve to change the situation. The following technologies should be associated with the promising technologies of communication between the government and society.

Technology of diagnostics of communicants' dispositions (authorities and representatives of civil society). The purpose of this diagnosis, in this case, is to obtain an objective view of the current communicative situation, trends in its development and opportunities for management intervention. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to ensure systematic collection and analysis of information about:

- communicants' readiness for adequate perception of conditions of changeable social environment and participation of policy-makers and public organizations in its management;
- readiness of regional authorities and civil society subjects for the communicative interaction, including the point of openness of subjects of state-public dialogue;
- level of communication competence of the dialogue participants;
- trends in communicants' behavior in order to interact somehow in communication situations;
- barriers in interaction between civil society structures and regional authorities;
- perspective directions of the state-public dialogue.

Undoubtedly, such diagnostics should be of a monitoring, not a one-off nature. Periodic measurements allow us to monitor the dynamics of changes in the "climate" of state-public interaction, to make timely adjustments to the process of management impact.

Such diagnostics should be effective in case if it is carried out in the mode of external counseling. As external consultants, highly qualified professionals should be involved, primarily psychologists, sociologists, economists and others. For verification of diagnostic results, it is advisable to use empirical and statistical data at the same time.

For implementation of this technology it is necessary to include the diagnostics of communicants' dispositions in the system of collection and analysis of statistical and sociological indicators at the regional and municipal level. The mechanism of its implementation should be assigned by the legal document providing the description of terms, stages and participants.

Technology of initiation, selection and support of civil initiatives. The main point of the technology is to organize systematic support for civil initiatives and projects in order to increase the efficiency of interaction "government-population" in solving socially significant problems.

Civil initiative is a form of collective expression of the citizens' will, through which the opinion of a certain group of the population is transmitted to the competent state and municipal authorities in order to obtain a response. In addition, civil initiative is also a form of collective action, which is aimed at defending the legitimate rights and freedoms of a human and a citizen, as well as solving urgent and acute social issues (Zalivansky & Samokhvalova, 2018).

However, a number of problems, such as citizens' low activity, insufficient efficiency of the mechanism of initiatives promotion and low returns on initiatives implementation, necessitate taking a wider range of actions combined within a single technological chain.

The important condition for increasing the residents' civic activity is the need to take the external circumstances into account and minimize their negative impact, as they can contribute to or hinder both the emergence of initiatives and their successful implementation (Kolesnikova & Ryabova, 2016).

To ensure the implementation of the technology of initiation, selection and support of civil initiatives, it is advisable to develop and adopt (with mandatory public discussion) a program for the development of civil activity in the region, which is to determine the key areas, the results to be achieved and the funds to be allocated.

Crowdsourcing technology. Its essence is to involve the informal public in the implementation of the management process on the basis of a public offer, which is carried out by state and municipal authorities, in order to use the intellectual potential of network communities most effectively in solving socially significant problems.

The basis of modern approaches to crowdsourcing is application of electronic information and communication technologies, implementation of special projects using the Internet resources. This extends the range of participants significantly, as a result, the efficiency of work increases as well.

Crowdsourcing technologies have already been applied in the practice of local authorities in some countries (Sievers, 2015). Thus it is noted that the authorities should approach the organization and implementation of crowdsourcing projects with greater care and pay attention to data security in particular (Liu, 2017).

The implementation of crowdsourcing projects is based on the involvement of an almost unlimited number of participants who are supposed to use their own time and resources and devote their efforts to participating in the public discussion of a problem, suggest an idea and a new approach. In this regard, the motivation of the participants of the crowdsourcing project plays an important role (Nasyrov & Savelyev, 2012). Several ways of motivation can be used:

- great social significance of the problem can form participants' personal interest in its solution;
- self-realization through the publication of personal ideas and proposals that are of interest to active and creative people;
- non-financial promotion and encouragement.

Technology of virtual interaction involves permanent presence of authorities' representatives and public representatives in the virtual space of the Internet: on web resources, in social networks, with the use of messengers.

Active socio-political discourse and feedback between various subjects of political Internet communication are the basis of the process of involving civil society in the network political process. The

main purpose of virtual interaction is to raise public awareness about the regional authorities' activities, which is supposed to ensure the consolidation of public confidence in the government.

Technologization of virtual interaction is possible if the following requirements are met:

- understanding that debates in the Internet space do not guarantee the desire to act in reality. Web space is an artificial reality, where a user represents a real person, but in fact he is not a real man;
- it is important not only to inform citizens but to explain certain decisions to them and to be ready to take instructions and solve problems;
- inadmissibility of substitution of real activity and personal meetings with the population by virtual communication in the Internet space and social networks;
- regional authorities are supposed to form the structure of virtual space management excluding traditional administrative cliches.

Technology of formation of communication process participants' attractive image. Currently, in fact, in the region there is no purposeful and systematic work on the formation of the image of both the institution of power and the civil society actors. Only occasional actions and activities are carried out, which is one of the reasons why the participants of communication are dominated by negative images and stereotypes relative to each other.

Existing image-making practices are supposed to be brought to the level of technology. This should be done in two ways. Firstly, it is the formation of the regional authorities' image.

It is advisable to systematize the work on the image of regional authorities in the following areas:

- image of administrative functions and services provided by executive authorities;
- internal image: characterizing the ideas, which are formed in the environment of regional bureaucracy, about the purpose and role of the institution of regional management, the goals and directions of its development;
- image of the head of the region, structural units of the regional Government, as well as individual functional units - regional civil servants;
- social image: regional community's holistic view of the institution of state administration and local self-government;
- business image: business community's understanding of potential business opportunities (Kopytova, 2017), entrepreneurial activity in the region, as well as the possibility of dialogue with regional authorities via their representatives.

The ultimate purpose of forming the image of regional authorities is to create a positive image of the power system in the perception of residents, civil servants and other subjects of interaction.

Another area of image work is formation of civil society institutions' image.

In reality we can note the underdevelopment of horizontal ties between public structures, as well as information links with the bulk of citizens. As a result, the population often perceives public organizations as institutions formally imposed by the authorities, which imitate useful activities but do not protect the actual interests of citizens.

The lack of visibility of social structures' positive role, as well as poor awareness of them, prevent the strengthening of their social positions. The ultimate purpose of forming the image of civil society

institutions should be the consolidation of a positive image of civil society institutions in the minds of all subjects of interaction as active participants in the dialogue, which are capable of bringing real benefits.

## **7. Conclusion**

When modernizing the communication system of the authorities and society, it is necessary to consider the presence of a set of risks that can lead to the failure in achieving the objectives set forth in it.

There is a risk of formalization and imitation as a consequence of the bureaucratic approach of the bodies of power. The essence of this risk is that the authorities, which declare the focus on establishing a constructive dialogue with civil society activists, will not still perceive them as equal participants in managerial decision-making, the activities will be carried out “for the sake of appearance” and the work will be aimed at a formal report, not the result.

Foremost, it can be connected with general stereotypes and deformations of bureaucratic consciousness. These, in modern authors’ opinion, include functionary consciousness; bureaucratic corporate ethics and psychology; prevalence of stereotypes of conservative, closed behavior. In a number of cases imitation acts as a protective reaction of officials to the widespread formal-bureaucratic relations in the management system. As a result, civil servants often do not have time to realize the designation of their profession or to think about the future that awaits society. However, the quality of life and citizens’ comfort of living ultimately depend on a conscientious attitude to their official duties (Obolonskij, 2019).

As a result of the occurrence of the specified risk, the very idea of a constructive dialogue between the authorities and society can be compromised.

Risk minimization involves the creation of effective mechanisms for the selection of regional personnel; the formation of a system of effective incentives for their work with a focus not on the process, but on the result.

Risk of semantic disjunction is the presence of fundamental differences in the values, priorities and forms of implementation of management decisions between the authorities and public groups. In part, its occurrence is also determined by the above-mentioned stereotypes and deformations of bureaucratic consciousness.

The occurrence of this risk can be illustrated by the example when a bureaucrat considers himself sincerely to be standing on guard of order and state interests, but he understands this situation only from departmental positions or positions of his senior officials’ interests or his own interests. Thus, there is a transfer of the attributes of the official role to the personality of the official, his false awareness of his own indispensability.

As a result, there is a mutual disappointment of the authorities and society, growth of distrust, breaking of meaningful communication.

Mechanisms of minimization, in this case, can be formation of the value of “service to society” among the representatives of power structures; strengthening of mechanisms of public control over the official’s activities; setting goals of regional management that meet the expectations of target groups, which are increasingly shifting towards the needs of the highest order.

On the other hand, the residents of the region often have a passive-consumer attitude, which is characterized by the fact that, when dissatisfied with management decisions or actions, they do not want



to take any action to change the situation. Expecting officials to “take public interests into account”, they do not want to participate in their articulation, public control procedures, etc. In this regard, formation of the value of “civic participation” among the population is also a necessary mechanism to minimize this risk.

There is a risk of passivity of the regional community as a consequence of social apathy and distrust of the authorities. The essence of this risk is that, formally supporting the policy of the regional authorities, the residents of the region will not take part in its implementation and realization. Meanwhile, broad public participation is a prerequisite for effective regional governance. The main reason for this risk is the traditionally high level of passivity of Russian citizens. Social passivity leaves little room for socially active behavior. At the same time, most of social values, which are associated with the individual’s positioning in society, are losing their significance. Feeling their own helplessness and unwillingness to influence the processes taking place around them, individuals atomize and lose their ability to self-reflection, social responsibility and self-control (Kasyanov & Manachuryan, 2016). As a result, the phenomena of social inertia and political passivity are increasingly manifested.

The main causes of civil passivity are due to:

- atomization of the population caused by the low level of social and political trust and the large number of social barriers, which are difficult to overcome;
- low value of civic engagement at present;
- understanding of low efficiency of civic initiatives.

Paternalization of state and public relations is a consequence of social passivity dominance. As a result, members of the public refuse to have a real dialogue and influence on the authorities.

Risk minimization involves creation of effective channels of public participation in decision-making related to improving the quality of life; formation of a system of effective incentives for participation; setting real goals that meet the vital needs and interests of target groups.

Risk of lack of competence and qualified labor resources, insufficient intellectual development of society is caused, first of all, by defects of institutions of fundamental and professional education. In addition, intellectual degradation in society, according to modern researchers, is a natural uneven, continuous, often slow implicit process in local areas, systems, in society, where there is no spiritual, outstanding intellectual beginning, where the reproduction of new knowledge and qualitative assimilation of previously acquired knowledge are not provided in a timely manner. This natural process takes place in a poorly organized intellectual environment. It can be observed in those places where the level of intellectual organization and self-organization has fallen or is falling. This usually occurs where leaders and the media, they pay for, advocate physiological values, interests and lifestyles. At the same time, they block the intellectuals due to the fact that they are in poor demand of viewers and readers.

The consequence of this risk may be the possibility of not coping with many difficulties, which occur during modernization of the communication system.

Risk minimization involves intellectual selection of specialists implementing the concept and related programs, as well as the involvement of external experts.

Risk of shortage of financial and material resources is connected, first of all, with the insufficient amount of funds allocated from the budget for the implementation of planned activities.

The success of actions to attract resources primarily depends on the ability to formulate the goals and tasks of the project clearly, the choice of methods and tools for their implementation. The effectiveness of efforts to obtain financial support is largely based on the rationality of choice of a source of resources and the use of fundraising technologies (Kletsina, 2014).

Risk minimization involves the creation of effective mechanisms for attracting extra-budgetary funds, including the development of mechanisms of public- and municipal-private partnership; a clear formulation of the goals and tasks of regional management; scientific justification of the choice of optimal methods and tools for managing the region.

In addition to the above risks related to the process of forming a system of communication between regional authorities and society in an unstable social environment, in general, it is necessary to consider the risks, the occurrence of which is possible within the framework of implementation of the proposed technologies.

Thus, for example, when implementing crowdsourcing technology, the risk of inadequate analytical support should be taken into account; it is due to both the imperfection of information technologies used and the inability of specialists to work with information. Underestimating of the problem can lead to the actual failure of the crowdsourcing project. There is also a risk of resource limitation of authorities' ability to respond to the proposals of citizens in the framework of crowdsourcing projects, which is associated with the peculiarities of budget planning. However, broad public support provided by the active position of the media can contribute to correction of existing plans and quick solution to the problem.

Assessment of such risks should be carried out at the design stage of each of the technologies proposed in this article.

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