

Improving Electronic Communication between Organizations and Local Government in the Western Region of Romania

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ABSTRACT: The current information society is based on simplified operations using new information technologies. Using information technologies simplifies and streamlines the conduct of economic activities, increases efficiency and provides a somewhat less bureaucratic environment for the new digital economy.

This paper is based on a survey and examines the role of electronic communication in organizations interaction with the local government, as well as the importance and benefits of using electronic services. Organizations express their openness and interest for electronic services, on one hand, and the lack of attraction for the local public government website, on the other hand, therefore we will try to identify the main reasons that limit the interaction by electronic means between organizations and local public government and formulate some answers that may lead to a better delivery of government services and improved interactions.

Overall, the study confirms that the business environment is ready to embrace all new informational technologies as well as the fact that organizations are aware of the benefits of using electronic means of communication in relation to the local public government, and in certain circumstances tend to prefer more this type of electronic communication.

KEYWORDS: electronic services, business environment, local public government, information and communication technologies, electronic communication

JEL codes: H7, M10, L86

Introduction

The implementation of new information and communication technologies brings major changes on all business activities and on the area in which they operate. We consider that the computerization of economic

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activities is one of the most important components and the “secret” of a successful business. At the same time is a very important step for the entry of enterprises in the new digital economy.

The current information society is based on simplified operations using new information technologies. Using information technologies simplifies and streamlines the conduct of economic activities, increases efficiency and provides a somewhat less bureaucratic environment for the new digital economy (Lee and Kwak, 2012).

We can state that we are members of a new era – “a digital era” – in which information represents the most powerful instrument that guarantees success. One of the most important challenges for businesses and people, in general, is the knowledge of how to use correctly that information, the problem is not access to information but how you proceed wants you obtained that information, because today everybody has access to information, you just have to know where to look, the real challenge begins after you accessed the information and what you do after you obtained it. Thus, the use of information and communication technologies facilitates access to information and its storage.

With the implementation of these information and communication technologies in all activity fields, we can see several benefits such as: adoption of new work methods, decrease of the unemployment rate, competitive environment, research development and improved public services.

In the current electronic business environment, organizations are under a lot of pressure of external factors of the electronic business environment since they have to adapt constantly in order to gain competitive advantages and maintain their market position.

Both private, as well as government organizations have the same principle, that is to achieve their goals, but both categories have the same common objective: to include customers, stakeholders and employees in their managerial efforts in order to reach equilibrium between the needs and opinions of these interested parties (EC, 2013).

Electronic government refers to the implementation and use of instruments and systems available through information and communication technologies with the purpose of providing improved public services to citizens and enterprises. These technologies are already used in

private enterprises, as well as in public enterprises, but electronic government does not involve only the use of instruments but much more (Capgemini, 2010).

People are not very open regarding the use of new information and communication technologies in their relation with the public government, although we are currently in an informational era and we are all aware that information means knowledge and power.

In Romania there are only a few studies performed by specialists regarding the implementation and use of electronic services and their usage (Colesca and Alpopi, 2010; Ciocoiu, 2012; Dăneață et al., 2014) and for the Western Region there are not any studies at all, this being exactly the reason why I consider that this study could bring novelty to this area that is quite a new area in terms of performed studies. The main objectives of this scientific demarche is the intent to offer some answers to the current issues as well as to try and identify some possible solutions that could help in the development and improvement of the business environment of the Western Region of Romania.

Benefits and developments regarding the use of information and communication technologies

Since we are all members and active players in this digital economy, the use information and communication technologies determines businesses to keep up with the constant changes that appear over night thus helping them register obvious improvements regarding, performance, operation mode and communication methods. Among the benefits of using information and communication technologies the following ones are considered the most important (EC, 2012).

- Access to information – new technologies ensure access to information and documentation sources, facilitating research in all activity fields, the most important aspect refers to the fact that enterprises have to select the correct information required at a certain time rather quickly, because there are situation when time is critical.
- Simplify communication – it is a certified fact that using information and communication technologies simplifies communication, thus facilitating conferences or negotiations between partners that do not have to be in the same place.

- Simplify work processes – the use of new technologies facilitates the work processes, on the one hand, the costs are reduced and on the other hand the time required to develop products is significantly reduced compared to the period when manpower represented the engine of production processes. People are still the most important component in business processes, but in the present digital economy, people just have to program and use the latest equipments.
- Increase efficiency – the overall activity of the enterprise is influenced in a good way due to the use of new technologies, thus it becomes more effective, and its employees are more efficient in performing their work.
- Facilitate long distance communication – along with the appearance of new technologies we can say that distance barriers are no longer a problem in business transactions because with these modern information and communication technologies partnerships are no longer limited by distance.

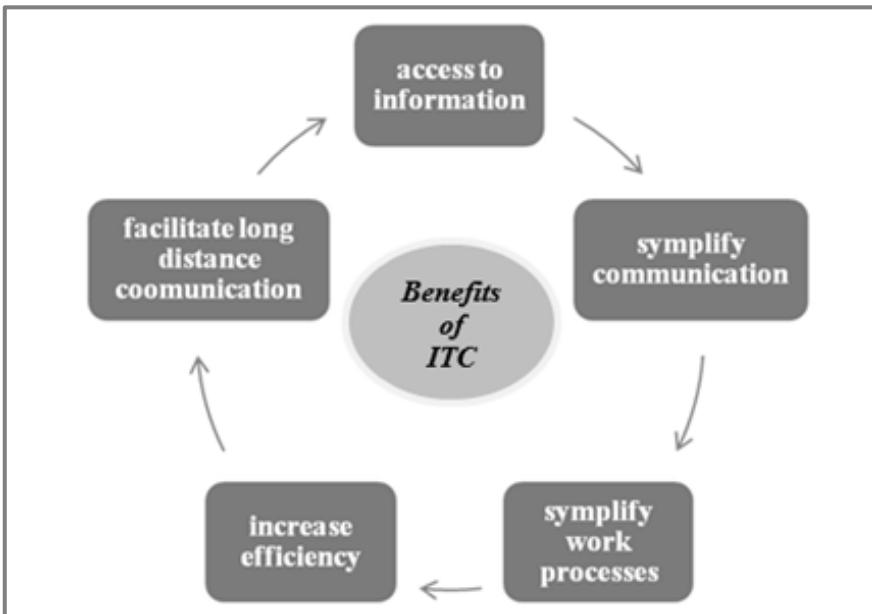


Figure 1: Benefits of using information and communication technologies

Source: Projection made by the author

Research methodology

The research method consisted of the development of an online questionnaire by using Google Drive application, during the period June-September 2014. With Google Docs within the application the results obtained from the respondents were automatically registered in a data base generated by this service. The program used to analyze and interpret data was SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which is generally used for processing and interpretation of statistical data.

The target group of this study consists of 230 enterprises from the Western Region of Romania. This questionnaire is intended to analyze the role of electronic communication in the interaction of organizations with the local government, as well as the importance and benefits brought by the implementation and use of electronic services

Based on the sample structure depending on the type of organization, 8.30% of the enterprises surveyed are individuals; 6.10% are joint stock companies and 85.70% are limited liability companies, this high percentage of limited liability companies should not surprise us, because in Romania most enterprises prefer this type of organizational form.

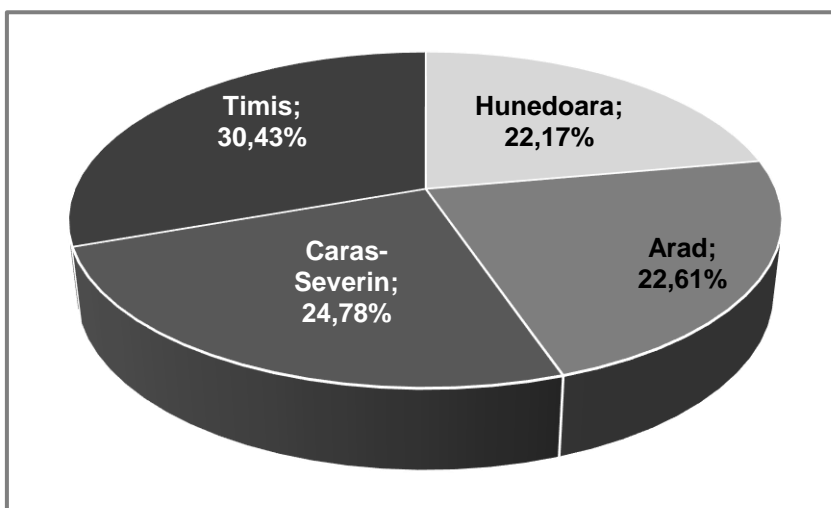


Figure 2: Location of surveyed enterprises

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

Regarding the location of the undertakings participating in the study, questionnaire responses showed that 30.40% of the enterprises are

located in Timis county, 24.80% are located in Caras-Severin, 22.60% of respondents are headquartered in Arad County and 22.20% of enterprises are located in Hunedoara county. Considering the shares of Western Region enterprises, most of them are located in Timis county, nearly 50%, while the smallest share is represented by Hunedoara county, approximately 10%, we can affirm that the dispersion of the responses obtained from this questionnaire is directly proportional to the dispersion of the Western Region enterprises.

Data analysis and main findings

An issue that was of interest to the undertaken scientific demarche targeted the hardware equipments of respondent enterprises, thus after analyzing data was found that 44.70% of the responding companies are equipped with portable computers (laptops, palmtops notebooks), 44.40% of companies indicated that they equipped PCs and 10.90% of companies are equipped with tablets and smart-phones. This fact is not surprising taking into account the technological era we find ourselves and the speed of development of innovative hardware equipment.

In order to demonstrate the importance of using information and communication technologies, I considered it is important to identify the main software programs used by enterprises. The most widely used program among the enterprises from the Western Region of Romania is the accounting program, respectively 77.40% of respondents affirmed to use it in their operation, at the opposite side is found the stock program which is used by only 23.50% of enterprises. This was a multiple choice question, that is why most of the responses are a combination of software programs, so it was observed that nearly 20% of respondents use accounting programs, invoicing software, stock programs, as well as payroll programs to conduct their economic activity.

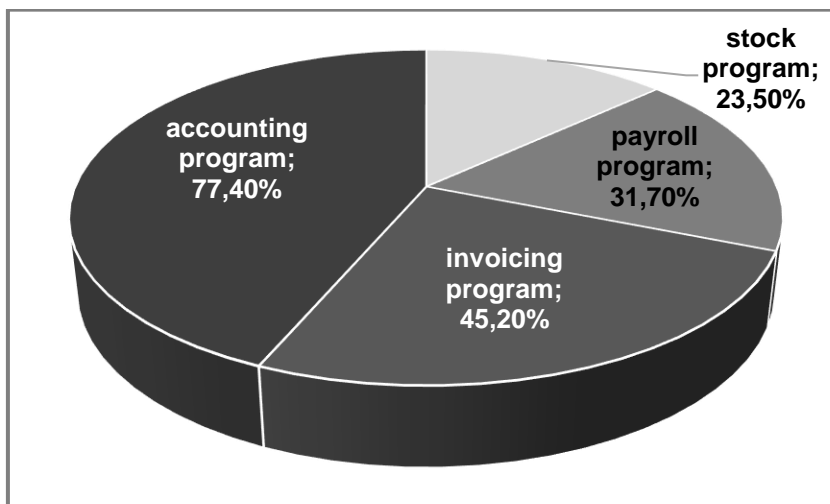


Figure 3: Software applications used by sample participants

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

Another analyzed aspect refers to the main means of communication used in the professional activity of enterprises.

This was a multiple choice question, that is the reason why most responses were a combination of choices, thus 11.30% of respondents mentioned that they use all means of communication, namely: classic, e-mail, fax, and magnetic media; 15.70% of respondents said that they most frequently use communication through e-mail and phone and fax. What is worth mentioning is that 17.80% of respondents affirmed that they most frequently use e-mail as a communication tool in their economic activity.

I considered it is important to divide the answers in each category of communication tools, thus 69.10% of respondents use most often communication via phone, and fax; communication by email is proffered by 66.10% of respondents; 37.8% of enterprises participating in the study prefer classical communication, and communication through magnetic media is preferred by 22.2% of respondents.

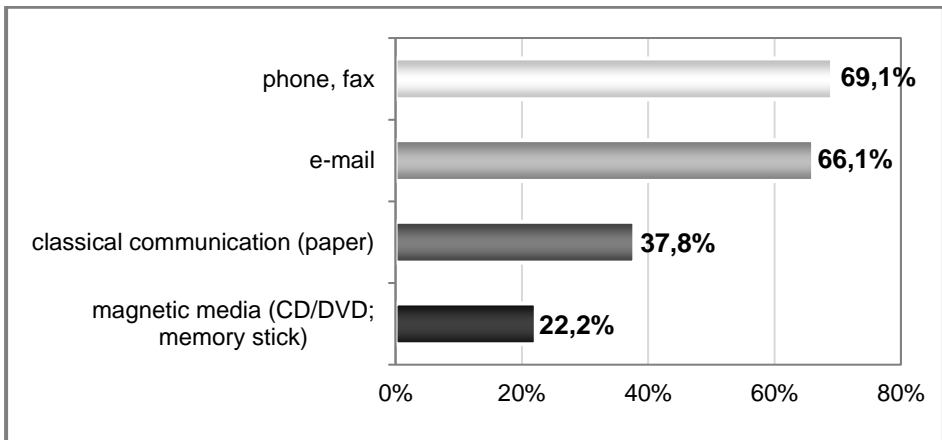


Figure 4: Means of communication used in enterprises' economic activity

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

For the analysis of the relationship between enterprises and local government the following aspects were taken into consideration:

- Identify the main ways of communication used by enterprises in their interaction with the local government.
- Analyze the familiarity of enterprises with the city hall's website.
- Analyze the utilization degree of e-mail used by enterprises in their relation with the local government, as well as situations encountered by enterprises in using this contact method.

The first aspect analyzed concerned the main communication methods used by enterprises in their interaction with the local government. Regarding the contact methods used most often in relation to local government, over 80% of respondents affirmed they still prefer the classic version or in some cases are forced to resolve some issues in person, directly at the headquarters of the institution. This was a multiple choice question; this is the reason why most respondents opted for more choices, in order to better reflect the answers they were divided into each category, respectively each contact method. It is worth noting that electronic methods register a high percentage of almost 30%, 14.80% of respondents said, they use e-mail and the phone and website each registered 7.40%.

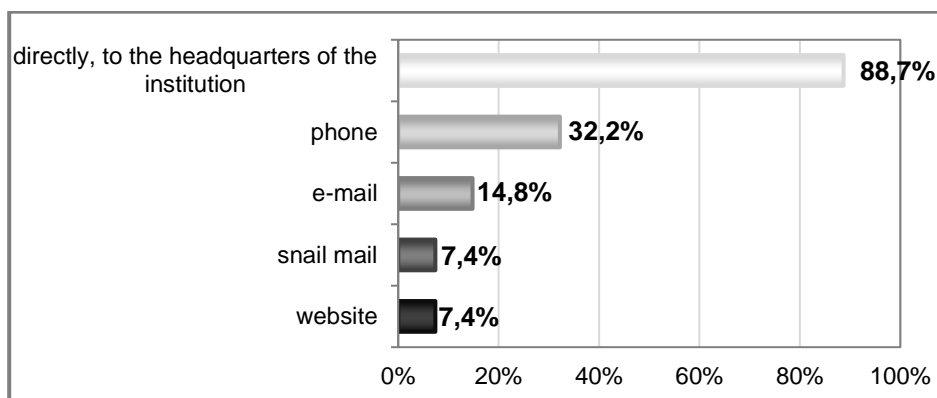


Figure 5: Contact methods used in relation with the local government

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

The second aspect analyzed referred to the familiarization of enterprises with the city hall website and the usability of this contact modality. After analyzing the data the following were found: 10.40% of respondents said they had visited the website quite often, 4.8% of enterprises often claimed to have visited the website very often, a percentage of 22.60% of businesses said they rarely visited the site and 23.90% of respondents stated that they have not visited the website at all.

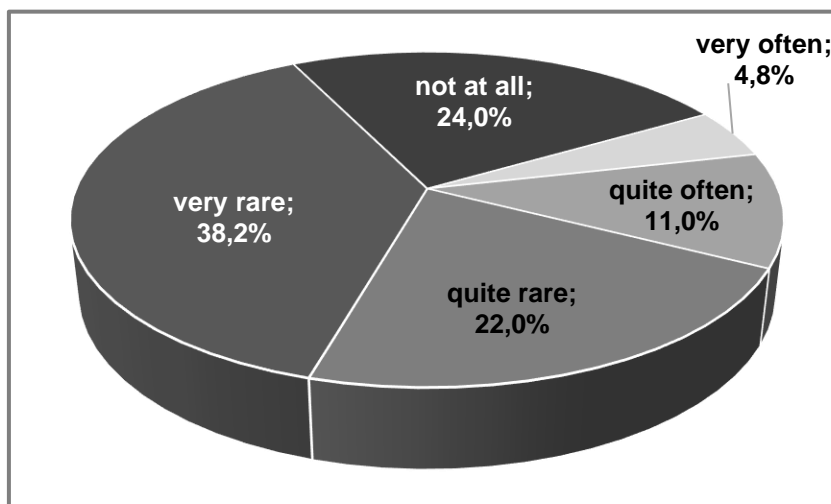


Figure 6: Familiarization and usability of the city hall website

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

Another component of our study was to determine the effectiveness of the city hall website in informing final consumers. After analyzing the data, the majority of respondents considered that the site is partially useful, namely 38.7%, a percentage of 28% of respondents stated that they have used this medium; 17% of respondents considers the site to be very useful, and 3.9% of respondents considers the site to be useless in terms of information.

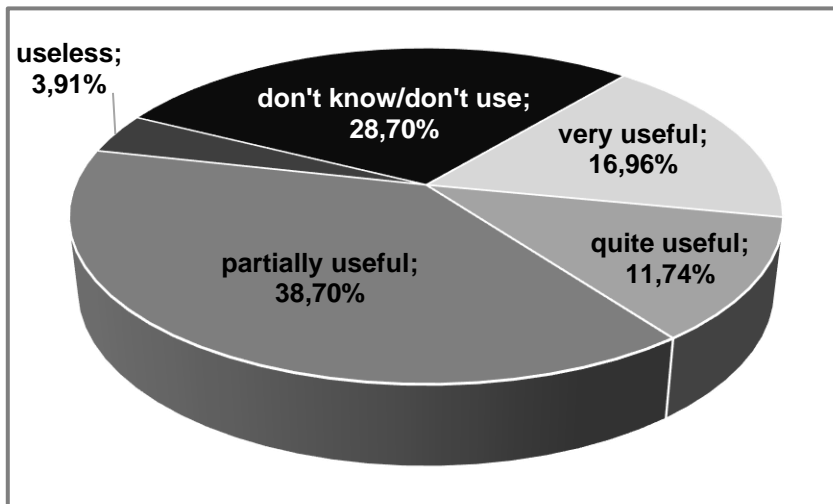


Figure 7: Efficiency of the city hall's website

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

The attention was focused to assess the level of satisfaction of respondents regarding the use of electronic means in relation with the local government. The most often used electronic method of communication is considered to be via e-mail, that is why during this study we addressed the question "If you contacted the local government via e-mail what is your level of satisfaction?". 17.4% of respondents said they are satisfied, and 3.5% of respondents are very satisfied.

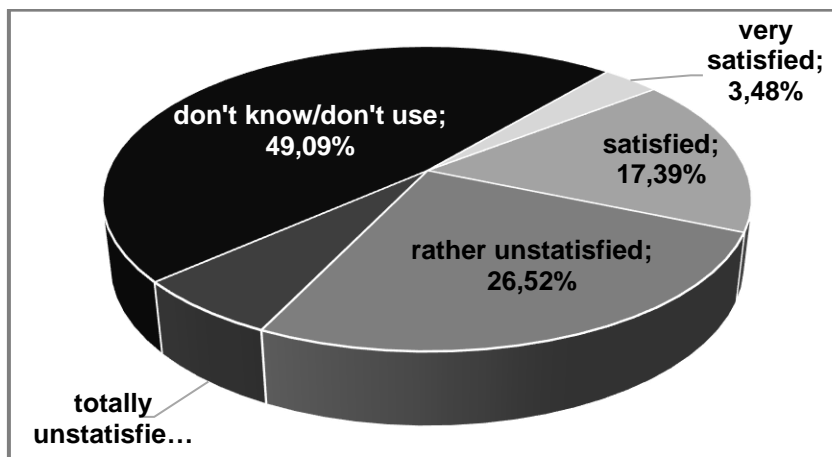


Figure 8: Level of satisfaction in using e-mail in relation to local government

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

It should be noted that we have a percentage of over 30% of respondents who said they are rather unsatisfied, respectively totally unsatisfied, this should alarm the bodies, identifying problems and improving e-communication between the administration and the end user as can be seen in the following figure.

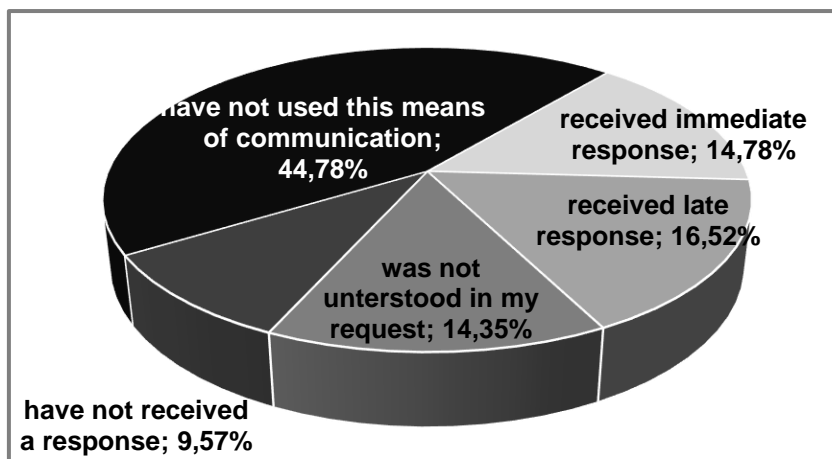


Figure 9: Circumstances noticed when using e-mail in relation to local government

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

The fact that there is a significant degree of dissatisfaction among respondents regarding the communication via e-mail with the local administration I considered it important to analyze what circumstances determined dissatisfaction among users. Nearly 15% of survey participants received an answer immediately after contacting local authorities through e-mail 16.5% of respondents received a late response, 14.30% of respondents were not understood in their request, requiring further clarifications and nearly 10% of respondents have not received a response after using e-mail as a means of communication with the local government.

Furthermore I wanted to analyze the subjects' perception on the use of electronic services and their benefits in terms of reducing the time allocated to e-interact with the local government, basically the intent was to determine if respondents believe that the use of electronic services saves time in their relation with the local government and thus helps improve their activity.

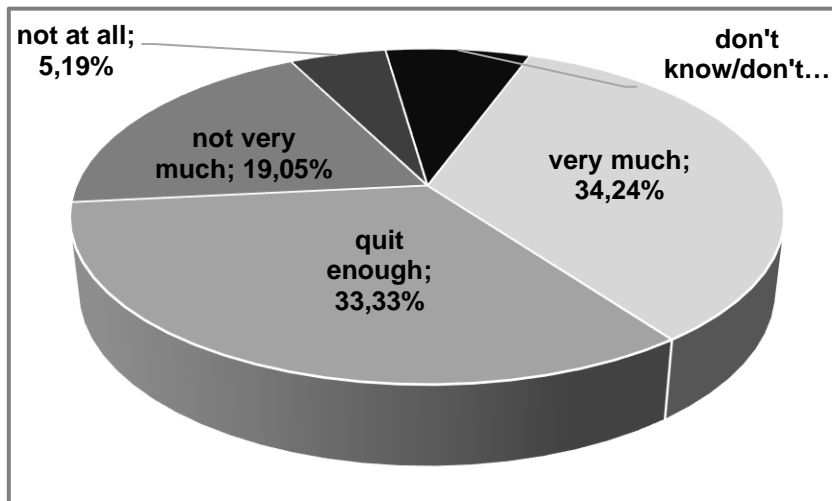


Figure 10: Respondent's perception regarding the time saved by using electronic services in relation with the local government

Source: SPSS processing of data obtained from surveyed respondents

As can be seen from *Figure 10*, of the undertakings participating in the study, a percentage of 34.2% believe that the use of electronic services reduce very much the time allocated to their interaction with the local government, 33.3% of enterprises believe that the time spent with

interaction is reduced pretty much through the use of electronic services. In contrast, 19% of respondents affirmed that the use of electronic services does not reduce very much the time spent interacting with local government and 5% believe that the time for interaction is not reduced at all by the use of electronic services.

Conclusions

In Romania, most enterprises are quite reluctant regarding the use of electronic services not necessarily when it comes to their economic activity, but mostly when it comes to their interaction with local governments and public authorities, even though they are aware of the technological progress and the necessity and benefits brought by the use of information and communication technologies.

In this regard, it is appropriate to combine investments in hardware and infrastructure with software measures (specialized training), in order to strengthen the skills of computer usage and related ones, such as training and certification. I strongly believe that targeting investment in information and communications technology by potential sectors and promoting innovation, can contribute significantly to economic growth and development.

At the same time, the integration and extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the didactic process, as well as training of human resources, by acquiring an optimal level of knowledge and ICT skills, will contribute to increase the quality of education whilst helping to ensure a high quality of services implemented and the sustainability of businesses and economy as a whole.

From the results of this scientific approach we found that there is a certain degree of reluctance from businesses when it comes to the use of electronic means, so we wanted to see what are the main reasons that impede their online interaction with public administration, and obtained the following results: on privacy issues and data security, almost 70% of respondents consider this very important reason that limits their interaction. Almost 40% of respondents believe that electronic interaction is limited because electronic procedures are complicated and that they consume too much time (about 30% of respondents consider this important), not knowing the methods to use these services. And the reason that the

online interaction is limited because there are no known electronic procedures available is considered to be important by 30% of respondents.

In conclusion, it is not enough to have access to the newest technology, it is also important to use it in order to improve your activity, and this should be applied both by enterprises, as well as by public authorities. The local government should take some actions to inform better the end users regarding all their services and should encourage the use of information technologies and electronic services in all activities where it is possible. On the other hand, businesses should try to get out of “their comfort zone” and be more opened to new ways that could help their economic activity.

Acknowledgement

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