



ORGANIZATIONAL AUDIENCES AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

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Abstract:

This article conceptualizes the theme of Institutional Communication. Contrary to some authors who categorize it as distinct and independent from internal communication, we defend it, however, as more comprehensive and integrative. We consider Institutional Communication as a set of procedures to disseminate information of general interest on the policies of action and the objectives of organizations, aimed at making these proposals understandable. However, this type of information will then be useful for groups in an intra or extra-organizational context, and should start by being applied internally; the structure can only assume itself as active and complete insofar as there are people within it who give it life. This should therefore not be perceived as a merely functional system, in the wake of a productivist thought that saw it only as a means to obtain ends: on the contrary, it is the action of individuals that gives it meaning. It is based on this perspective that we present this second part of the article, essentially focused on the issue of intra-organizational communication and on the privileged role that human relations assume in the incessant search for efficiency on the part of institutions.

JEL: M10; M11; L10

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1. Introduction

In contemporary societies, communication is the most powerful mobilizing instrument, capable of causing effects on all human beings and fields of activity. In the interpersonal, intergroup, or mass domains, it imposes its rules on the relationship between men and its effects became omnipresent in our time. If the 19th century was marked by industrial development, which caused profound changes in the social and labor plans. The century

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that has just ended favored communication and its devices, capable of instantly connecting the five continents. In this way, ideas, styles, and ways of life come together. The need to communicate is unavoidable for any institution, whether for profit or not. We are facing a rapidly changing society, so old values, rules, and conventions that governed our personal or professional lives have been replaced. In the new logic of open societies, any institutions need to communicate to justify their existence. The Armed Forces, Associations, the Church, the State itself, do not escape this rule. In other words, we live in a society in which traditional identities give way to communication as a legitimizing instrument for the activities of organizations, not only vis-à-vis their external audiences, but also vis-à-vis their internal customers (Reto, 1996). Business communication (Cornelissen, 2017) then assumes a strategic role - justifying its existence towards the outside, - and internal mobilization - in the search for employees to adhere to the organization's project. However, if this global vision does not coincide with that of the Administration, which is often more formal and autocratic, the risk of demotivating employees becomes real, which can be seriously harmful to the economy of the organization and even the country.

It is therefore important to show all employees that the organization has a history, a specific culture and that it ensures (or should ensure) a mission every day. The internal public is the first to be considered, being necessary that all employees work according to the same line of thought and action, which is the mission of the organization, according to its strategy and sharing its objectives (Ramos, 1996). The former explains the reason for its existence and legitimizes it before society, affirming its meaning, image, and character (Cardoso, 1997).

Making the organization's true mission known to its employees is to establish a Company Project, materialized in a document that should never exceed ten pages, and which works in the following ways (Chevalier-Beaumel, nd): in a first stage, under the responsibility of the Administration, it will be necessary to find a collaborator for reflection, preferably from abroad, for which consulting firms or communication agencies compete. The resulting intentions must then be communicated to all the collaborators. However, they should also be heard through interviews, which will make it possible to write a White Paper focused on two points: on the one hand, a verification of the way it works, highlighting the organization's strengths and weaknesses; on the other hand, the values that stand out from the interviews, as they translate the organizational culture (Gomes, 2000). In the next phase, it will be essential that this data be presented to employees during working meetings that will allow them to listen to their opinions, collect suggestions and prepare a version that integrates the ideas of all representatives. The Company Project will now be able to be definitively written, as concisely as possible. Finally, since the institution has clearly outlined its mission and enumerated the values it values, it can henceforth make it known, not only to its employees but also to all its economic partners, making this document the real starting point for an effective communication policy.

The company project thus makes it possible to define the mission and the objectives to be achieved to fulfill it, also listing the primary values that characterize its

culture. It will therefore be important to express them in the form of essential concepts, manifested in the following aspects (Camara et al., 1998): purpose, reason for being or social posture of the company, which explains the contribution it intends to make to society through its action: generally, institutions claim to exist, for example, to ensure their shareholders a regular and high return, as they have believed in them and invested capital in their creation; others claim to exist to satisfy the needs of all their internal and external audiences; still others argue that it is not enough to satisfy each of their audiences: more than that, it is important to achieve a high goal, with a view to the common good of humanity; strategy – related to the institution's commercial logic/objectives, assumed as the factor that differentiates it from competitors; values – ethical principles that guide its action, and which can be translated into Honesty, Justice in the treatment of employees, Excellence in the services provided...; standards of action – they concern desirable or undesirable behaviors in the organization, and the type of attitudes that employees must take in different situations, always in line with the company's mission. Finally, a desirable scenario must be presented to what the organization intends to be in the future, which enhances the motivation and cohesion of all employees (Cardoso, 1997).

We see, therefore, that, to be successful, an institution must deal honestly with its many publics, and generate a high level of satisfaction. *“Managing will have to be communicating. (...) It’s not advertising that creates the company’s reputation. It comes from the coherence and summation, over time, of their actions. Credibility is not a simple letter of ethical principles. Credibility and reputation are, rather, confused with the company’s history and with the behavior of its leader and its employees. (...) If it is true that a good communication strategy is essential to launch a new product or service and to reach consumers who may be interested in it, in the short term nothing replaces the intrinsic value of the product or service. And even if this one is good, it will always be much easier to reach people if the institution that launches it has a superior reputation. And this one cannot be acquired, it is the result of personal and teamwork that can only be achieved with time.”* (Azevedo, in Brochand et al, 1999: 90-91).

The marketing effectiveness of an organization, therefore, depends on fully satisfying the needs and desires of its audiences, obviously always bearing in mind the existing limitations and available resources, with institutions varying in the proposed response levels. Some are unable to respond because they are bureaucratic, which makes them vulnerable as clients find other alternatives. Institutions that focus on their programs and fail to understand the needs of different audiences are so dazzled that they lose sight of what they need or will need in the future. Organizations heavily tied to traditional systems often act as if needs and wants never change; forget that they must solve a consumer problem.

Conversely, many are taking steps to become more adept at these responses, promoting studies on satisfaction, needs, and preferences of their markets, and responding to their complaints and suggestions. Institutions that respond to their audiences recognize the importance of having satisfied users or consumers.

2. The different publics

"*The public can go to hell!!*" These words, uttered by the American railroad magnate William Vanderbilt in 1873, determined the birth of Public Relations and allowed the consolidation of the new power of public opinion, ignored for so many years. It is unavoidable, within the scope of an approach related to the issue of the public of institutions, the use of the fundamental concept of public opinion. The first question that arises is its definition: for Wilcox et al. (1992: 234), "*Public opinion is the sum of individual opinions on an issue affecting those individuals*", or "*Public opinion is the collective expression of opinion of many individuals bound into a group by common aims, aspirations, needs, and ideals.*" (idem, ibidem). How does it form? According to Lendrevie et al. (1992: 364), results from "*various forms of communication that come to us from different parts and that end up allowing us to express value judgments about certain facts or events.*" In the words of Cutlip et al. (1994: 242), "*Public opinion has never been more powerful, never been more fragmented, never been more volatile, and never been more exploited and manipulated*".

Public opinion is thus assumed to be a dynamic force, so an integral part of the mission of communication technicians will be to help organizations recognize, understand, and deal with this powerful influence in their internal and external environments. It reflects a continuous process of interpersonal and mediated communication on certain topics, between groups of people who have the faculty to act similarly. "Thinking together" often leads to "acting together", which makes it particularly important to understand this phenomenon, which forces more and more institutions to publicize their activities, promote them, to obtain a favorable average of the opinions of individuals and groups. It is, therefore, the task of the communication professional to study and interpret the opinions of the public on which he will carry out his activities. It is important to work on the opinions of these groups, which are of direct interest to the institution's activities, through persuasive communications.

It is now possible, based on the concepts presented, to make some considerations at another level about the publics of an institution. First of all, a caveat: it is necessary to forget the idea of "public" as an undifferentiated whole. Such an application is counterproductive since in any society it is possible to find a mosaic of ethnically, religiously, geographically, socially, politically, and occupationally different groups, with different interests. This reality forces communication programs, to be effective, to address target audiences. It is necessary to know specifically and in detail, each of the target audiences, to understand them, define objectives, develop effective communication strategies and evaluate their results. The selection of the most effective ways that an organization has available to communicate with its publics is crucial. If these were a homogeneous whole, the task of communicating with them would certainly be easier, but certainly less stimulating. What happens is that the publics are complex, distinct groups whose interests do not always coincide. For the communication technician, knowledge of this audience dynamics is essential. "*A successful campaign must be aimed at those segments of the mass audience which are most desirable for its particular purpose and must employ those media most effective in reaching them.*" (Wilcox et al., 1992: 262).

In this way, we see that any institution, even if pursuing social or non-profit objectives, has different audiences and has to manage relationships with each of them. Given the scope of action of Public Relations, it is essential that the organization proceeds with a generic segmentation at two levels: internal and external audiences, although, as we will detail later, institutions often forget or invest very little of their time and budgets in actions aimed at internal audiences. Theoretically, however - and in an opposing perspective to the one mentioned above -, when identifying the different targets of an organization, it is common to create an order according to the degree of proximity, considering, according to this criterion, the primordial importance of the internal audiences. Equally noteworthy is the importance normally attributed to the Media, as they convey information that leads other human groups to form opinions. For this reason, organizations often pay particular attention to it, though, for example, the creation of the specific position of Press Officer.

We can then, based on Cutlip et al., "Effective Public Relations" (1994: 245), define a public as "*an active social unit consisting of all those affected who recognize a common problem for which they can seek common solutions.*" Penteado (1993: 45) defines the public as "*the group of people in which the work of Public Relations develops.*" According to Kotler & Armstrong (1999: 48), "*the public is any group that has an actual or potential interest in, or has an impact on, the company's ability to achieve its objectives*". The latter authors propose the following categorization of audiences: a) Financial publics – are all those who influence the organization's ability to obtain funds, such as banks or shareholders; b) Media audiences (Radio, Television or Press) – disseminate news about various events concerning the institution; c) Government publics – central and local authorities; d) Interest groups – groups that, acting in different areas, can pressure the organization to act in one or the other direction. Examples: consumer organizations, environmental groups, minority representatives...; e) Local public – public that lives where the organization is located: community institutions, commerce, service sector...; f) General public – groups all people who have some interest for the company, that is, in some way related to its products and activities; g) Internal public – includes employees, managers, volunteers, and directors, concerning whom some specific communication supports can be used to inform and motivate.

Penteado (1993), in turn, proposes that the criterion of proximity, that is, the criterion of proximity, that which gives primacy to the closest public of the organization. In this way, the author systematizes 1. Internal publics of an institution: Company owners, Shareholders, Employees, Community, Dealers; 2. External publics of an institution: Suppliers, Consumers, Competitors, Representative Employers, Professional Unions, Information Bodies, Government, General Public.

Equally noteworthy, in presenting some variations, is the view of Lendrevie et al. (1990) on the specific audiences of an institution, still according to the criterion of proximity, and in descending order of importance. Given its relevance, this was the categorization adopted by us in this study for the application of the concept of "internal public": Shareholders, Directors, Employees. External audiences: Consumers/Users, Distributors, Prescribers, Suppliers, Opinion Leaders, Financial Community, Unions,

Employers' Associations, Local Community, Central and Local Administration, Media, General Public.

To conclude this theme, and as Penteadó (1993: 33) states, *"The public's opinion is sovereign. Difficult as it is to detect and know, it is to her that the efforts of Public Relations must be directed. In this sense, we can understand Edward Bernays' definition: "Human Engineering". Public Relations is effectively a form of human engineering because it builds in the public opinion the basis for the success of any enterprise."* In this way, and even more important than the specific criterion used, it seems to us to be the care that the message is transmitted in the right direction, that is, in the direction of the target audience, so it is essential to locate it. To this end, it is necessary to establish criteria, which will make it possible to determine the audiences and define priority scales for each specific institution.

3. The communication strategy

Following the proposal to present the different audiences of an organization, we understand that, in defining a coherent communication strategy, two aspects must be considered: internal communication, which concerns the dissemination of information to employees, and which allows for the development of a feeling of belonging and sharing by human resources; and external communication, which can be divided into commercial communication (in the form of promotions at the point of sale, advertising, merchandising), and corporate communication (translated as the part of the communication policy dedicated to spreading abroad a reflected and coherent image of the institution). At this level, two major types of communication are distinguished, which differ more by the content of the message they transmit than by the media they use to disseminate it. Concerning each of them, two forms can be distinguished, depending on whether the object has as its object objective performances of the product or company or, on the other hand, the personality of the brand or institution, highlighted symbolically.

Thus, in the set of external communication, four levels are identified (Brochand et al., 1999): on the one hand, commercial communication, which is concerned with communication - product (disseminating the objective characteristics of the product or service) and with brand communication (which works at the level of symbolic communication, positioning the brand in the consumer's imagination). On the other hand, corporate communication, which also unfolds on two levels, company communication (objective translator of the company's economic, technical, social performances, and institutional communication (which works at a symbolic level, disseminating the values, identity and company culture) This has been gaining relevance in organizational structures, which realize that it is not enough to make their products or services known and that it is necessary to develop an institutional image for the different audiences (Fonseca, 1998). Such awareness was favored by the ecological and consumer defense movements that emerged in the 1970s, which highlighted the existence of corporate social responsibility.

Internally and externally, however, even today there is a strong tendency to transmit only what is good about the institution while trying incessantly to prevent bad

news from being disseminated. However, this option will tend to appear ineffective in the long term, as it will imply a slow but continuous loss of self-esteem, first with internal audiences, and at a later stage with the general public. Institutions need effective communications with their markets and audiences, and these are not limited to developing good programs and services, setting fair prices, and making sound distribution decisions. It is also necessary to inform the target groups about the activities and goals to be achieved - which will arouse their interest - but also about the failures, errors, and measures to solve them. Thus, the institutional communicator must elaborate an explicit framework regarding the communication tasks that need to be carried out (Chevalier-Beaumel (nd); Lendrevie et al. (1992)). Below we present some of those considered essential in a large number of institutions: maintain or improve the global image; maintain or develop the loyalty of former employees or customers; attract potential customers, encourage them to seek information about the organization; correct incomplete or erroneous information about the institution. Naturally, common sense tells us that there are no pre-defined ideal actions in theoretical works on the subject: the communication strategy must consider experience, its successes, and failures. The proper combination of intuition and rationality, daring and tradition also have its say. (Santos, 1996).

To achieve its objectives, an effective communication strategy must have some characteristics: first, communications must be coordinated. Instead of editing brochures, Press Releases, or bulletins with different graphic presentations, or possibly even with the logo in different stages of updating, a unique logo and theme should be used in all communication materials, to increase institutional recognition. We emphasize that the implicit message and the graphic quality of the logo must not be neglected or underestimated since that element cannot be elaborated until after a good knowledge of the organization. Its graphics must translate the concepts contained in the Company Project and allow the public to perceive them, consciously or unconsciously. This drawing, sometimes reproduced in a few square centimeters, will contain the very essence of the organization; it works as its "flag", as a sign of internal union for the staff, and a symbol of the institution's personality for external partners. The quality of the content and style deserves to be consistent, and the print cannot lose sight of the intended communication objective. This need justifies the importance of the organization having the collaboration of highly qualified professionals who carry out the preparation and review of all official publications.

On the other hand, and whenever possible, the institution should personalize its communications to internal and external audiences, which can be easily achieved through computerized means. Although recipients are often aware that such results are obtained using the computer, this kind of care and attention will benefit the organization that achieves them. Naturally, this type of communication must be completed with a signature, preferably handwritten, accompanied by the respective identification typed in the area immediately below.

Finally, *"organizations should remember that an effective public relations program, while undoubtedly important, is only one component of the institution's marketing effort. This must*

ensure its correct performance and viability through the choice of products or services, pricing system, and safe distribution decisions.” (Kotler & Fox, 1994: 334).

As fully effective communication is extremely difficult to achieve, and as organizations undoubtedly have an absolute need to communicate profitably with their audiences, the strategy and technique of this communication must be very well defined, implying the collection of information, the recognition of existing problems, and the proposal of creative solutions. Today more than ever, communication will have to be global and unified. Consistency in the base image and quality are strong arguments in favor of a lasting relationship between the public and the institution. Under any circumstances, an integrated message policy in all aspects of communication is highly desirable: in Public Relations, Merchandising, Direct Marketing, Promotions, Sponsorship, or even in innovative areas of activity: *“Lendrevie said that a new form of Marketing will develop; Internal Marketing, which seeks to make everyone in the company aware of the fulfillment of commercial objectives. The content of internal Marketing will also, of necessity, have to be in tune with the whole”*, in a global vision. (Lanham, in Lendrevie et al., 1992: 320).

4. Conclusions

Systematizing, we can present important stages of a communication strategy (Raupp & Hoffjann, 2012; Neamtu & Neamtu, 2015): at first, an analysis must be made of the main existing communication problems, following which it will be possible to define of a global communication policy. Subsequently, objectives, targets, and communication axes can be defined. Once conclusions have been reached in this area, it is time to make an inventory of human, technical and financial resources, after which it will be possible to select the different supports to be used and the investment strategy. A later stage leads us to the design of specific communication programs for each selected technique, and their implementation. The last – but not least – stage of the process refers to the consequent measurement of results and correction of deviations whenever justified. In this regard, Santos (1996) recalls the existence of a basic principle that requires the readjustment of a plan every time any major component changes or adverse circumstances arise. The person responsible for its implementation must therefore foresee and maintain practical flexibility to resolve unforeseen events.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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