



UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract:

This article aims to analyze the changes in organizations and the need to adapt in the field of communication. It is a given that the contemporary world is characterized by constant changes; mutations occur at all levels of society, involving communications, the productive structure, markets, technology, or science with enormous speed. These profound transformations cause permanent instability and require an effort to monitor change, a mandatory condition for survival. Institutions are also no exception, in terms of aspects such as management processes, work organization, structures, the relationship with the market (new needs, expectations, and demanding standards of their audiences), attitudes, degree of interest and responsibility of its elements, the enrichment of the content of the tasks or the values. In organizations, changes have been increasing, including changes in the quantity or quality of materials or messages. In this sense, several strategies can be put into practice: communicate in advance the changes that will occur, explaining the reasons for this and the objectives to be achieved by the organization, as well as the role that each human being can play in this process; make people participate in change, seeking their involvement; support individuals, for example through training for the performance of future roles - which allows the acquisition of new knowledge and new skills.

JEL: M10; M11; L10

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1. Introduction

Change is crucial for enhancing and improving organizational effectiveness and/or ensuring organizational growth (Aravopolou, 2016: 19; Cummings & Worley, 2014). Camara et al (1997: 165) define the process of organizational change as “*the change in the*

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structure and way of functioning of an organization, to make it more competitive and adjusted to the realities of the market". As for Infestas Gil, (1991: 162), "the organizational change can be defined as the appreciable alteration of the structural and functional aspects of an organization, including the consequences and manifestations of these aspects that are incorporated into the norms, the values, to products and cultural symbols." The author further adds that "the company, as a social institution, lives immersed in the situation of change, which characterizes today's society. It is a broad, complex change, with acceleration and without the possibility of returning to previous moments." (idem: 165).

In fact, at the organizational level, changes have been increasing substantially in pace and degree since the second quarter of the 20th century, and it is currently one of the main challenges that institutions face (Christensen, 2014; Özgen & Akbayır, 2017; Neill, 2018). They are strategic to their survival and development, and declare themselves at two levels: on the one hand, due to the organizational condition of an open system, influenced and influencing its surroundings, in the technological, behavioral, or sociopolitical aspects. On the other hand, at the internal level, where interpersonal and intergroup relationships, as well as the processes of conquest and exercise of power, constitute frequent pressures towards change (Ferreira et al., 1996).

In this regard, Katz & Kahn (1997: 474-478) add: *"Changes can be attributed to two sources: changes in environmental inputs, including the organizational supersystem, and internal system tension, or imbalance."* In the first case, we are talking about changes in the quantity or quality of the influx of materials or messages or even the case in which there are changes in the supersystem that legitimizes organizational functioning, such as the enactment of new laws. Changes can also be seen in the inputs related to social values and motivations, which slowly change over time, until some event precipitates them, causing major transformations in organizations.

2. Changing corporate communication

Organizations function through compromises and adjustments between their elements, which produce tensions between different functional subsystems or horizontal tension (between departments with different dynamics, or in competition for the same resources), and vertical tension, translated into the conflict between the various levels of the hierarchy (difficulty in achieving, on the part of all employees, total harmony regarding the institution's goals, especially when there are large differences in interests and power between hierarchies).

Freire (1993: 144) also underlines this issue, when he states that *"the phenomenon of change can also be triggered by demands that are felt within organizations."* The socio-professional profile of today's human beings is substantially different from that of a century ago: the rise in the level of education, culture, information, makes the new generation want more from their professional life than just economic compensation or material goods. Human beings feel the need to find meaning in their work, they want to learn, to fulfill themselves personally and socially. And the obligation to adapt to the changing demands of the environment *"leads companies to reject the Fayolo-Taylorist model*

of the strict definition of tasks and their rigorous fulfillment in favor of greater autonomy, decision-making capacity, and personalized accountability for a growing number of your employees." (idem: 146).

However, whatever the source of change, the truth is that the process does not always take place peacefully, as it means a change in the daily life, habits, attitudes, and behavior of the elements of the organization. When the level of transformation is tenuous, such changes do not lead to internal conflicts; however, if the degree of change is accentuated, it is perceived by individuals and triggers mechanisms of resistance to this alteration to the balance of the system. Organizational change efforts almost always come up against some form of human resistance, due to different causes that can be grouped as follows (Lampreia, 1997): logical factors - in this context, aspects such as personal interests, the time required to adjust to change, the extra effort to relearn, the economic costs of change, or questioning its technical feasibility; psychological factors – materialize in fear of the unknown, difficulty understanding change, low tolerance for change, lack of trust in others or need for security, desire to maintain the status quo. Finally, sociological factors, due to the existence of distinct social values or the desire to maintain the composition of groups.

Bilhim (1996), on the same topic, believes that there are two sources of resistance to change: individuals and the organization. In the first case, it refers to aspects such as habit (to the extent that life is complex, human beings seek to simplify it through programmed and regular responses), security (since people feel, to a greater or lesser extent, need for security and, if they perceive it as threatened, tend to resist changes), economic factors (which give rise to resistance in case they can threaten with reductions in wages), fear of the unknown (due to ambiguity and a period of uncertainty that any change entails) and selective information processing (since each individual conceives the world according to his/her perception, and seeks to ignore everything that may jeopardize his/her vision.) With regard to organizations, they can, according to the author, six sources of resistance to change were identified: structural inertia (due to the existence of mechanisms that ensure stability, such as job descriptions, rules and procedures), limited change focuses on (resistance arises if some organizational subsystem is not subject to changes during the others), group inertia (cases in which the group in which the worker belongs acts as a "brake", even if only psychological, preventing any change of attitude on the part of the individual), threat to competence (in cases where organizational changes may jeopardize the competence of specialized groups, which in this way see their power diminished), threat to the established power relationship (to the extent that that greater openness and dialogue in the decision-making process can jeopardize previously established people and powers, which will lead them to resist changes), or even changes to the established allocation of resources (fear about a possible reduction in budgets or available staff for each task). On the subject, Rosa also draws attention to the fact that it is necessary to give individuals time to change old habits and change values they believe in: *"change means an inverse process of acquiring habits and values. The deinteriorization (...) of these also requires its own time. The attempt to force overcoming the psychosociological time necessary for the process of deinteriorization can be one of*

the causes of resistance to change, in adaptation or social upheaval." (1992: 49). In fact, in any area, radical and rapid changes in strategy and behavior may not result in the desired way, so any organization should introduce all operational changes in a phased manner. Very rapid and profound changes can generate insecurity and create barriers on the part of the employees, which will greatly hinder the implementation of measures.

We thus verify that, naturally, any process of change - however well prepared it may be - will face individual or group resistance, as it represents a threat to established interests, due to the changes it will introduce in the power structure and the organization's habits (Waddell, Cummings & Worley, 2011). In overcoming these difficulties, we believe that communication has a decisive role. *"To eliminate the natural resistance to change (...), it is essential to communicate your objectives and reason for being exhaustive, seeking to obtain the alignment of employees and their commitment to the chosen path."* (Camara et al., 1997: 187). *"The key to change and its success is people."* (Lampreia, 1997: 47). It is the human resources that make the technology work, serve the customer/user, and consequently determine the efficiency of the organization, so it is essential to fully utilize its potential.

In this order of ideas, the constant struggle for the implementation of modernization programs, the need to increase the quality of services, and the orientation towards results, implicitly require intervention at the organizational culture level, since the intended changes can be compromised if not taken into account the cultural specificities of the organization, that is, a whole set of habits, beliefs, values, and traditions that act in the long term, and create a certain style of action within the organization.

The process of modernizing organizations is, therefore, currently going through more participatory management, which introduces strategies focused on valuing human resources and recognizing the role that individuals play in bringing about change. In this way, we seek to make room for people in the organization, that is, to place them at the center of all problems and questions. *"Only a new management philosophy, which emphasizes flexible operating structures, redesigns the roles of actors (...), implements strategies that favor commitment and participation, enhances debureaucratization and quality, can it succeed (...)"* (idem: 17). To this end, it is necessary to answer a set of questions that translate the vision of what the leaders want the organization to be: What is the organization today and what does it want to be? What values do you defend? What are you committed to, and what are your goals? These issues imply a concern with its functioning, to achieve the desired results, mobilizing and motivating the human resources available. Not only is it essential for managers to have a vision of the future regarding the organization, but also to know how to share it with everyone, at the different levels of the organizational structure. In this way, people will have a better knowledge of the institution's mission and its objectives, also giving meaning to the work that each one develops (Fallik, 2013). In internal communication, the work should not be limited to the transmission of information: *"in terms of efficiency, to limit the emergence of certain social conflicts, it is not enough, for example, to inform the staff of decisions. Upstream, a real work of explanation and pedagogy must be carried out."* (Brault, 1993: 167). A priori, employees are interested in the

life of your company, so they should be informed about what is happening in it. The lack of information generates perverse effects, as it causes in individuals the impression of rejection, or lack of consideration, which may lead them to criticize the decisions taken. Conversely, information is perceived as a way of valuing their tasks and performance.

The organization's vision of the future, as well as the sharing of this vision internally, contribute to increasing internal cohesion, motivating and mobilizing human resources, and encouraging participation and innovation. This new look at organizational reality implies changes in its internal dynamics, such as: attributing more responsibilities to people, discovering how to bring decision-making down in the organization; the design of a new sharing of power and influence within the organization, so that individuals have a more active role, and where their contributions and efforts are recognized; an effort to humanize the world of work, which implies that the organization is no longer a space for frustration, but a space for personal fulfillment.

Obtaining results is not possible without the participation of all stakeholders, mobilizing joint efforts, with active collaboration and individual commitment, even though this task of changing behaviors and attitudes is one of the most difficult in management. *"All useful means must be used to promote the commitment, contribution and participation of people: they are the key to change."* (Lampreia, 1997: 27). In this context, internal communication plays an essential role in organizations, about its contribution to innovation and change, due to the need and ability to permanently study the different audiences and opinions, and their constant fluctuations.

Adaptation to change is thus facilitated by the exchange of information, indispensable in any of the phases that must be covered at that moment: the implementation of a correct program of flexibility to the resulting changes begins with a period of investigation - to seek to know the problem in question, and everything that concerns it; it goes through the painstaking treatment of the data obtained; proceeds with the planning of actions to be carried out, according to the previously defined project; and, finally, it evaluates the results of the actions undertaken, to be able to correct any deviations or gaps that may arise. Throughout the entire process, communication also develops the irreplaceable work of clarification, of calling for participation, and of seeking the commitment of all those involved, which makes it possible to attenuate or even cancel the usual resistance to change. *"In a company, communication is at the origin of progress that is all the more substantial the more it is considered a powerful management tool, both an objective and a means of a change strategy."* (Brault, 1993: 167).

In addition, in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment, organizations need, to remain competitive, to permanently listen to the market, respond to its needs, and, ideally, anticipate its requests. For the entire system to be prepared to respond in a timely and effective manner, each employee must be more autonomous in their daily tasks, can adapt, and adhere to the general objective of the institution. Employees want to see their degree of autonomy increased, express their opinion, participate in decisions, and obtain quick and complete information about what is happening in their work environment. Internal communication is the preferred instrument for this purpose, although the awareness of managers regarding this aspect

is recent, which is why there are still some failures in its application. To manage the complexity of the internal functioning, favoring the involvement of individuals, the global communication policy should be governed by some lines of force, which translate into the dissemination of relevant and continuous information (to allow everyone to understand the company), in the constant exchange of information and coordination between people and departments, and in the search for everyone to adhere to common values and objectives (Lampreia, 1997). Such objectives translate an ideal situation of concern with aspects such as providing accurate information about the goals to be achieved by each individual, inserting them in the context of the institution's purposes (incentive to individual effort), maintaining open communication, and encouraging the exchange of opinions, or the encouragement of teamwork and interpersonal relationships (Bucăța & Rizescu, 2017).

For effective implementation of change projects, it will then be necessary to obtain the adhesion and commitment of all the actors, only achieved through a clear explanation of the objectives to be achieved or, ideally, through dialogued information; in modern societies, it is increasingly difficult to “impose” changes on individuals, and to implement reforms “by decree”. As Cowling & Mailer (1998) point out, social psychology teaches us that attitudes are difficult to change: but it also teaches us that they are changed more easily through dialogue and exchanges of views with peer groups than through confrontation. , open attempts at manipulation or imposition. *“The lack of dialogue and, therefore, the feeling of not participating in decisions, the lack of external communication and, therefore, the absence of social recognition, always create a profound lack of motivation in large organizations, in which few employees are lucky enough to be close enough to the boundaries of the environment to be in a position to feel the impact of their contributions.”* (Brault, 1993: 166-167).

In summary, it appears that internal communication translates into a set of actions that materialize the principles of an institution's communication policy. These aim to facilitate the adherence of individuals to the company's objective values, to motivate them, to facilitate the work in common, and, finally, to allow them to find the meaning of their tasks in the organization; at the same time, we can see that external communication includes – among other things – actions aimed at valuing the organization itself in the face of different targets. This can be achieved through disciplines such as image communication, patronage, sponsoring, or lobbying. Thus, the relevance assumed by the internal cohesion of all elements of the organization, about its relationship with the outside world, is inferred. The employees who provide the different services are decisive in the customer's assessment of the organization, especially those who are in direct contact with them. The role of contact personnel is twofold; on the one hand, the protection of the institution's interests, ensuring that the service or product offered is by pre-defined specifications; on the other hand, the defense of the client's interests, providing him with a high degree of satisfaction. To achieve this objective, the human resources policy must provide each employee with motivation and meaning about the functions he/she holds in the organization; this will make them active, committed, responsible, and with a spirit of initiative.

It seems to us, therefore, that aspects such as the constant exchange of information, the encouragement of team spirit, the generalized sharing of the organization's values, and the commitment to the delegation of responsibilities are assumed to be necessary for achieving success with external audiences. *"The desire to develop this type of communication implies recognizing that the concern to communicate with the internal public can ensure cohesion, a feeling of sharing in the organization, the desire to offer more quality in performance. Fluid communication is essential for transparency, security, and stability. In short, to have a competitive advantage."* (Santo, 1996: 17). We, therefore, understand that the challenge of winning over the internal public is essential, insofar as the acceptance of the institution by external publics will largely depend on the opinion and posture of these groups. *"The notion that to project a good image to the outside, it is first necessary to pass it on internally, is already a reality in the four corners of the world. Internal communication plays a key role on the stage of any Organization."* (Cunha, 2000: 14). The circulation of information within organizations, whether processed from top to bottom, in the opposite direction or horizontally, is essential for all internal audiences to feel motivated and integrated into the organizational culture. As a result, it will be possible to humanize relationships and improve the image transmitted to the outside, facilitating the institution's response to any doubts or misunderstandings that arise in the surrounding environment.

According to Kunsch (1997: 37), *"the convergence of all activities internal and external communication, based on a single, clearly defined policy and the global objectives of the organization, will result in really effective communication."* Only a global communication strategy will allow each of its interlocutors to understand the legitimacy of that institution and its reason for being. For this, consistency of form in communications is not necessary, but consistency in policies. *"La communication globale n'est pas seulement la cohérence des discours: elle est la cohérence des discours avec les actes. It expresses the logic between le "dire" et le "faire" de l'entreprise, les deux constituant son image. C'est une question d'éthique autant que d'efficacité."* (Weil, 1990: 224).

Internal communication is therefore not reduced to a set of formal channels through which information circulates; it will be a system of multidirectional interactions in which sender and receiver share symbolic meanings, which enable employees to understand the organization's real identity, the knowledge that serves as a reference for their behavior. And it is from the set of individual behaviors, developed at different stages in interpersonal, group, and organizational relationships, that the image of the institution emerges. This idea is shared by Camara et al. (1997: 339), when they state that *"internal communication is of crucial importance for the development of a common reference framework for all workers of what the Company is and, consequently, for the consolidation of the organization's identity."* Other authors, in turn, explore a little-referenced aspect about the direct influence of internal communication on institutional strategy, but complementary to the above: the close link between that and Total Quality (of products, services, and organization). They emphasize that *"Quality is fundamentally obtained by the capacity and commitment of each element of the organization. Thus, (...) these are, with their talent and dedication, one of the basic factors of competitiveness."* (Tenera, 1998: 23).

It is understood, therefore, that the way organizations communicate internally is reflected in the type of relationship they establish with the outside. *"A group only exists through communication. It is communication within this group that creates coherence among the members, and it is communication that, from this group to the outside, creates this image of coherence and, therefore, differentiates it from other groups."* (Brault, 1993: 173). The projection of a good image of an organization to the outside must, first of all, be cultivated inside: we thus emphasize, once again, the importance of the internal public, which is often not given due attention, and which should always be the starting point for any action. (Lampreia, 1992).

3. Conclusions

Therefore, it seems clear to us that effective communication implies, above all, that the receiver correctly interprets what the sender intends to transmit. Often, however, this is not the case, due to the constant presence of barriers, which Teixeira (1998) classifies into three large groups: technical, language, and psychological barriers. The author understands the former as related to the temporal opportunity in which communication takes place, information, and cultural differences. The information must be transmitted at the appropriate time since, for example, even a few minutes' delays could lead to the message not reaching the intended objective. Also, the excess of information channeled to a person or group of people prevents that one from being perfectly understood or treated, which inevitably leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of communication. About cultural differences, we know it is responsible for some gaps or misunderstandings between people from different countries or continents.

We also mentioned language barriers above, and we would like to clarify, according to the author, this idea. In this case, the vocabulary used and the meanings attributed to the words are decisive. The first must take into account the type of receivers it is aimed at, otherwise, it will generate a disinterest in some people to whom the message was intended. An example of this is the use of technical languages, very characteristic of some professional groups or areas of activity, which make it difficult to fully understand what they intend to convey to individuals outside the system. The possibility of different meanings for the same word can also hinder the effectiveness of communications, so prudence and clarity in its use are advisable.

Finally, about barriers, Teixeira argues that they can take various forms, presenting those that he considers being the most significant: information distortion (the greater the more links there is in the communication chain); low level of trust, and open-mindedness between the parties involved in the process; worry or stress that, when reaching high levels, prevent the human being from correctly recording the information transmitted to them; tendency to understand what one wants to hear, which causes deformations in the reception of the message; also differences in perception, in the sense that people with different experiences tend to attribute different interpretations to the same words or situations.

Still, regarding this theme of analysis, the perspective of Berlo (1985) seems pertinent, as it is unusual. Incidentally, the author refers that each role played by individuals within the social system obeys a set of behaviors: what must be done within the scope of this function. However, it would be reductive to make predictions according to the knowledge we have about them: the truth is that these can be seen from various points of view. According to Berlo (idem: 152), "*in the analysis of role behaviors, we need to use at least three forms of treatment: role prescriptions, role descriptions, and role expectations.*" The author understands that the former can be defined as formal, explicit statements about the actions that must be performed by each person within the scope of a specific attribution. Descriptions are the report of the conducts that, in reality, are performed by the human being in a given role. Finally, expectations are translated into the images that people form about the procedures of other individuals in a given role. Theoretically, and in an ideal system, these three forms referring to a role would be equivalent. However, this is often not the case. If the differences between them present themselves as very distinct or even opposite, communication breakdowns in the system will occur (idem, ibidem). Communication difficulties are then attributable to the existence of ambiguity or conflicts between the sender's demeanor and the receiver's expectations in a communication situation. An essential principle for effective communication is, therefore, the need for the prescriptions, descriptions, and expectations of role behaviors to be in harmony with each other. This makes it possible to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the social attributions that each individual has in society.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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