



INTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS – THE CONTRIBUTION OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TOOLS

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Abstract:

The set of human resources at the service of an organization must recognize itself in the image that it spreads, and experience the feeling of belonging to a collective. The regular and appealing use of the internal communication tools available makes it possible to keep all employees informed about the life of the institution, and about the changes underway: these supports are therefore a vital substance in the involvement process, so everyone should be used to facilitate and develop the circulation of information. Information within the company is one of the preliminary conditions for good motivation at work. This information has to circulate with the greatest freedom, in every way, following not only the formal structures of the company, but also the entire range of informal structures (Levenshus & Lemon, 2017; McKie & Willis, 2012). Successful organizations are those that have an informed and motivated workforce that *“can respond to criticism, explain difficulties, publicize successes, praise merits. In short, they are those whose staff can act as a faithful, credible and positive ambassador.”* (Westphalen, s.d.: 66).

JEL: D20; D02

Keywords: organizations, internal communication, public relations, written communication tools

1. Introduction

Each communication support has specific characteristics, which must be adapted to the organizational structure. For this, it is necessary to know all the symbolic capital of the company accumulated over time, that is, its culture. Once this aspect has been diagnosed, it will be necessary to distinguish targets, translated into groups of people who have distinctive traits, and messages can be directed in a concrete and discriminated way.

We found in some authors coincidental proposals, in the sense of systematizing the messages disseminated in the organization into two categories: operational

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information - that which is transmitted to disseminate orders, instructions, norms or regulations, which pass essentially through hierarchical or functional channels -, and motivating information - translator of messages that aim to mobilize (Pirjol, 2017; Westphalen, s.d.).

Soares and Pereira (1999) corroborate this proposal, presenting two dimensions of communication in organizations: the technical dimension (whose mission is to make it work, establishing functional links between people and bodies), and the integrative dimension (whose mission is to make people belong, seeking to know the motivations and finding ways to satisfy them).

Weil (1990) also proposes an identical categorization. According to the author, the notion of internal communication contains two aspects: a function that ensures the optimal treatment and dissemination of information in the organization, and a stimulus function, which animates and complements existing networks. For a long time, this dynamic function was highly valued in internal communication, with the two aspects being perfectly dissociated; while operational communication, with technical characteristics, was entrusted to the IT Departments, the second was humanized and presented under the domain of the Human Resources Department or the Communication Department. However, in a holistic view of the organization, they are not isolated; their goals are identical, and the means they use are common. Internal communication rests on a centripetal logic, since the overall objective is to attribute meaning to management actions and decisions. Its contribution translates into ensuring integration and synergy at work. *“Pour intégrer, pour fonctionner comme une boussole interne, elle ne peut être isolée et se concevoir comme un département supplémentaire dans une division tayloriste du travail: the centripetal fonction requires an organization qui puisse à la fois irriguer et se nourrir de tous les services.”* (idem: 238).

Naturally, it will not be feasible or advisable to use all the means of internal communication for the dissemination of information: each one of them will be more or less suitable depending on the type of message, the profile of the recipients, and the intended impact, so it will be desirable to play with the complementarity of these instruments. We will therefore seek to systematize the main written supports for internal communication.

2. Written communication tools

In Latin countries, tradition still prevails, essentially, the diffusion of ideas through writing. Also in the workplace, and supported by the use of modern digital media, written support is the main vector of internal communication. Its use is varied, and can serve several purposes: transmission of orders, publication of results, information about the institution's general lines, perspectives and future projects, providing staff with the information they need to perform their tasks correctly, knowledge of opinions and recognition of the successes of each employee. However, the plurality of its applications must be managed carefully, in order to avoid the indiscriminate and exaggerated use of

this form of communication, which can generate bureaucracy, financial and temporal waste.

To be properly used, the written instrument must contain elements that allow the immediate identification of the subject, author and recipients, be quickly distributed so as not to lose relevance, have clear and logical wording, and a careful presentation. There is, however, one aspect to be highlighted: the fact that these means complement, but do not replace, the face-to-face communication necessary for the success of professional relationships. As reported by Cutlip et al. (2013), a handbook for the new employee is no substitute for the personal handshake, for a thorough orientation program and tour, or for regular and frequent communications from immediate supervisors.

We will now present the main forms of written information, including working documents and dialogue instruments.

a) Service note – used to present directives or provide explanations, allowing the dissemination of specific information. It should be simple, concise and clear, with the subject to be addressed appearing right at the beginning. As advantages, it presents the accuracy and speed of information circulation.

b) Report – enables the description of a topic or topics dealt with in a meeting. It must obey the following internal structure: title, introduction, problem statement, analysis of possible solutions, the solution recommended by the author and conclusion. Its distribution to employees and shareholders on a regular basis demonstrates the existence of a Public Relations “mentality”.

c) Information sheet – generally distributed in digital format, it is convenient and quick-to-prepare support, which disseminates brief and current information: conjuncture, recent decisions... it does not have a fixed frequency, which gives it greater flexibility.

d) Annual report - useful insofar as the employees of the organizations like to have knowledge of all the fields of activity of the same. The preparation of this annual report is one of the essential functions of the Public Relations Department of the institutions, and it translates into an informative document, divided into two general sections: detailed financial information on the conditions and performance of the organization in the year that has just ended, and presentation of the achievements, its objectives and outstanding issues. This type of information can make known the economic situation of the institution, the policies of action and profits obtained, present a summary of the work carried out in the previous year, the projections for the future... it constitutes a Public Relations vehicle of great importance for shareholders, a public in relation to which two aspects should not be neglected: attention to new shareholders and cares for minority subscribers, which are increasingly important in global terms. Hence the importance of the Annual Report, as it constitutes, in most cases, the only connection between the company and its investors (Winner, n.d.).

An objective, complete, useful and clear annual information can arouse interest in everything that concerns the company, and also recognize mistakes made, enabling the choice of more effective paths. It should also be noted that this report needs to be interesting, understandable and professional, but the cost factor should be subject to careful analysis: if it has a very simple graphic appearance, *“it suggests that the organization*

is weak and amateurish. On the other hand, if it's too flashy, readers may question why the organization is spending so much money on publishing instead of spending it on more important things.” (Kotler and Fox, 1994; 329).

e) Circular - used frequently in large organizations, it is intended to summon staff to meetings, make notices or recommendations. It is a communication tool endowed with speed, but whose content must be carefully selected, in order to avoid tensions and conflicts.

f) Billboard – easy-to-apply, inexpensive and efficient support, adaptable to all types of non-complex messages. Essentially used for simple, but useful or attractive indications, such as: brief legal information, useful contacts, emergency telephone numbers, internal regulations of the organization. Compact texts, with very small characters, or the presence of too much information, sometimes superimposed, should be avoided. The location of this support, with regard to the physical space, is important: the painting must be seen by everyone, so it will be preferable to place it in a place of strong affluence, such as the corridor that will give access to the bar or social areas. Up-to-date information is essential, since failure to observe this care generates disinterest in employees, and inevitably leads to inattention. The information must be treated with care, using paper of different colors for each item (Social Life, Technical Information, Sports, Training...)

g) Suggestion box – in physical or digital format, it is one of the main means of contact in the upward direction. The principle is simple: employees submit their proposals, and the identification shall be optional. Suggestions are ideas that lead to an improvement in the execution of technical and administrative tasks, through innovations, modifications or even deletions, which will improve working methods, reduce manufacturing times and costs. There may also be suggestions regarding the human aspect, such as improving working conditions or the hygiene and safety system, timetables... (Westphalen, s.d.). Its contribution to the enrichment of human relations in the organization translates into the opportunity for the top of the hierarchy to show confidence in the other workers, and to give them the possibility of participation. Suggestion boxes encourage workers to think and observe, taking them away from the routine and passive situations that often occur. They appeal to responsibility, encourage initiative and creativity. In addition, they allow problems to be transmitted and solutions proposed that only those who are in direct contact with the realities can know. For the total reliability of the process, all proposals must be analyzed quickly, and interesting suggestions should be effectively explored. There must be a form of a posteriori identification of the author of the idea in question, allowing him to be rewarded for his contribution.

h) Survey - element of annual preparation, to assess the motivation, needs and aspirations of employees. This type of upward communication can relate to all members of the organization or be carried out through the selection of a sample, which must be representative. The surveys are carried out with the aim of studying the prevailing opinions among workers, detecting the existence of informal groups, and obtaining knowledge about the structure and situation of groups in the institution. They diagnose the organizational climate or analyze specific problems (working conditions, training needs...). It is therefore a “radiography”, which is intended to be as faithful as possible to

the different areas and sectors of the institution so that, through a constructive dialogue, it evolves in the best direction. Preferably, they should take place under cover of anonymity, as this allows for safer, more accurate and sincere answers; they are a communication channel that allows, therefore, a great precision and depth in the conclusions. Naturally, the launch of an opinion poll is the beginning of a dialogue that needs to be continued. Once the results have been determined, their publication and general dissemination is essential, because if this does not happen, an unfavorable climate for communication is established, which could have negative consequences in the future. As Westphalen says (n.d.: 89), *“nothing is more “frustrating” than an inquiry whose conclusions are ignored; nothing is more disappointing than questions left unanswered.”* With some costs in terms of the time needed to prepare the questionnaire, obtain the answers and analyze them, it has the advantage of creating a more open communication environment, and facilitated upwards.

i) Direct letter to employees - signed by the President or Director and sent to everyone, regularly or occasionally, addresses important events in the life of the organization or a particular employee. Sent on paper or by e-mail, personalized letters are increasingly used to establish direct and rapid communication with specific audiences; they can constitute solid instruments of internal communication, and define the institution's image through “details” such as care in presentation, sentence construction, the content of the message or the legibility of the signature. An example of its use is the letters addressed by superiors to a close collaborator, at the time of happy or unhappy family events, considered as manifestations of sympathy and unity. They can also be used to explain intentions, publicize or reaffirm important projects, announce particular operations, quash rumors that occasionally arise within organizations or evoke a hot topic. Among the advantages are economy, direct and individualized approach, impact and speed. These letters allow the creation of a climate of trust and dialogue, essential for greater integration.

j) Company newspaper – one of the privileged means of internal communication, so it deserves a somewhat more in-depth treatment with regard to its description, uses, costs and advantages. Distributed on paper or sent digitally, it is an instrument of humanization, which helps to instill in those who are convinced that they are an integral part of the institution; moreover, its wide dissemination facilitates the feeling of participation in the company's life. It has great integrative potential, as it allows access to communication to all sectors, and the creation of community awareness. As stated by Chevalier-Beaumel, *“the company newspaper is a privileged vector at the service of a precise objective, contributing to the accomplishment of the company's mission”* (n.d.: 10). As the most popular support for internal communication, it thus has multiple ambitions: in addition to its informative role, it can also encourage staff to adhere to the organization's objectives, boost its culture, provide training, provide a privileged place for the exchange of information or a rostrum. of expression. Another objective to consider, which can be achieved through the publication of a newspaper or company bulletin, is the elimination of misunderstandings or rumours, often unfounded, that arise within organizational hierarchies. It also seeks to inform workers about labor measures taken by managers, and

to reinforce the sense of interdependence between departments, eliminating communication barriers. The newspaper or company bulletin is, likewise, a privileged vehicle for the active participation of employees in the events arising in the institution in which they belong, and for increasing the prestige of this institution among their families. It should be open to anyone who wants to make suggestions, collaborate or propose topics. Essential topics are technical and commercial information, competition, presentation of individual or group professional successes, workers' sporting results, leisure time, culture or associations. Some space shall also be provided for small announcements by employees, or news related to them: births, marriages, retirement or deaths, for example.

On the other hand, the disclosure of information outside the company will make it more stimulating, allowing the connection with the surrounding environment to be maintained. Thus, topics of current and general interest, such as health, safety, environment, suggested itineraries, instruction on the economic situation, useful information (such as ways to save domestic energy), and distracting elements such as crosswords or humour, should not be forgotten.

Like any publication issued at regular intervals, the company magazine or newspaper creates a sense of anticipation of its arrival. This helps to strengthen the ties between management and the groups it seeks to inform and influence (Bhattacharyya, 2018). The Administration has the opportunity here to announce its policies, and explain the reasons why they were adopted. However, this possibility offered by the newspaper to influence some target groups should be used with the utmost caution: if the employees perceive that the newspaper is being used as a vehicle of propaganda, the communication between the parties can be seriously affected.

Due to its degree of importance as an instrument of dialogue, this newspaper cannot be improvised: its launch requires reflection, coherence and professionalism, and editorial and printing quality should not be neglected. It will be convenient to have an editorial committee, editors and modelers. The first, employee representative, will be responsible for defining the guidelines for the publication. The editorial staff is responsible for the design of the articles, with the only thing having to be careful with the journalistic skills of the people involved, and look for a certain uniformity in style and form. The model designers are responsible for the technical execution of the newspaper. Pagination or graphics are some of its skills, and nowadays there are not very complex electronic editing templates that help in this task.

Of course, if what is intended is just to give brief information in very short periods of time, the newspaper will consist of few pages and little sophistication. On the contrary, if its vocation is to inform, raise awareness and bring together all employees around common values, the execution formula will be different, and the publication period will be longer.

However, regardless of the choice of type of information and its frequency, the essential thing is that some strategic guidelines are followed: stability and coherence allow the reader to immediately identify the support, and facilitate their loyalty. If the graphic line must be coherent with all the other visual elements of the organization, the

editorial line will also, naturally, seek to address the organization's general themes and values. The adoption of a moderate and objective speech is advisable, always allowing the different actors to intervene and use the word.

For an effective effectiveness of this support, translated into the emotional appropriation of it, it will be of great interest to carry out a regular biannual internal survey to evaluate the impact of the newspaper and the expectations of the employees, proceeding with a reorientation of the editorial line if this is necessary.

l) Handbook or welcome booklet - we must not forget that the new element of the organization is practically unaware of everything, so a handbook can act as an important guide, give confidence, arouse interest and motivate for work. When welcoming the new employee, he also explains the organization's rules, its operating philosophy, its values, and the principles by which it is guided. Clarity is essential. In its constitution, the following elements should not be overlooked: history, evolution and main activities of the organization; indications on salary, vacation, pension and bonus systems; existing improvements (canteen, day care center, medical center, library, social room, sports spaces...); work regulations and safety standards to be observed; system of absences and leaves; facilities map; opening hours of the different sections; roles and responsibilities; opportunities for professional training, etc.

The welcome booklets then make it possible to insert new hires more easily, so they are essentially intended for their efficient reception, for which first impressions are decisive, with regard to future behavior and the speed of integration into the institution's functioning; the quality of this instrument often depends on the employee's adherence to its purposes. The publication of the libretto must, however, also contemplate the employees already belonging to the organization, who would not accept to be less informed than the newcomers.

In the construction of this type of supports, some rules must be observed, such as the use of synthetic texts, spaced pagination, simple schemes and color photos. Finally, an image of professionalism but of simultaneous cordiality in human relations should be a permanent concern when designing the libretto, in order to consolidate in employees a sense of pride in belonging.

m) Bulletin board – this is a powerful instrument of upward communication, thus appearing as a source of information for the employees themselves on organizational matters. Sometimes, it is assumed as a form of expression of internal discontent, a situation particularly visible in times of social crisis. Although this is not a pleasant task, it should be read by higher bodies, as it often reflects the work environment and internal pressures. It works, therefore, in a complementary way to company newspapers, not limited to the dissemination of simple messages; it has the ability to initiate or encourage dialogue. It presents daily news, and refers to very diverse subjects. It is generally read by groups of workers attracted by brief information, and who communicate with each other through gestures, laughter, etc., in reaction to the exposed information, which allows the creation of currents of opinion that reinforce interpersonal bonds.

n) Poster to be displayed on the organization's premises - it is a very dynamic medium, ideal for information campaigns on Quality, hygiene and safety, health or new projects

of the organization, for example. Its success will depend on the impact of the slogan chosen, as well as the design, but also on the relevance to the target, the message, the context of the campaign and the place where it is displayed.

o) Informational flash – extremely flexible support, as it is not subject to any periodicity obligation. Very brief and simple, it allows the transmission of urgent or important messages, but also of a recreational or social nature (exhibitions, results of contests, raffles, prizes, trips...). It provides summary information, usually dealing with just one subject. It is generally photocopied, so that it can be disseminated in the shortest possible time, and serves as a supplement to the company's newspaper (Westphalen, n.d.).

p) Press review – systematic collection of information about the institution, or related to it, disseminated in the media. The frequency of dissemination of this support among internal audiences will depend on the amount of material published in the media, but it should almost always be supported by the daily dissemination of urgent or very important articles among interested audiences.

q) Pamphlet and leaflet – simple documents, which make it possible to quickly make the Board's views known to all employees (thematic campaigns, Quality, safety). Quick to prepare, they have other advantages, such as the instantaneous dissemination of information and ease of distribution.

r) Intranet - one of the most used channels for internal communication, the intranet is a corporate network with access restricted to the organization's employees. It is a means of interconnecting departments and employees and an excellent source used for sharing content such as notices, news or information, as well as being an internal system for centralizing processes and managing internal content. To fulfill the function of a comprehensive and easily accessible communication channel, the intranet is an excellent option (Ramadan, 2017).

3. Conclusions

Internal communication is an area of integrated communication that focuses its actions on the employees of a company. It is about the transmission and sharing of relevant and strategic information in a corporate environment. This exchange can be done either vertically (between superiors and subordinates and vice versa) or horizontally (between employees of the same hierarchical level).

This information can range from a broader message, such as the propagation of values, missions, visions, market strategies and organizational objectives, to something more segmented and restricted to a group of employees, such as feedback and goals by the department.

The main objective of internal communication is to keep employees aligned and engaged with the organization's goals, causes and discourses. In this way, behaviors that go against what the company preaches are established and encouraged. For this to happen, the relationship with the professionals in the house must be transparent, constant, empathetic and simple.

The written part of organizational communication is essential to build a welcoming environment, increase productivity and employee satisfaction, with repercussions for managers and customers.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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