DIGITAL CHALLENGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the work and changes caused by the technological evolution of organizations, in their communication and relationships with employees and other audiences. The text defends internal communication as a way to strengthen organizational values, critically approaching this communication in the light of the reality of organizations in the contemporary. The methodology adopted was an exploratory study, based on the survey of secondary data, from the perspective of organizational communication and public relations (Kunsch, 2003). The results point to the impacts of technology, the fragmentation of work and the pressure for results, factors that affect the physical and psychological well-being of workers. Future perspectives include the deepening of analyses on new communication practices to meet the new realities of work.

Keywords: Organizational Communication. Public relations. Work Environments. Internal Communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of humanity in labor relations, regardless of the type of work, the relationships between individuals and the environments where they are carried out have always been references for studies, research, discussions of fundamental importance for the understanding of societies. Therefore, the issue of communication and relationships in work environments, how they operate, how they influence individuals and how they are carried out by organizations also circumscribed in this perspective are relevant.

This article is the result of an exploratory study based on the survey of secondary data following this theme from the perspective of organizational communication and public relations, therefore, we seek to point out the following issues: the evolution of work and the changes caused by technological evolution, how organizations develop their communication with their employees and third parties, internal communication as a way to strengthen organizational values and also raise the following issues: criticisms that we can still make in a reality where organizations have such distinct characteristics.

What is presented here is a proposal for us to think and reflect on the reality of communication and relationships in Brazil from the perspective of organizational communication and public relations practices and, consequently, to be able to help other researchers on new research, other views and ideological positions on the issue.

TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION AND CHANGES IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

When we look at the past, we can easily see that human labor has undergone significant transformations over the centuries. The way people relate to work evolves as cultural and technological changes have become integrated into societies. In prehistory, survival depended on work. In Antiquity, philosophers and aristocrats did not see work as something positive, quite the contrary, however, those in inferior positions or who were enslaved were forced to work under precarious conditions. Already in the Middle Ages, work was inseparable from serfdom. However, with the advent of the Enlightenment, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the Industrial Revolution, wage labor began to develop, separating itself from slavery and serfdom. Nowadays, work is as we know it, "paid" and "independent".

However, authors such as Ricardo Antunes (2018) still maintain this argument, that work constitutes a process of servitude. The author raises important questions about the changes in the world of work in the twenty-first century, including the fragmentation and

uncertainty of work, the reductions in the workforce and the impact of these changes on the physical and mental well-being of workers and the formation of new classes resulting from these changes.

Another aspect raised by Ricardo Antunes (2018) is technological advances and how they have impacted the effective changes that have occurred in the labor market. It is true that in the last three decades, changes in technological innovations have created the need for workers to adapt to cultural realities and, especially, to professional practices related to technology.

If we conjecture about an individual who was 15 years old in 1980, it is possible to verify that this individual experienced several technological transformations that impacted the way his daily life and work were modified with each of the novelties that were introduced to the work environment. This individual witnessed the arrival of the fax, the computer, the cell phone, the internet, the transformation of the cell phone to become a portable microcomputer, the emergence of social networks and, more recently, applications and the numerical mediations of algorithms.

In recent times, society has witnessed the increasing prominence of remote work, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which established the urgency of social distancing. Analyzing the evolution of these changes throughout history makes it possible to understand not only the past, but also the current context and what we can foresee in the future. Therefore, all these issues directly affect how organizations communicate with their employees, whether in person or virtually, and how this communication impacts relationships in the workplace.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRATED ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION TO ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

It may seem obvious that organizations need to communicate with their audiences, however, this premise does not mean that this communication is effective, or rather, that it produces results related to the objectives and interests of organizations and at the same time are favorable to human relations at work and to the worker himself.

Kunsch (2003), when proposing the model of integrated organizational communication, sought to indicate the need for organizations to understand the types of relationships with their various audiences, their levels of influence and, consequently, that for such different individuals and with whom there are also different types of relationships,

communication has the potential to translate specific key messages clearly, coherent and consistent, so that in the end, everyone can understand what the principles, values, culture are, what their products and services are for, their social potential and as a business.

According to Kunsch (2003), this model integrates all areas of communication and relationships of organizations. Which, according to the author, is presented in three parts, they are: Internal/Administrative – which refers to all communication, whether bureaucratic, operational, informational and motivational carried out in work environments with a focus on employees, third parties and their families; Marketing – which is intended to communicate to current customers, potential customers, competitors, that is, the entire market about the potential of its products, services, partnerships and businesses; and Institutional – communicating identity in a strong way and a positive reputation with society, through the media, investors, governments, communities, among other audiences.

Kunsch (2003) also emphasizes the importance of organizations relating to all their audiences as a social organization, including with other organizations in a system of interdependence, only in this way will it be recognized, its brand and identity ratified, its reputation will be positive, its products and services validated, ensuring its continuity with the support of public opinion.

> Interdependent, organizations have to communicate with each other. The organizational system is made possible thanks to the communication system that exists in it, which will allow its continuous feedback and survival. Otherwise, it will enter a process of entropy and death. Hence the indispensability of communication for a social organization. (Kunsch, 2003, p. 69).

To plan effective and efficient organizational communication, mainly capable of transforming work environments and creating a sense of belonging to employees and not only to external audiences, it is essential to recognize and evaluate how the communication that exists works, according to Kunsch (2003) and Marchiori (2016) it is necessary to take into account all the organization's communication and intercommunication processes, informal and formal networks, flows, means and barriers.

In this logic, communication has to be effective, that is, both efficient and effective. This means that the planned process has to be followed effectively in its parts – actions and stages – so it will be efficient. And also to achieve the proposed objectives and obtain the expected results, achieving effectiveness without being unethical.

> Moral issues and the correct and true positioning of institutions and their brands are also contemplated. The notions of suitability, notoriety and even more of reputation

are within the scope of studies on the ethics of consumption, in the areas of public relations and organizational communication. The foundation is on truth and honesty as parameters for the conduct of institutions, but also of their executives and employees. (Perez; Trindade, 2018, p. 12).

Therefore, in addition to the organizational perspective, it is still necessary to consider the audiences, because communication is dynamic and based on interpretation structures and cognitive schemes that each person has and uses to capture and especially to understand, but will only do for what interests him. By understanding this mechanics, it is possible to build narratives that interest your audiences and consequently validate the organizational discourse.

Kunsch (2003) attests that it is essential to communicate from the inside out, that is, it is first necessary to communicate to employees, outsourced workers and family members about the organization and its entire context. Thus, internal communication plays a very important role in the integrated organizational communication model, as producing communication that generates empathy and value with internal audiences will be fundamental for the organization to achieve its strategic objectives.

CREATING MEANINGFUL LINKS FOR INTERNAL AUDIENCES AND GENERATING VALUE

Individuals behave according to multiple factors, such as their beliefs, their values, their personality, their culture, but they also adapt to the environment in which they are inserted, in other words, we are all directly affected by the work environment in which we find ourselves. And organizations expect their members to act in accordance with their organizational culture, not only in the physical space where work is carried out, but also in other spaces where the organization intersects with functions, in professional relationships, and even in their public lives. We cannot, therefore, refrain from mentioning that communication with employees also represents an element of control, of panopticon (Foucault, 2013).

Therefore, we can infer that this adaptation of individuals to the environments, more specifically to what we are dealing with here, which is the work environment, can be perceived in three instances within organizations, as presented by Tarifa et al (2011), they are: microorganizational - individual or social behavior, mesoorganizational - group or team behavior, and macroorganizational - organizational behavior.

Thus, as Kunsch (2003) and Marchiori (2016) point out, internal communication should identify these changes within the organizational culture in order to favor the transformation or maintenance of a favorable internal climate, producing satisfied employees.

To this end, internal communication actions must be developed together with the human resources and marketing departments to positively impact motivation and engagement, and consequently improve the organizational climate, reduce *turnover*, increase productivity, reduce absenteeism, image and reputation, *employer branding* – attracting new talent and increasing the organization's intellectual capital.

That is why actions and campaigns aimed at employees, outsourced workers and their families have to be attractive, motivating, inspiring, but above all they must be consistent with the organizational discourse. It is not effective to launch a product or develop an extraordinary advertising campaign without these actions being previously communicated to employees and being aligned, or not in line with, the practices effectively adopted by the company. We can then, by similarity, use the logic described by Trindade and Perez (2014) that, from the perspective of consumption, communication must create bonds of meaning between brands and their consumers. Considering the workers of an organization as symbolic consumers of its brand (identity, image and reputation), internal communication must then be responsible for creating these bonds of meaning.

In fact, the effects of this internal communication are capable of creating these bonds of meaning will end up reverberating externally to the point of being used as an *employer branding* strategy, attracting new workers with greater intellectual capital to the organization. An excellent example is Google's office in São Paulo[i], which combines organizational architecture actions with differentiated internal communication, making the organization one of the most desired to work in.

As mentioned above, technological advances have affected work environments and relationships, and with that, organizational communication and, consequently, internal communication, have also undergone changes in their practices. According to Saad Corrêa (2016) there are new organizational objectives that have emerged from the use of digital platforms. This is because it is cheaper and easier every day to reach all *stakeholders*.

To achieve these new objectives and validate the actions, it is essential to explore the best information opportunities through geolocation and mobilities to create interest,

value and loyalty, generating a continuous cycle of opportunities, points out Saad Corrêa (2016).

The author strongly suggests the use of *storytelling*, a technique that involves telling stories that cause identification with the target audience, generating commotion. In addition, the qualification and measurement of data, in which to understand the opportunities it is necessary to have knowledge in areas beyond communication such as mathematics, graph analysis, statistics, etc. and, to understand what the data means, semantic analysis, understanding behavioral science and anthropology are fundamental.

Data coding and *app construction* are also included in the suggestions, in which the communication professional does not necessarily need to know how to create an *app*, but it is essential to have knowledge so that there is fluidity in the creation process together with the responsible team.

For all this to happen, it is essential to reconfigure the notion of audiences, in which the company must perceive the digital context and its transformations in audiences that are not just mere receivers, but that produce, consume and use the content of the organization they have a link to.

For Saad Corrêa (2016) it is essential that the internal public has the same attention as the external one. In other words, it is necessary for the company to establish a less rigid relationship with its employees. After all, what good is it for the company to show something to the "consumers" and be the opposite with the employees? This is another great challenge for companies, finding the balance point regarding the way of thinking, planning, structuring and acting communicatively.

However, it is not just a matter of using digital social networks to communicate with employees in the workplace, as this issue brings us to the current reality of many organizations and important inquiries of the social reality of work, such as the platformization of work. Thus, it is essential to understand that these work platforms reconfigure the social relations and daily activities that workers carry out and in this way reconstruct the identity and restructure of daily life, thus modifying territorialities, transforming them into virtual ones.

Another important aspect is centered on the fact that this platformization directly affects workers, considering that in some cases they mediate labor relations, as in the case of apps such as Uber, Ifood, among others. And also professional relationship applications, in which organizations can generate interaction between employees from different

departments, in different places and that can even be customized with the corporate identity, such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, Google Workspace.

These work tools can, on the one hand, be seen positively, as they serve as a means of solving the issue of unemployment, however, the conditions in which these jobs are carried out only reinforce neoliberal thinking as stated by Ricardo Antunes (2018), without considering that workers need to overcome physical and psychological limits to provide for their needs and those of their families.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PLATFORMIZATION OF WORK

The platformization of work is a contemporary phenomenon that transforms labor relations through digital platforms, mediating work in order to change how it is structured and executed. This transformation represents a significant shift in work dynamics, bringing with it diverse perspectives on issues such as power, control, and deregulation. For this reason, a critical reflection on its social and economic implications is essential, as discussed by Rosenfield and Almeida (2021) and Grohmann (2020).

This platformization is characterized by the intermediation of services through digital platforms, which connect workers and service takers. This format has challenged traditional definitions of employment, creating a new space in which workers are neither completely independent nor fully subordinate (Rosenfield; Almeida, 2021). In a way that promotes the release of responsibility from employers, who distance themselves from traditional labor obligations. This has resulted in instability and uncertainty for workers, who face variable incomes, and in addition, also the absence of effective social protection.

At the same time, in this scenario of platformized work, we observe a growing *datafication*, in which the collection, analysis, and use of data is explored to shape labor practices and business decisions, impacting the very dynamics of platform-mediated work (Grohmann, 2020). This phenomenon is also influenced by social factors such as gender, race, and territory, resulting in different forms of value appropriation and inequalities in access to work. Thus, according to the author, it is important to create new forms of organization and resistance to face the challenges brought about by platformization, seeking alternatives that promote fairer work.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the existence of invisible surveillance that can lead to an oppressive work environment, where workers feel constantly watched and controlled. This occurs through algorithmic management that enables constant

surveillance of workers, monitoring their performance and behavior. A more accurate look at "subordinate self-management" reveals a profound transformation in contemporary labor relations, especially in contexts mediated by digital platforms (Abílio; Amorim; Grohmann, 2021), covering some issues of relationship between organization and workers, encouraged to see themselves as entrepreneurs, which implies taking risks associated with their work, such as responsibility for their own income and health.

At the same time, this vision of "entrepreneurship" leads to a consequent internalization of competition, operating towards a competitive and stressful work environment, in which collaboration is often replaced by competition. This situation tends to exacerbate the pressure on individuals, in which workers are subordinated to the rules and requirements of the platforms, even without direct supervision, which can lead to a sense of lack of control over their lives and work, contributing to frustration and dissatisfaction.

Otherwise, workers are now responsible for managing their own activities and working conditions. This means that they need to organize and plan their tasks without the traditional support of an organizational structure, which can be challenging and require skills that are certainly not shared by everyone in these platformized work environments. Thus, it further deepens the differences between the various service providers.

These and other issues are pressing in view of SDG 8, which covers "*Decent work and economic growth: promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all*",[ii] in the face of the problems of work, at the central level, related to the forms of value production, of work in the production of platforms and of work itself mediated by platforms.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals cover a variety of themes involving environmental and social issues. Each of the SDGs, along with their targets, was developed in an interdependent way, highlighting the connection between these various aspects. However, the work is imbricated with global economic development itself, thus considered a key factor for the sustainability of the planet.

The so-called "uberization" of work is currently taking place, in which even though workers may seem to have more freedom in their activities, their autonomy is often illusory. Digital platforms exert subtle and constant control over work, using algorithms that determine how and when, and even at the speed at which tasks must be performed. In this way, organizational communication with these platformized workers is programmed based on the unilateral needs of the service taker. Often, the communication structure has a

gamified logic that "rewards" the worker's performance based on metrics, sometimes inhumane, in terms of hours worked and rest, due to the financial rewards received in the form of real bonuses.

In view of this, we believe that it is necessary at the macro-social level to also have sovereign answers to these questions, considering regulation, governance, the development of public policies and also community alternatives. In our research on the subject, the analysis of platformization from the perspective of the global South should above all highlight local specificities, as inequalities can be exacerbated by this phenomenon. This approach brought by Rosenfield and Almeida (2021) from several studies on the subject gives us a critical view that challenges dominant narratives, emphasizing the interconnection between local experiences and global trends.

The communication of these apps also follows the neoliberal logic, making users understand that the workers who offer their services are entrepreneurs and, therefore, owners of their own businesses, but in fact this refers only to the skills and competencies of these workers.

In the corporate work applications mentioned above, the reflections are centered on the temporal issue, when the ease extrapolates the time dedicated to the work itself. Not to mention that they also impact workers in their physical and psychological limits. In this case, organizations sustain their narratives through the fulfillment of goals, objectives, that is, results.

All these issues lead us to the responsibility of organizations in addition to the environment or society in general, it is essential that this issue be expanded to the workers linked to the organization's production chain, as stated by Vidal:

> As for social responsibility, according to Melo Neto and Froes (1999), a company has it not only when it supports the community and preserves the environment, but also when it is concerned with the internal public well-being and its families. (Vidal, 2011, p. 279).

We cannot say that all organizations work their relationships and communication in the work environment in order to generate value, that is, in such a large country and with so many regional and local differences, whether economic, cultural, social and demographic, we have many different types of organizations, with different structural and managerial characteristics, therefore, Although we have described what is proposed as ideal, there are still many gaps for what translates as real.

NOT TO SAY THAT I DIDN'T TALK ABOUT FLOWERS: CRITICISMS WE STILL NEED TO MAKE

Mumby (2013) points to an approximation between interpretative and critical perspectives, he says that both in a way seek to verify and understand how people create meanings together, how they build social realities together, how they coordinate and develop shared realities.

However, while the interpretive view is concerned with describing the ways in which people in communication processes construct and share social realities, the critical view understands that certain movements, flows, processes, and shared realities do not emerge only consensually and spontaneously. And in this view it is necessary to study and understand how the forms of power and politics build the emergence of social realities.

Mumby (2013) also points out that the critical view is not centered on just a single focus, as it addresses multiple traditions, hence the influence of Marxism, the Frankfurt School, Critical Theory, the strong influence of Foucault, post-structuralism, the influence of feminist theory and also cultural studies and postcolonial theory, being significant.

It is worth mentioning that this broader view of Critical Theory applied to organizations allows an analysis of social issues, understanding that organizations with commercial purposes centered on a consumer society seek profit, but in this search they impact society and are responsible for resignifying it.

One of the aspects highlighted is the issue of communication in corporate governance practices. However, according to Andrade and Rossetti (2006) there is no single model of corporate governance that is equally applicable to all countries. This is because there are multiple interpretations and multiple concepts. In addition, it also includes legal, macroeconomic, financial, strategic and management issues related to the various cultural conditions in each country.

Andrade and Rossetti (2006) present what they call the 8 Ps of governance, which are: property, principles, purposes, roles, power, practices, people and perpetuity, which must be interconnected to validate and make these actions effective.

However, there are several corporate governance and social responsibility actions that, even based on ESG - *Environmental, Social and Governance* practices validated through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), do not represent significant changes for the organization's workers, quite the contrary.

We can mention the Natura brand, an organization that operates on several fronts related to human rights and the environment, all duly circumscribed in corporate governance practices, based on the so-called 8 Ps and also related to the SDGs. However, if we look at the practices associated with the issue of female equity, a cause adopted for years by the organization and despite the organization having a relevant number of women, even surpassing the number of male employees, it was only in 2020, according to its "Natura 2020 Annual Report"[iii] that inequality in relation to hierarchical levels was solved. But the case of Natura is not the rule, but the exception.

It is as Araújo, Farias and Bedendo (2015) affirm, that the specific power of advertising communication is also demonstrated, because, by addressing the relationship between the use of a product and a specific benefit, it converts the discourse into a consumption practice, modifying behaviors. If it was relevant for the journalistic media to inform certain groups of the population, who had access and means to decode such information, and played a role as spokespersons for this knowledge, influencing other groups, the power of companies and their advertising communication to influence the adoption of new behaviors by other segments of the population is also evident.

Another interesting case is that of Coca-Cola, which despite having a policy of social responsibility, governance practices and seeking to relate its commercial objectives to the SDGs, one of its guidelines is to return 100% of the water taken from the environment, without negatively impacting the biomes. However, the Coca-Cola Company is pointed out as responsible for several actions with damage to the environment, including in Brazil, more specifically in the northern region and in the state of Minas Gerais[iv].

This case puts Coca-Cola workers in these places in a dilemma: do they defer their jobs or do they defer their existences? It's like Werner Herzog's 1984 film "Green Ants Dream," in which workers at a factory on an island in Australia have to decide whether to defend the company they work for even though it pollutes the environment around them, or whether to think long-term and fight the organization even at the risk of losing their jobs.

Cases like these, where in many organizations, causes related to human rights are still far from being resolved. Even so, Mumby (2013) indicates that when the organization does not provide a space for favorable intersection between employees, their differences and the needs of specific groups are not met, as workers, these individuals who are part of specific groups can and should use the organization's space and its strength, through their

mesorganizational behaviors to impact and transform the organizational culture and, therefore, how they think and act.

Issues such as the inclusion and equity of women, ethnic-racial groups, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, among other minority groups in the workplace, and how organizations act in the face of internal relationships and communication are still topics that not only society needs to debate, but the organizations themselves.

Communicating and establishing healthy relationships in work environments linked to causes related to human rights are complicated given that they are structural to society. For example, Butler (2015) argues that gender is not an innate or biological trait, but rather a social construct that is repeated and reinforced through performative practices. Although the author's conclusions are not specifically aimed at the area of organizational communication, public relations and relationships in the workplace, they have been applied to analyze how gender norms are constructed and reinforced, including the dynamics of organizations, in order to challenge gender norms and promote equity in the workplace.

The same Silvio Luiz Almeida (2020) does when he makes a critical reflection on structural racism in Brazil and reinforces that it is present in the social and institutional structures of the entire Brazilian society and indicates the need to build a more just and egalitarian society. From Almeida's perspective, we can understand that these prejudices exist and also impact the work environment.

In short, there are many issues that impact relationships and communication in work environments, from human rights issues, mental health, social reconfigurations, and much more. However, organizational communication and public relations have a fundamental role in ensuring not only that communication is efficient and effective and that work environments are desirable, but above all that ethics, transparency and the links of meanings established between the brands of organizations and their audiences, including the workers who are in their production chain, are real and meet their needs both at the individual level, at the level of identity groups, and at the organizational level.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The way people relate to work evolves as cultural and technological changes become integrated into their lives. However, work is a process of struggle for power. These technological advances and how they impacted the effective changes that occurred in the labor market also impacted communication and relationships in these environments.

From the perspective of integrated organizational communication, administrative/internal communication is and should build the organization's relationships with its internal audiences and also ensure that internal relationships are valued and relevant to the well-being of all.

However, from the organization's point of view, the benefits are measured by results such as reduced absenteeism and employee turnover, increased productivity, reinforcement of the *employer branding* strategy translated by publicized actions in order to attract new talent and expand intellectual capital, for this, the communication area must act in line with the marketing and human resources areas.

Internal communication can and should create meaningful links between the organization's brand and its employees, to then have a positive impact on other audiences, reflecting on the understanding of its principles, values and causes, improving the perception of the image, making the reputation stronger and valuing its products and services. However, we observed that there is a certain bias in these objectives, such as the issue of organizational communication and internal communication as elements of control, and of platformization itself as a way of transforming work and the professional environment.

Even so, there are points that need to be studied, debated and improved in relation to the work environment, such as the models imposed by labor mediation applications or those that create virtual work environments. As well as the impact of corporate governance actions on employees.

In addition, topics such as the inclusion and equality of women, ethnic-racial groups, LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, and other marginalized groups in the workplace, as well as the way organizations deal with internal relations and communication, must be debated so that organizations also do their part and transform work environments and, consequently, the lives of workers.

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