

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS: CHANNELS AND CONTENTS

COMUNICAÇÃO INTERNA EM INSTITUIÇÕES PÚBLICAS DE ENSINO SUPERIOR: CANAIS E CONTEÚDOS

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ABSTRACT

Internal communication is a helpful tool for the strengthening of interactions, the sense of appreciation, and the engagement of employees with organizational goals. Thus, this study seeks to analyze the practice of internal communication in a given higher education institution, in order to map the preferences of the employees in relation to its channels and contents. We used a case study model, through a predominantly qualitative approach. We concluded that email is the most used medium of communication, and that social media and instant messaging applications do not have a good acceptability. Face-to-face communication is also well-accepted by employees. Regarding content, it was pointed out that employees had an interest in the divulgation of management's decisions, as well as those of the Superior Council, and matters related to the management of people. Thus, this research aims to be a source of advice for public educational managers to evaluate or redefine their internal communication, aiming to help them strengthen their interactions and relationships with strategic publics; and, consequently, reflect positively in the services offered to the company.

Keywords: Internal Communication. Communication Channels. Communication Contents. Public Institutions of Higher Education.

RESUMO

A comunicação interna vem sendo apontada como uma aliada no fortalecimento das interações, no sentimento de valorização, bem como no engajamento dos colaboradores com as metas e objetivos organizacionais. Assim sendo, este estudo busca analisar a prática da comunicação interna em uma determinada instituição de ensino superior, a fim de mapear as preferências dos funcionários em relação aos canais e conteúdos. Para tanto, foi utilizado o estudo de caso, por meio de uma abordagem predominantemente qualitativa. Concluiu-se que o e-mail é o canal mais utilizado; e que as mídias sociais e os aplicativos de mensagens instantâneas não têm uma boa aceitabilidade, enquanto a comunicação face a face é bem aceita pelos colaboradores. Em relação aos conteúdos, foi apontado o interesse pela divulgação de decisões da gestão, do Conselho Superior, planejamento e assuntos relacionados à gestão de pessoas. Assim, os resultados desta pesquisa pretendem ser uma fonte de assessoramento para que gestores públicos educacionais possam avaliar, definir ou redefinir suas ações de comunicação interna, como também visa ajudá-los a fortalecerem suas interações e relacionamentos com seus públicos estratégicos; e, conseqüentemente, refletirem de forma positiva na prestação dos serviços ofertados à sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação Interna. Canais de Comunicação. Conteúdos Comunicacionais. Instituições Públicas de Ensino Superior.

1 INTRODUCTION

Public Higher Education Institutions (now called HEIs) have an important role in Brazilian social and economic development. They are responsible for forming critical and reflective individuals in various areas of knowledge, able to work in different professional sectors. In addition, HEIs are responsible for promoting the advancement of science, technology, cultural diffusion, as well as the development of extension activities that directly impact society's demands (Brazil, 2006).

Considering these social functions of HEIs, this study seeks to contribute to the strengthening of these educational institutions, through the discussion and analysis of their internal communication strategies. It is necessary to understand that embracing this theme involves understanding public HEIs as organizations, with their own characteristics and purposes. As stated by Kunsch (1992), HEIs are a part of a larger group of organizations that integrate the global social system; as such, it is this set of institutions that enables the entire functioning of society.

According to Meirelles (2003), an organization can be understood as a set of people, methods and natural resources, articulated for a given purpose and guided by a set of determining imperatives (beliefs, values, cultures, etc.). In turn, Cury (2000) conceptualizes organization as an articulated system of collective effort, in which each member has a defined function to perform as well as duties and attributions to exercise.

However, it is important to highlight that an organization is only possible through communication (BERLO, 2003). It is precisely communication between the components that constitute an organization in its entirety, not merely separate and disordered elements.. Kunsch (2003) also endorses that communication is inseparable from organizations. For the author, the organizational system only materializes itself due to the communication system that exists in it, thus enabling its feedback and survival. Otherwise, organizations are subject to a process of entropy and death. As such, it can be said that communication is inherent to the organization.

In addition to the challenge of harmonizing human relations according to their own purpose, organizations are currently immersed in a universe of uncertainties, resulting from the constant social, economic and cultural transformations of the Information Age (KUNSCH, 2014). These changes require agility and innovation in order to take advantage of opportunities and face existing threats.

Given this context, the appreciation of the internal public gains prominence, since it

is responsible for assimilating new concepts and practices that guarantee the quality of the offered product or service. In this perspective, understanding and harmonizing the internal space before other actions is essential to absorb the intense changes in processes (FARIAS, 2009).

This situation has led to new reflections and perspectives for communication in organizational spaces. Attentive to this new context, many theorists and practitioners such as Bueno (2009), Curvello (2002), Karanges, Johnston, Beatson and Lings (2015), Kunsch (2009), Marchiori (2008), Matos (2009), Mishra, Boynton and Mishra (2014), Welch and Jackson (2007), Welch (2012), point to internal communication as an essential strategic tool for dialogue and interaction. In their works, all authors converge that communication is a strong tool for the valorization and engagement of individuals.

From this perspective, organizations need to seek new communicative methodologies, which allow suggestions, opinions and the creative potential of the internal collaborator to become evident, thus modifying the roles of the enunciator and the recipient, for “a relational dynamic co-authors/creators” (RIBEIRO and MARCHIORI, 2008, p. 5).

Public HEIs, as formal organizations and members of the global social system, also live this reality. Thus, they also need to reflect on their internal communication practices.

Because of the abovementioned scenario, this work proposes to analyze the practice of internal communication in a given institution, as well as map the employees' preferences in relation to channels and contents, in order to meet the real desires of employees in relation to internal communication. This approach took into account that public HEIs, as organizations, have an important role in the development of modern society (KUNSCH, 1992); it was also decisive to understand that internal communication makes interactions possible and strengthen relationships between organization and its collaborators (MARCHIORI, 2008; WELCH and JACKSON, 2007),

Thus, the discussion starts from the following question: how is the planning and execution of internal communication configured in a public HEI and, from the perspective of its collaborators, what are the most appropriate means and expected content, in order to improve its effectiveness?

In view of the above, it is intended that the data obtained by the investigation serve as support for researchers, communication professionals and public managers, who might have a source of advice to take practical measures, with a view to assessing or redefining its practices regarding internal communication.

2 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication has been perceived as a strategic area for organizations and as such has been gaining space in theoretical discussions (KUNSCH, 2009). In an objective way, Curvello (2002, p. 22) conceptualizes it as a “set of actions that the organization coordinates with the aim of listening, informing, mobilizing, educating and maintaining internal cohesion around values that need to be recognized and shared by all”. However, Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 183, own translation), claim that there are still gaps in the theory and conceptualization of the theme; they propose internal communication as “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels. within organizations”.

In a similar view, Kunsch (2009) defines it as a planned sector, with well-defined objectives, to enable all possible interaction between the organization and its employees. Endorsing this thought, Marchiori (2008) argues that internal communication promotes social interaction and fosters credibility, acting to keep an organization's identity alive. Friedl and Vercic (2011) add that internal communication has two main functions within the organization: informing and fostering the creation of a sense of community.

Internal communication is also seen as an opportunity to value employees. Matos (2009) points out that as the internal public finds openness to give their opinion and is encouraged to participate, they feel more valued, motivated and consequently more committed to the problems and objectives of the organization.

Welch (2012) reinforces these contributions by understanding internal communication as an opportunity to raise awareness among employees about threats, opportunities and institutional priorities, in addition to enabling them to have a positive feeling of identification with the institution. Additionally Mishra et. al (2014) highlight that internal communication is important for building a culture of transparency, which reflects in the employee's institutional involvement. In the same sense, Karanges et. al (2015) concluded that internal organizational communication has a direct positive effect on the development and engagement of employees, being an instrument that facilitates interactions and relationships between managers and employees, opening the way to transmit institutional goals and values.

It is also worth noting that the institution's credibility regarding the market and society is directly influenced by the internal public. Bueno (2009) points out that employees are the best spokespersons for the institution in which they work, because they can express, with

more authenticity than other audiences, the positive or negative values of the organizational culture.

Likewise, White, Vanc and Stafford (2010) highlight the positive contributions that well-informed employees can bring to the external public. Well-informed employees are more likely to defend the institution and less likely to spread rumors (CUBBGE, 2005).

Given the above, internal communication can help organizations to strengthen their interactions and relationships (WELCH and JACKSON, 2007; KUNSCH, 2009), fostering the feeling of belonging (FRIEDL and VERCIC, 2011; WELCH, 2012), of appreciation (MATOS, 2009), and, therefore, employee engagement with institutional objectives (MISHRA et. Al, 2014).

In this perspective, internal communication assumes a role of strategic relevance in the management of organizations, as it allows employees to be more informed, providing them with a systemic knowledge of the processes of the organization of which they are part as well as a more humanized work environment. However, it is important to emphasize that organizational environments are complex and conducive to disputes, due to the singularities and the confrontation of interests of its members (SIMÕES and LIMA, 1997). Therefore, internal communication might not solve all institutional problems, but it can become a strong tool to help in a more harmonious and interactionist environment.

2.1 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CONTENT

Organizations can use multiple channels of different formats to communicate and build positive internal relationships with stakeholders. However, Welch (2012) argues: while communication can contribute to the effectiveness of organizational relationships, it can constitute a threat and become a counterproductive factor. For the author, these potential benefits depend on appropriate messages that reach employees in formats that are acceptable to them. As such, if employees feel that information is being handled inappropriately, the communication process could damage internal relationships.

In a similar line, Caleiras (2015, p. 4) highlights the relevance of choosing the appropriate means of communication to send messages, in a targeted and clear way, according to the employees' preferences, stating that “[...] when internal means of communication are used interchangeably and at all levels, disinterest is generated and, consequently, a negative attitude in all employees”.

Investigating internal communication channels, White et. al (2010) indicated in their

findings that dialogical and interpersonal communication is preferred by employees. The survey found that e-mail is suitable for sending quick information and updates; the institutional website is not considered a daily communication channel for employees but is rather an important means of archiving information; printed documents, such as memos and letters, are relevant to employees. Face-to-face interaction is recommended for more complex issues, as it allows for immediate feedback and the possibility of resolving doubts, in addition to contributing to the sense of community and employee satisfaction. Meetings were identified as an important communication channel. However, the authors point out that electronic media, if used with caution, can offer employees at all levels of the organization the opportunity to learn first-hand information from the top managers.

Similar findings were found in the studies by Men (2014). The data showed that employees tend to be more satisfied with their institution when managers use face-to-face interaction to communicate institutional matters. Survey data draws attention to the fact that employees prefer traditional media instead of social media, even though they might use these networks a lot in their personal lives.

However, Welch and Jackson (2007) emphasize that it would be illusory to think that the implementation of internal communication is something simple, especially in large organizations. In this sense, the authors still emphasize that depending on the circumstances, the means of communication are an essential strategic choice.

Welch (2012) presents three media formats that can be used to mediate internal communication in organizations: printed, electronic and face-to-face. In Table 1, some channels are presented, suggesting the pros and cons.

An important point for internal communication to achieve its institutional objectives is the amount of information disseminated in the institution by superiors. White et. al (2010) emphasize that it is necessary to have a balance in the communication flow. Little information can generate distrust on the part of employees and consequently boost rumors. However, sending too much information can cause disinterest in employees, who might start to ignore messages.

As such, it is necessary to be aware that harmonizing internal communication is not an easy task. The internal public is not homogeneous, with different characteristics and levels of needs (GRAY and LAIDLAW, 2002) and, therefore, it is necessary to outline strategies to investigate the profile of employees, seeking to discover what information they might want to receive, what are the most appropriate channels to send a message to stakeholders, as well as

assessing whether the amount of sent information is adequate.

Table 1 Suggestion of possible internal communication channels

FORMAT	CHANNEL	PUBLIC	PROS	CONS
Electronic	E-mail	Individual or group	Fast; Cheap; It is possible to forward files; Its possible to reach many people.	The receiver can ignore the message; Possibility of the reader not understanding the message; Generation of many questions that need answers.
Electronic	Intranet	Restricted to organization members	Fast; Dynamic information; Multimedia diversity Database; Active transparency.	Employee needs to access the intranet; Constant updating is required.
Electronic	Video conference	Individual or group	Cheap; Reaches people from different locations; Chat possibility; Can be recorded.	Requires a good internet connection; Technical failures can occur and affect image and sound; Possible difficulties in using the tool by the participants.
Face-to-face	Meetings	Individual or group	Systemic view of the institution and how decisions are made; Possibility to resolve communication noise; Spread responsibilities; Development of group feeling identity and belonging among the participants; Possibility to strengthen the relationship between employee and management.	Possibility of becoming long and expensive; The group could might be incohesive with difficult communication; Discomfort when expressing opinion openly.
Face-to-face	Visits to the units	Group	Employee feels valued; Understand the reality of employees; Dialogic communication.	Requires managerial time; If the organization has several branches in different locations, it is tiresome for the manager.
Face-to-face	Events	Group	Group interaction; Feeling of belonging and community.	Expensive; Logistics; Takes time.
Printed	Newsletters	Group	Messages targeted to specific audiences; Credibility.	The employee may not read your content; Printing cost; Concerns about sustainability.
Printed	Posters / Mural	Group	Attractive look.	Short messages; Outdated posters; Concerns about sustainability.

Source: Own elaboration, based on the format presented by Welch (2012).

3 METHOD

To achieve the objectives proposed in this study, the researchers used a predominantly qualitative approach and the case study model as an empirical research strategy. The data collection techniques used were documents, participant observation, interviews and questionnaire (as shown in Table 2). Although qualitative approach prevails, the study also had quantitative elements, using a questionnaire to quantify data. We assumed that the combination of approaches can bring “a mutual contribution of the potential of each one, generating more comprehensive responses to the research problems formulated” (DAL-FARRA and LOPES, 2013, p. 77). The results of the information found were triangulated, allowing the research responses to be checked.

The research was aimed at administrative technical servers, teachers and managers of a multicampi HEI, located in Northeastern Brazil. After approval by the Ethics Committee and by the institution’s highest authority, an email was sent, inviting all servers to participate in the research, through a semi-structured questionnaire. The objective was to map the servers’ perception regarding channels and content, in addition to the institution's internal communication needs. To formulate the questionnaire, the following authors were used as theoretical support: Welch and Jackson (2007), White et. al (2010) and Wen (2014). At the time of application (April 2017) the population was 937 servers; 256 responses were obtained. Thus, we obtained data from approximately 27% of the Institution's employees.

For the interviews, the highest-ranking manager of the Rectorate as well as the managers of five campi of the Institution were invited, in order to verify their perceptions regarding internal communication in the Institution. Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on a script of equal questions for all managers. Two representatives of the Communication and Events Coordination (CCEV) of the Rectorate were also interviewed. It is important to note that the research was carried out through the participants’ perceptions, which is selective and based on the subjects’ previous experiences (BERLO, 1985; LEIBNIZ, 1984).

Documentary analysis, on the other hand, was used to support and compare the other data obtained, from other techniques applied in this investigation. The following documents were consulted: Statute; Internal Regulations; Own Evaluation Committee Report (2016); and Institutional Development Plan (PDI). This stage sought to map how internal communication is institutionalized by management and whether it is legitimized in the organization's strategic

and guiding documents. Participant observation was used naturally in this research, since one of the researchers (a co-author of this work), is part of the professional staff of the studied Institution.

Table 2 Structure of the research methodology

CASE STUDY		
PHASE 1	Data collection	Techniques: documents, questionnaire, semi-structured interview and participant observation.
PHASE 2	Data Analysis	Techniques: document analysis and systematic analysis of the data found in the questionnaires and interviews.
PHASE 3	Results	Technique: data triangulation, descriptive analysis and suggestions of actions

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the information found were crossed in order to allow checking of the investigation responses from different aspects. Thus, data triangulation was used as an analysis procedure. This system was chosen because “it has as its main objective the development of converging lines of investigation, providing more convincing and accurate conclusions about the same phenomenon” (LYRA; GOMES; JACOVINE, 2009, p. 45).

4 RESULTS: INTERTWINING THE DATA

The results found were divided into four topics, which are presented below.

4.1 ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE AND PLANNING OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

After analyzing the Statute (2009), Internal Regulation (2011), Report of the Own Evaluation Committee (2016) and Institutional Development Plan - PDI (2009-2013 and 2014-2018) we could observe that there were advances in relation to communication in the institution. The number of employees in the communication area grew from two, in 2010, to 30 professionals, in 2017. In addition, it is possible to mention an evolution in the incorporation of communication in institutional documents, such as, for example, insertion, in 2014, of the Communication axis in the PDI.

However, we also found that the Institution did not have a Communication Policy, even though it is one of the goals of the PDI with completion date in 2016. According to Kunsch (2003), delimiting a communication policy is paramount, since it should lead all the organization's communication, in addition to being responsible for establishing the principles,

values and guidelines for an institution's relationship with its various strategic audiences, including its own internal audience (BUENO, 2009).

We observed that the report of the Evaluation Committee pointed out the communication between the units that make up the Institution, including the Rectorate, has been, according to 39.6% of the respondents, bad or very bad. For the Commission, such a result shows that there is a need for HEI to create a mechanism of greater “interactivity”. The negative assessment was also found in this study. The general average on the quality of internal communication between the units was 5.5, on a grading scale that could range from 1 to 10. This may be justified because the Institution has many campi, with units in six municipalities, leading to geographic dispersion.

Thus, it is important that the Institution adopts new strategies to foster spaces of face-to-face interaction, which depend primarily on management decisions. But it is important to emphasize, due to its geographical dispersion, that the means of communication, which are managed by communication professionals, become essential. Therefore, internal communication needs the alignment of management and communication teams for its effectiveness.

4.2 POLITICS, ELECTION AND THE EFFECTS ON THE PRACTICE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Through participant observation and interviews, we noted a conflict in the relationship between the communication servers and the managers of some units. It was possible to notice that the results of the elections for Rector and campus directors (held one year and three months before the application of the research) were still present and negatively influencing the alignment of communication in the Institution. Communication team members had publicly opposed the winning managerial staff. Although a year had passed since the directors took office, the lack of acceptability of some members of the communication team with management, as well as the tension between both parties was notorious, which made difficult to align the communication actions within the institution.

The conflict was also aggravated by the interests of both groups: the communication area expected political representation and a specific board for the area, while management wanted more effective and strategic communication. This situation confirms what was exposed by Simões and Lima (1997), stating that organizations are a political environment and bring, by nature, the possibility of conflict, due to the confrontation of the interests of its

members and the struggle for power.

The interviews also made evident the lack of alignment between the groups. As excerpts from interviews below:

The limits that are placed by some communication professionals are a great barrier. They understand that they have limitations in their performance. Meetings that impact on the lives of employees are not disclosed because in their understanding it is not news. We receive a very large number of complains, because civil servants and society want transparency (Manager 1, interview report, 2017).

If Ascom [referring to the Communication and Events Coordination of the Rectorate] were more flexible, it would greatly help the communication of our unit (Manager 2, interview report, 2017).

In turn, one of the communication representatives pointed out that institutional communication is a daily challenge that these professionals face in order to define strategies, since the employees are confused on what is organizational communication, with a lack of transparency in administrative routines or lack of integration between sectors.

This perception causes undue dissatisfaction, which is attributed to the institutional communication sector. However, the planning of administrative process flows is the responsibility of the managers of their respective sectors. The communication sector can participate in the action planning process to change the organizational culture guided by the organization's management (Representative of CCEV 1, interview report, 2017).

4.3 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: PREFERENCE AND ACCEPTANCE THROUGH THE PERCEPTION OF SERVERS

When investigating in which channel the servers had more access to institutional information, we found that institutional e-mail was the tool with the greatest coverage (96.5%), followed by the website (79.7%). It should be noted that it was possible to select more than one option. A small number of servers (3.2%) added that they are aware of the information by groups in instant messaging applications (WhatsApp).

A fact that also draws attention is that 13.3% of the respondents stated that they get to know the information via third-parties or external communication channels, which can cause mismatched information, as well as damage to the institution. This is due to insecurity and rumors of criticism for the external public, as Bueno (2009) warns.

Regarding the frequency of access, institutional e-mail also stands out; 98.5% of the servers stated that they use the tool always or frequently. The result reiterates the observations made by White et. al (2010), who indicated electronic mail as an adequate means for sending

quick information and updates. In line with this data, the managers, during the interviews, mostly emphasized that institutional e-mail is the most effective channel for transmitting communications and forwarding the dissemination of institutional actions.

When asked about the internal communication channels, in principle, all managers indicated only electronic means. They did not mention forms or face-to-face meetings. Only after being questioned, they reported that they also use meetings to transmit information to the servers. When talking about the meetings, the managers justified that there are difficulties to hold face-to-face meetings, due to academic calendars, since it is necessary to suspend the classes to encompass all the servers. “The meeting with the community was a long time ago. It takes a whole day. I have to stop the class” (Manager 2, interview report, 2017). It was also said that there is complexity in holding meetings together with two distinct categories: professors and administrative technicians.

As meetings are with all servers, sometimes it takes too long. And when the agenda turns to the pedagogical part, I feel that there is a lack of interest from fellow administrative technicians to participate in the issues (Manager 5, interview report, 2017).

At the time that the leaders mentioned the means of internal communication, they were also presenting the communication barriers in the use of these means. Regarding e-mail, managers complained that not all servers access the tool and often delete the message without reading it.

Sometimes I send an e-mail announcement. Then the servers find me in the corridor of the institution and ask me the same information. I end up explaining. But I also get a lot of positive feedback from e-mails sent (Manager 2, interview report, 2017).

The CCEV content publication criteria were also pointed out by most managers as one of the factors that hinder communication between management and the academic community, in addition to the lack of interest on the part of the public about institutional information and cultural barriers. “It is also a question of culture. We need to internalize that it is necessary to pass on information”(Manager 1, interview report, 2017).

Therefore, despite the difficulties posed, it is a consensus between servers and management that e-mail is currently the most effective tool for internal communication. Still regarding the frequency of access, the institutional website ranks second, totaling 80.1%. The least used tools are related to the institution's official social media: 56.7% and 94%, 5 of the servers stated that they never or rarely access, respectively, the Facebook page and the Twitter profile. This result reaffirms the findings found by Men (2014) in his research: collaborators

prefer traditional channels to social media, even though they use them a lot in their personal lives.

In addition to the low acceptance of social media as an institutional communication tool, some servers, in the open questionnaire, (which was designed to conduct either criticism or suggestions, optionally), stated that they do not legitimate instant messaging applications as an official means of transmitting information from institution.

I disregard WhatsApp (chat application), as a legal tool for management (Server 3, report recorded in the questionnaire, 2017).

I learn about the information after it happens, as they schedule meetings and give notice via WhatsApp (Server 4, report recorded in the questionnaire, 2017).

Furthermore, in order to identify new communication tools, which may help in the internal communication flow of the researched Institution, a series of new communication channels was listed for the servers to indicate which they believed could improve internal communication. In the results, the instant messaging applications were the least suggested by the servers. However, three of the interviewed managers mentioned that their units have groups in instant messaging applications. Of the three, two rated the channel negatively. One of the leaders pointed out that the group was not created by management, and has employees who insist on not participating. The manager also added that there have already been problems with the message not reaching all servers, and he is concerned with the issues that are put in the application, as he understands that it is not the best channel to transmit internal information.

Certain discussions, due to their complexity, should not be placed there, but discussed in meetings. Some information is exaggerated. I do not think the tool is very positive. I have already called the attention of the staff of what is put in this tool, so that our unit is not harmed. I follow more than I give feedback. I do my best not to discuss anything within the group (Manager 4, interview report, 2017).

Therefore, the results found indicate that instant messaging applications are not the most suitable for circulating institutional information of interest to all servers, since most servers do not accept the channel as an official medium. However, the interviewed managers pointed out that the application can be used for smaller management groups. Even so, it should be used to send simple notices, as reported: “Internally, WhatsApp helps us a lot. We have a management group and sometimes we are unable to use e-mail, and end up using WhatsApp a lot”(Manager 5, interview report, 2017).

When analyzing also the suggestions given by the servers about which channel could help to optimize the internal communication in the Institution, it was found that the internal procedures flows were the most indicated (65.2%), followed by face-to-face meetings with the Rectorate/Pro-rectors (51.2%) and with general director/immediate superior (47.7%). The Intranet and manuals/booklets appear, respectively, with 45.7% and 44.5%.

As such, it is possible to apprehend that the Institution needs to trace the flows of its administrative processes. In addition, it was demonstrated that the servers need to create spaces in which face-to-face communication can be carried out, confirming the preference that the servers have to communicate face-to-face with the institution's top managers, as previously pointed out by Men (2014) and White et. al (2010).

4.4 CONTENT PREFERENCES

The research also sought to identify the satisfaction of the servers in relation to the content of the messages. In this regard, the website and institutional e-mail communication channels again stood out in relation to the others, such as those containing the most satisfactory content. But only 25.4% said they were totally satisfied with the content of the website and 25.45% with the content of the e-mails.

As previously explained, the questionnaire had a space for servers to optionally record criticisms, suggestions or other information that they deemed relevant about the institution's internal communication. Some comments were made regarding the structure and content of the institutional website, which are exemplified in Table 3, below:

Table 3 Demonstration of observations made by employees on the institutional website

Criticisms	Content and structure suggestions
"The information does not cover all areas and sometimes repeats the guidelines and photos".	"The actions taken, even those with the least impact, should be disclosed".
"It is difficult to find the information you want, it is a labyrinth to find things".	"Improve the institutional website's search link".
"Improve posts on some campi".	"The events should be disseminated in an integrated manner".
"Lack of efficiency in disseminating information on the institutional website".	"Feed the website with information, in a timely manner, as it is a more suitable channel for sharing news, among all campi".
"An important action is taking place and students and servants who could participate will find out after the event".	"Publicize actions of works presented at events. Publicize Teachers' Awards".

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the website, some managers also made observations during the interviews, partially dissatisfied with the content presented on the channel. This was mainly due to the information related to the internal public, as reported below:

On the website, part of the community finds it insufficient, but this does not depend only on the manager. They [communication professionals] create regulations; for example, if the server participates in an international congress to present one of the campus' research projects, if they work with students; ... and according to them I am showing only the server. Which is not the case! From the moment I disclose that the server is going to Europe or the United States, I am showing that our institution is producing research and being recognized (Manager 2, interview report, 2017).

Given the above, it is possible to see that the Institution needs to improve the content of the messages on the institutional website, considering what its strategic audiences want to know. If actions were to be taken, Table 4 might be useful, as it contains the categories of information in which the servers feel the most severe lack of access, as pointed out in the questionnaire. Most are linked to the disclosure of management decisions by the Superior Council on the planning of the Institution and its units and matters related to people management. Therefore, it is a responsibility of upper management and each unit, together with the Communication and Events Coordination, to align the content of the messages and disseminate them, according to institutional needs.

Table 4 Statement of categories of information suggestions for HEI, as perceived by the servers

Categories	Suggestions of Information that can be shared in HEIs
Management decisions of the Rector and Pro-Rectors	Administrative acts of the management and performance of the Rector, the Pro-Rectors, directors (i.e., activities they are developing). Decision-making, which occurs through meetings with top managers. Internal information about the institution's management.
Superior Council (CONSUP)	CONSUP meeting minutes and decisions (institution's highest body, formed by representatives of the categories of civil servants and managers). Reports of the meetings of the Board of Governors.
Issues related to the People Management Directorate (DGP)	Disclosure of internal ordinances. Orientations regarding positions and careers, such as promotions, time, merit and qualification. Training information. Interpretation of the laws that govern public service in general. Normative.
Internal flows	Procedural and document flows. Sectors and their competences. Work routines and procedures. Sector specific functions within the general structure of the institution, for example, the Boards in the Rector's organization chart.
Planning	Proposals and programs implemented. Management of plans and proposals. Status of ongoing projects and proposals for improvements. Institution's

Categories	Suggestions of Information that can be shared in HEIs
	planning and goals. The process of implementing the actions.
Budget	Information on the application of public resources.
Events	Information on funding towards events. Transparency in grant award processes. Calendar of monthly events. Disclosure of the participation of servers in events.

Source: own elaboration.

Continuing the results found in the evaluation of the content of messages from institutional channels, the social media content on Twitter (83.3%) and the institution's profile on Facebook (58.2%) had a high index of “indifferent”. As already presented, these were the tools pointed out by the servers that have the lowest frequency of access. A data point that deserves attention in relation to the content was also the high index of “indifferent” in relation to the meeting with the Rector and Pro-rectors (37.9%). When questioning, in the interview, the maximum authority of the Rectorate about what she thought had provided this high percentage of “indifferent”, she reported that the current administration had only one year in managing the Institution and that, in that period, she had only made a single round of visits to the campuses, with the objective of introducing the management team. Management also added that she already knew it was time to return to campuses to talk to the community.

5 CONCLUSION

The results of this research sought, from the analysis of a specific HEI, to point out contributions to the practice of internal communication in public HEIs and, consequently, reflect positively on the service offered to society. Thus, through the investigation, it was possible to reaffirm and strengthen some findings already exposed in previous studies, as well as to present new findings, which can direct further in-depth studies and enrich the discussions on the theme.

Regarding the communication channels, it can be reiterated, according to previous research by White et. al (2010), that electronic mail is the tool most used by employees and the most effective for sending quick information, updates, communications, as well as forwarding the dissemination of institutional actions. The website presents itself as the second option in relation to the scope and frequency of access. Social media (Facebook and Twitter) are the least accepted channels and accessed by employees as an institutional communication tool, although they used them in their personal lives, in line with the study already exposed by

Men (2014).

Another factor that deserves attention is face-to-face meetings. Most of the servers stated that they believe that face-to-face dialogues can help to optimize internal communication at the Institution, thus demonstrating that they need to create spaces for dialogues with managers. This finding confirms what has already been pointed out by Men (2014) and White et. al (2010), who stated that face-to-face communication is well-accepted by employees. Therefore, HEIs can use face-to-face communication to promote a closer relationship with their employees, increase trust and transparency, as well as use it to help minimize internal conflicts. However, managers must be careful to adapt the content to be discussed at each meeting to the interests of the categories of employees present there.

An important finding of this study concerns channels. Most of the Institution's servers do not validate instant messaging applications as an official means of transmitting information; managers negatively evaluated this tool as well. Thus, we conclude that this channel is not the most suitable for sending institutional information, especially the instant messaging groups, in view of the lack of acceptability, as well as the risk of bringing unwanted noise to institutional internal communication. .

Regarding content, it was possible to draw some lines of convergence pointed out by the servers, who reported having an interest in news related to management decisions; Superior Council; matters related to the People Management Directorate; planning, internal flows, budget and events. In general, it is clear that employees are interested in information that directly affects their work routine.

Another significant indication revealed by our research is that the elections for the positions of Directors-General and Rector negatively reflect on the alignment of internal communication, considering that there are political groups with different interests. This can be a complex barrier of internal communication to overcome. We also found that effective internal communication requires the joint action of communication professionals and managers.

In view of the above, we hope that the data indicated can help communication professionals to carry out their strategic plans, choosing the best channels, as well as the appropriate content in order to meet the needs of employees. For managers, they are expected to use this research and internal communication as support to share with the employees the challenges of running a public higher education institution, offering them systemic knowledge of institutional goals, as well as providing opportunities for valuing everyone in the

organization's decisions. This can enable a more participatory, engaged and harmonious work environment, and may reflect on the confidence and quality of life of these professionals.

Therefore, for HEIs, internal communication can help improve the work environment, allowing professionals to perform their duties in a more satisfactory and less stressful manner. These strategies will reflect on the quality of the actions of these agents and, consequently, in a better future for Brazilian public education. It is important to stress that this research has its limitations: it was not possible, due to time problems, to cover all the internal publics that make up the institution, such as outsourced employees and interns, who are also responsible for providing services, in addition to students.

Finally, we indicate that new research still can be carried out, in order to enrich the discussions of internal communication in higher education institutions. As a suggestion, we propose: to expand the investigation to include the internal audiences present in these institutions; to compare the data of this research with other educational institutions; and to conduct surveys of perception of satisfaction with internal communication, as well as on reducing the existence of conflicts, obtaining controls before and after the implementation of suggestions presented in this study.

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