Chapter 1

Internal Communication in Contemporary Organizations: Digital Challenge in a Project Management Department

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports an action-research study on internal communication in the context of an innovation project management department at a multinational company. An intervention was carried out in the communication system, with the purpose of improving team performance. The first action research cycle began with data collection through questionnaires, document analysis, direct observation, and focus groups. The sequent implementation stage was designed and carried out with a mid-term communication plan. After this, a new data collection process began. Results showed lack of communication skills, lack of information, and lack of involvement. This was the beginning of a second evaluation cycle, and a new communication plan was implemented. After this, another diagnosis emerged showing the persistence of some issues. These results are discussed, and the possibility of implementing a digital communication platform is addressed. This study seeks the development of knowledge on internal communication in the context of innovation projects.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of a European university-industry consortium, a study on internal corporate communication

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was developed in a project management department of a multinational company, dealing with innovation processes inherent to industrialization. These processes begin in the project management department, where project managers (PjM) are accountable for coordinating all innovation projects, from the ordering phase to completion, which happens when the product goes into mass production. It is up to each project manager to select and lead the team responsible for fulfilling all tasks associated with developing new production lines. According to Qusef and Ismail (2016), this manager must be a qualified specialist, as he is responsible for defining a plan and assigning tasks appropriately to each member of his team, depending on information quality and motivation to carry on the entire process.

PjMs spent about 75% of their time interacting and exchanging information and, for this reason, communication is a fundamental part of project management and innovation processes, supporting each of its phases. According to Zerfass and Huck (2007), project management must be understood as an integrated system of cooperation and interaction, which needs to be strategically planned and supported by communication.

Aiming to contribute to the development of theoretical and practical knowledge on internal corporate communication in the context of innovation projects, this study sought to analyse and intervene in the communication system of the aforementioned project management department, namely through a digital communication approach. To this end, and using action research as a methodology, it started with a diagnosis that identified the communication barriers existing in industrialization projects and proceeded with the implementation of tailored measures to promote a more efficient project management environment. The consequences of those measures were afterwards assessed and discussed in order to prepare a second intervention cycle.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal Communication and Innovation Processes

Innovation projects concern temporary efforts with the objective of creating a unique product or service with limited human, financial, and material resources (Bosch, 2017). Thus, these projects are constituted as temporary organizations (Turner and Müller, 2003) that can integrate a large number of collaborators, often geographically distant and culturally diverse (Ruão et al., 2018). In this context, communication processes are particularly relevant and complex.

Innovation Communication is actually a subdiscipline of Organizational Communication that began to stand out in 2004 (Gerhard et al., 2001). According to Mast et al. (2005), this field of study focuses on the analysis of symbolic interactions between an organization and its audiences, as they deal with the development of new products or services. And innovation communication seems indispensable today, in times of rapid technological change, intense competition, and global economic markets, as innovation enhances performance and revenues. “Yet, this innovation is no longer created in isolated labs or by a single innovation leader (Schumpeter, 2006), but through processes of Open Innovation” (Linke & Zerfass, 2011, p. 334). In fact, many stakeholders can be involved in the innovation process, from idea generation through implementation. Innovation is therefore a result of a collaborative cooperation between different groups (Gutiérrez-García et al., 2020).

Innovation is commonly pursued through project management approaches (Kapsali, 2011). Project management can be defined as the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to design activi-
ties that make it possible to respond to project requirements. This profession was, in fact, being practiced
ad hoc until the middle of the 20th century (Munns and Bjeirmi, 1996), but today it is a professional
area rooted in organizations and taught at universities. This area of studies and professionalization has
been feeling the need to reinvent itself in order to be able to respond to the demands that organizations
and businesses currently face.

Thus, the knowledge developed in the field of internal corporate communication has been used to
reproach project management practices (Ruão, et al., 2020). According to Welch and Jackson (2007),
internal communication is the “strategic management of interactions and relationships between stake-
holders at all levels within organizations” (p. 183) and it is “crucial for successful organizations as it
affects the ability of strategic managers to engage employees and achieve objectives” (p. 177). Internal
communication may mean either the formal communicative activities carried on between employee
groups or departments (e.g. meetings and other formal information flows), or can be the processes where
two or more groups work together, have a mutual understanding and a common vision, share resources,
and achieve collective goals. In fact, empirical findings suggest that a certain amount of interaction is
necessary in innovation processes, but also shows that it predicts innovativeness less strongly than col-
laboration (Kivimäki et al., 2000). In project management, likewise, internal communication require-
ments are huge and include the need to develop quality interactions, but also collaborative relationships
between team members throughout all phases of the project (Remidez and Jones, 2012). Therefore,
internal communication can be used to promote information flows, but also to supplement internal
climate with participatory practices.

Moreover internal communication does not only allow to stimulate active employees, it can also create
ideas. A crucial task is to enhance employees’ potential and make them use it effectively. Internal com-
munication therefore plays a central role in creative environments, because innovation requires informed
and motivated individuals. Organizational members must be willing to contribute with time and effort
to the development of innovative ideas (Linke & Zerfass, 2011; Gode et al., 2020).

The present study combines existing knowledge in the field of internal communication with innova-
tion communication research and project management knowledge. Existing research has identified com-
munication as a critical factor for business success (Kivimäki et al., 2000). A variety of communication
instruments exist inside companies and help to inform organizational members, to communicate with
them, to persuade them, to promote loyalty, and to improve job satisfaction. This chapter explores this
increased perception on the relevance of communication and presents questions about its interplay with
innovation and project management.

**Project Manager as a Communication Leader**

In project management, each innovation team has a manager. The core function of the innovation project’s
manager is to coordinate the tasks and expectations of all individuals who make up these temporary
organizations, which, as indicated by Rutten (2016), are constituted with the mission of accomplishing
a certain task, in a certain period of time, after which they dismantle. Thus, communication, as the ele-
ment responsible for creating and maintaining relationships in organizational contexts, takes on relevance
(Shenhar and Dvir, 1996).

In fact, an analysis of internal project management documents (PMBok) has allowed us to realize
that project managers’ functions are described in a way that emphasizes their role as leaders and as com-
municators. They are anchors that coordinate teams involved in developing new products, services or
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processes, whereby they are challenged to reveal leadership and interaction skills. These are, moreover, functions traditionally attributed to internal communication, which is fundamental in the processes of planning and controlling information flows and in aligning and motivating stakeholders (Welch and Jackson, 2007). Thus, a project manager is a leader who must be able to coordinate team work through communication:

a. Ensuring the integration of all innovation activities, as an intermediary between team members;
b. Creating, supplying, sharing and keeping updated all the project’s documents, in all phases;
c. Monitoring all tasks, to ensure that the goals are met according to deadline, budget and stipulated quality;
d. Motivating, supporting and informing team members throughout the project, managing their needs and expectations; by keeping the entire team informed on the status of tasks and by involving them, whenever possible, in decisions (Bosch, 2017; PMI, 2017).

In order to successfully develop these roles, some skills are described as important, namely: (a) to choose the appropriate communication channels and contents for different stakeholders; (b) to ensure that the receiver understands the message as intended; (c) to accept the opinions of team members on relevant issues; (d) to listen others patiently; (e) to give and ask for feedback; (f) to create team spirit by developing group identity; (g) to lead with motivation, commitment and enthusiasm, always showing a positive attitude; (h) to develop relationships of trust, transparency and honesty with the entire team; (i) to provide and receive guidance to improve individual and team performance; (j) to use influence to ensure the fulfillment of the tasks of each team member and; (k) to know theirs and the team’s needs, strengths and weaknesses, and manage them in the best possible way (Bosch, 2017; PMI, 2017).

In short, a project manager is, above all, a communication manager. In this sense, he is expected to be able to plan, manage and monitor all the project’s communications, while maintaining reciprocal interaction between all members, in which information, decisions, ideas and doubts are transmitted and shared. In fact, the success of the project seems to depend a lot on the way the manager relates to the project team, handling expectations and guaranteeing everyone’s commitment during the new product/production development cycle (Hamdi and Rajablu, 2012; Ozaeta and An, 2014).

Reminding the CCO Principle – or the proposition that advocates the “communicative constitution of organizations”, supported by Organizational Communication authors (as Weick, 1979) -, all the above ideas on the communicative axis of project management become intelligible, as communication is central to every organization. It represents the mechanism through which human beings produce and reproduce reality, giving meaning and direction to their practices. Organizations exist because there are people inside who communicate and “organize” (Vuuren et al., 2006). Within project management temporary organizations, the same logic can be found: people are the central factor for the development or manufacturing of any product or service, dictating its success or failure. The main challenge for the project manager is, then, to create collaborative work within teams that share feelings of belonging, able to develop cohesive, motivated, involved and committed work to the achievement of a common goal that is, in this study, the result of the innovation process. To this end, PjM’s leadership skills are essential (Hamdi and Rajablu, 2012; McCartney and Campbell, 2006; Zerfass and Huck, 2007).

In general terms, leadership can be defined as the process that is carried out to influence others to pursue a certain result or objective (Hamdi and Rajablu, 2012). According to several theorists, communication is closely related to leadership ability and is central to its good execution (Hamdi and Rajablu,
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2012; Vries et al., 2009). In turn, leadership is described as a decisive procedure for organizational commitment (Shirbagi, 2007; Zerfass and Huck, 2007). In order to explain this relationship, Hamdi and Rajablu (2012) stated that when organizational communication is clear and precise, it is more likely to generate interaction between employees and managers, thus facilitating the creation of feelings of belonging and commitment and, consequently, it has positive effects on productivity and efficiency. Good communicative skills seem, in fact, to portray a good leader and, therefore, the development of strong organizational commitment is directly related to the quality of the interaction between managers and their employees.

In terms of communication quality, the responsiveness of the organizational leader represents a decisive variable for the creation and maintenance of good relationships. According to Lipäinen, Karjaluoto, and Nevalainen (2014) and Men (2015), when leaders use two-way communication strategies that privilege behaviours of honesty and real listening, empathy, understanding, sincerity, kindness, compassion and feedback, they are able to generate positive feelings within the team and promote motivated attitudes, committed to success. This environment of motivation and commitment is likely to be reinforced when the ability to respond coexists with the possibility of real participation. This happens in leadership contexts in which opinions and ideas of employees are considered in the process of organizational decision making. As important members of a common project, employees’ thoughts can be quite valid to decide future directions (Hamdi and Rajablu, 2012). Thus, legitimizing belonging reinforces team commitment.

These considerations can, moreover, be applied to project management. As stated by Vuuren et al. (2006), a successful project is always strongly dependent on the leadership communication skills of its manager and its ability to motivate and cooperate with its team members. In the context of this study, leadership becomes more complex because it involves multicultural and geographically distant teams, who have no exclusive ties to the project. In addition, the fact that these teams carry out tasks with the notion that their collaboration is temporary and transient, hinders the ability to generate feelings of belonging, involvement and motivation that are necessary for the good performance of the project (Ruão et al., 2018). This is a great challenge for the project manager, who is expected to have a leadership profile based on good communication skills.

Communication Systems in Project Management and the Digital Challenge

To comprehend and intervene in the project management communication process, it is important to analyse, not only the role of the PjM, but also the communication flows and channels in use in project management environment, as structures of the internal communication system. This system aggregates informal chats on the “grapevine”, as well as our core subject: managed communication.

In order to coordinate team work, PjMs then need to manage internal communication: keeping open vertical communication flows (ascending and descending) - to assign tasks and to receive feedback on the status of the project -, and horizontal and diagonal flows - to allow the interaction between project members, who, in some cases, belong to different departments and are in different facilities or countries (Remidez and Jones, 2012). In this context, the communication skills of the project managers, as well as the development of communication strategies are fundamental.

These concerns were also stressed by the document analysis applied to the company under study. This research showed that the careful definition of means to send and receive information is important to a successful project management. To this end, one of the documents the project manager is accountable for is, precisely, the Communication Plan, whose objective is to identify the communication stages and
channels for information exchange and interaction between all project stakeholders (internal and external), following the PMBok recommendations. Thus, this document regulates all communication actions for the entire project team, including the production of weekly status reports and the scheduling of meetings.

However, this plan covers only a small part of what makes up the internal communication of project management departments. Other very important communication abilities - such as guidelines for adapting the communication channels to a dynamic reality or the definition of strategies to guarantee the involvement, commitment and motivation of the team members (Verčič et al., 2012) - are not considered. In addition, this plan does not mention the communicative skills that can be useful for project manager to solve some of the problems they face in their day-to-day.

Furthermore, the communication plan model in use is very traditional and does not favour new trends, such as the use of social media channels. According to several studies (Baltatzis, Ormrod and Grainger, 2008; Men, 2015; Ingelmo Palomares et al., 2018), technological development has transformed the global communication landscape as well as the internal communication formula for companies (above all multinational ones). In this context, easy access to countless social media (as Facebook, Twitter, instant messaging systems, Skype, LinkedIn, YouTube, among others) has changed the way organizations communicate in all hierarchical levels. In general, these new communication tools have been welcomed by employees, who seem to accept their growing inclusion, although some cases of resistance are reported. The lack of skills in the usage of communication technologies, the time spent updating information and publishing on platforms or the complexity in the management of these digital technologies make some employees favour traditional channels such as phone calls or face-to-face interaction (Baltatzis et al., 2008; Men, 2014, 2015; Zyl, 2009).

However, these social platforms can be very useful for corporate internal communication. Social media facilitate the distribution of information and promote permanent interaction between all hierarchical levels, softening the boundaries between managers and employees. In a way, social media can encourage the democratization of the organizational environment because they promote upward communication through dialogue between employees and managers, thus simplifying the exchange of ideas, the sharing of opinions and feedback regarding the status of tasks (Baltatzis et al., 2008; Ewing at al., 2019; Men, 2014, 2015; Men and Bowen, 2017; Zyl, 2009).

Some of the most common platforms in use are, according to Lipäinen et al. (2014), Qusef and Ismail (2016) and Zyl (2009):

**Wikis:** a website that allows online collaboration in which individuals can create and modify content simultaneously; Wikipedia is an example;

**Blogs:** a communication tool that resembles an online newspaper and allows its owner to publish periodic messages; in which readers can follow, share, and comment on these messages;

**Intranet:** an internal network that, ideally, contains all the information needed and facilitates the contacts that are essential for all employees to be able to carry out their tasks; besides access can be given to other sites relevant to the work context;

**Email:** a platform that allows the exchange of messages quickly and simply, for several recipients at the same time;

**Instant messaging systems:** a platform that enables the rapid exchange of messages, in real time, with one or more individuals at the same time; Skype, WhatsApp are instant messaging systems and Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Facebook also allow this type of interaction;

**Collaborative real time editor:** a type of software or application that allows simultaneous real-time editing of the same document or other digitally stored content; Google Docs is an example;
**Social bookmarking:** an online service that allows users to create, annotate, edit, and share their list of favourite websites with other individuals;

**Social networks:** platforms that allow the creation of personal profiles and interaction with various individuals or groups through the sharing of content, comments or instant messages; Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube are the best known.

From the platforms presented, email seems to be the one preferred by organizations. Its speed and ease of use makes it a widely chosen internal communication tool. However, the trivialization of its use has brought problems, namely, it produces information overload and a consequent decrease in its relevance that leads to growth in response times (Lipäinen et al., 2014).

Considering the potential of digital communication and social media to simplify information flows, to encourage relationships and to promote a sense of community, in 2008, the concept of Social Project Management (SPM) emerged. Such an approach arose because social media has become an accessible alternative to traditional communication channels, namely in project management. These tools have increased the volume and speed of communication and information exchange. Further, they have the potential to stimulate sharing, co-creation, interaction and debate, bringing the project manager closer to the team, significantly improving communication outcomes (Fernandes et al., 2018; Silvius, 2016).

This approach has been discussed and introduced in the project management department of the company under study. However, some resistance was encountered as a result of the dispersion of content in different sites and the need to update multiple channels, giving PjMs the feeling of being wasting time with these platforms. In fact, without a holistic approach, the potential of these channels is likely to be lost.

So, do the existing communication systems in this project management department facilitate the efficiency of the innovation process? Do the installed communication models promote team performance? Can digital communication enhance organizational innovation processes? What improvements should be made in the communication system of this department? These were the questions that we looked to answer, using a qualitative methodology, through action research.

**METHODOLOGY: ACTION RESEARCH AS A FORM OF INTERVENTION**

Considering this theoretical framework and the research questions, an action research intervention study was developed at the project management department of a multinational in Portugal. This automotive industry factory has around 3500 employees, of which 101 belong to the innovation projects’ department, being responsible for coordinating the company’s innovation processes.

Implementing sequential action research cycles was identified as the best methodology to promote in depth changes in the project management communication system of the company. The first cycle included a communication audit, followed by an action plan. At the end of the implementation phase, a new diagnosis was carried out, giving rise to a new intervention cycle to improve the communication system of the project management department.

As an ongoing, systematic and empirically grounded attempt to improve practice (Baum et al., 2006; Coghlan, 2019; Tripp, 2005), action research is an interactive method that involves the collaborative participation of researchers and professionals who seek to solve a problem through diagnosis, planning and implementation of appropriate actions (Avison et al., 1999). Improving practices is, therefore, the purpose of action research and, as such, its emphasis is on the actions taken and its ability to solve problems.
Within the scope of this commitment to improvement, the team of professionals and researchers goes through a spiral of steps - which include analysis, planning, action, evaluation and readjustment of the action – that are monitored and adjusted as needed. Thus, the cyclical nature of this methodology recognizes the importance of designing flexible action plans and responding to the needs of the context in which it is applied (Dickens and Watkins, 1999). In addition, action research enthusiasts argue that complex social processes can be better studied by introducing changes and observing their effects (Baskerville, 1999).

The development of action research begins with the identification of a problem in its context (Figure 4). The team of researchers then collects the relevant data using appropriate methods that may include interviews, observation, document analysis or other social sciences techniques. This collection and subsequent analysis of data is carried out with the aim of proposing possible solutions to the identified problem, facilitating the appropriate change in the context under study. The next step is to implement the actions in the real environment, which can be an organization. Then, researchers analyse the effects of the changes implemented through the collection of new data that allows the evaluation of the results, according to which the problem is reformulated and, consequently, new ways of action are considered. Researchers structure their activity around this cycle until the problem initially identified is solved. It is likely, in fact, that the research team will go through several cycles of revaluation and implementation until the problem is fully resolved (Dickens and Watkins, 1999).

This is, moreover, a method widely used in organizational environments since it can be applied to intervene and improve their different contexts. In addition, as Dickens and Watkins (1999) point out, action research has already been used in studies developed in multinational technology companies, because it presents itself as a good strategy to intervene in the practical solution of certain problems. This is the environment of our study that aimed at auditing innovation project management communication practices and proposing a tailor-made plan of improvement. The study looked at three key points: (1) the
Table 1. Communication barriers in project management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of communication skills</th>
<th>PjMs reported difficulties in communicating with their teams. Although there is an understanding of the importance of communication for the performance of the project, managers consider they have no adequate communication skills to manage team work effectively.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>The innovation process was not clear to all parties involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scattering of channels</td>
<td>The existence of many communication channels and the fact that they are not used regularly causes information dispersion and duality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of team involvement</td>
<td>PjMs call all team members to periodic meetings, but most members are not actively involved in the debate, as its subjects are not of interest to all participants. Instead, team members prefer to use this time to carry out other tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of communication strategy</td>
<td>The communication plan is an administrative document that serves the PjM exclusively, but would be a useful tool to guide communication interaction for all team members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

The First Cycle: Communication Barriers and Solutions

In the first cycle of action research, methodological triangulation was used, including document analysis of the company and its procedures, non-participant observation of the work environment and meetings of the project teams, a survey to project managers, and focus groups with members of the department. The following communication problems (table 1) were, then, found:

To solve these problems, an action plan then was designed (table 2), including:
The Second Cycle: Reassessment and Discussion

After the implementation of this action plan, a new cycle of action research was initiated with the evaluation phase of the communication system of the project management department, considering the actions carried out previously. To make this diagnosis, data collection privileged: a new survey applied to project managers, which aimed to assess the effectiveness of the workshops held; document analysis on the progress of project management procedures and functions in that department; and unsystematic non-participant observation of the project management work environment and team meetings, for three months.

Based on collected data, a model was built (table 4) in order to validate communication problems encountered. To this end, communication barriers were listed and a small team (with the head of PjMs and two other PjM) was asked to validate these problems using two scales: agreement and importance. These levels of agreement and importance were measured on a scale of 1 to 5, as explained in table 3.

To simplify the presentation of results, sentences from the validation model will be identified with an S, followed by their respective number. Through data analysis, the following main communication problems were identified, some of which persist since the first implementation cycle:
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Table 4. Results of the validation process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Barrier types</th>
<th>Level of agreement</th>
<th>Level of importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I get a lot of emails per day, many of which not relevant</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Some of the issues solved through email can be worked out through live conversation</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There are platforms that allow the updating of information still debated by email</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Email management takes up a considerable portion of my day</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There are too many communication tools</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The communication tools cause dispersion of information</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The communication tools generate task replication</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The communication tools do not allow the feedback and follow-up needed in each phase of project management</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Team members do not update task status in the tools</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Communication tools are not used with due frequency</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Team members do not frequently check project related documents</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Team members do not frequently consult shared documents</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. In general, team members do not efficiently and effectively use the communication tools</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The existing communication tools do not reach the pretended results</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. There is not an adequate platform for the management of information regarding all the phases of the project</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inadequacy of Existing Communication Channels

The existence of many communication channels gives rise to serious problems: the replication of tasks (S7); the lack of information updating by team members, regarding the status of the project (S9); the absence of project documents consultation (S11 and S12); and the trivialization of the use of email as a means to make any type of interaction or to clarify any subject, even when the answer is available by searching documents on the platforms (for example, task completion dates) (S1 and S4). In fact, email overload seems to be one of the main problems that PjMs deal within their daily lives.

Bearing in mind these difficulties, which were classified with high or very high levels of importance, it became clear that respondents agreed with statements S13, S14 and S15, which confirm that project
members do not use communication tools efficiently and effectively, and that there is still no adequate platform for the management of information and interaction in all stages of the project. This reinforces the need to implement a software solution to aggregate all PjM procedures, information and communication channels. As we can see in Table 4, most sentences related to communication tools (S1 to S15 and S25), except for S6 and S10, reached levels of agreement or total agreement and these subjects were classified with levels of high or very high importance.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Meetings are useful</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Meetings enable the solving of problems found in the execution of tasks</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Team members value face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Most team members attend to meetings they are summoned to</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Team members do not always attend to meetings</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The number of meetings between teams is excessive</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Face-to-face contact between all members involved in the project is sufficient</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Team members are not usually aware of the project schedule</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The current communication plan template is useful for planning communication at all stages of the project</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Existing standards and communication channels facilitate the work of project manager</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. If it would be useful if there were communication procedures (rules and templates) to accomplish tasks and solve problems</td>
<td>Completely agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Team members are unaware of the role of project manager</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The industrialization project process is not clear to all parties involved in the projects</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Team members are motivated to perform tasks</td>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. As a project manager, I feel that I can promote good interaction and communication between all members of the team</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5. (continued)*
Lack of Communication Planning

The current communication plan, as already mentioned, has the main function of scheduling project meetings, and serves, mainly, for the use of PjM. Thus, the lack of an adequate communication plan was identified as a communication failure (S24, S25 and S26). The validation model proved that, despite the intervention carried out in phase one, the still existing communication form plan is not useful to help PjM structure the information and interaction activities in all phases of the project (S24 and S25) and, therefore, the respondents considered that the level of importance of this subject is very high and, in this sense, they totally agree with deepening the changes on communication procedures (rules and templates) to accomplish tasks and solve problems (S26).

Lack of Team Involvement and Motivation

This diagnostic phase allowed us to perceive that PjMs have serious problems in promoting feelings of belonging within their teams, so that they all are committed to the project’s mission. As it can be seen in table 4, although team meetings are evaluated as important communication tools for the good performance of the project (S16 and S17), the degree of attendance of team members to those meetings is low (S19 and S20). The employees assigned to the project teams are responsible for other tasks and tend to attribute little relevance to these face-to-face contacts.

One of the reasons for this lack of team involvement and commitment may be related to the lack of recognition of the PjM functions (S27). But, in addition, and although respondents agree that project manager’s communication skills are adequate to promote good interaction between the team and to solve the problems that arise in daily life (S30 and S31), it is also true that they are unable to form an opinion as to the degree of motivation of the project members regarding the execution of their tasks (S29). Thus, the deepening of the feelings of belonging and commitment in project teams may come from the improvement of the communication and leadership skills of PjMs. This vision is shared by the project managers themselves, who positively evaluated the communication workshops and confirmed their interest in maintaining regular training.
Introduction of a New Digital Platform

Given the results presented above, it was then possible to think about the next step of a third intervention program. Data gathered gave us some clues about the team perception on the introduction of a new digital platform aiming to store and share all the information and communication about current and past projects – in line with the social project management perspective. This platform would replace all the dispersed systems already in use.

Regarding this issue, PjMs agreed that implementing an integrated platform to support project management and tailored to the company was a good internal measure (S3 and S15). This digital system should have the ability to concentrate information, to enable monitoring the status of each project, and to be used in the teleworking mode or through a mobile application. These two last suggestions can be justified by the context of the global pandemic, caused by COVID-19, in which this study was conducted.

Altogether, results show that the innovative project management platform should favor the development of an easy-to-use digital interface that facilitates information and communication flows. Although, attitudes of distrust and resistance towards the emergence of “another communication platform” were also noticed. There is some fear that the introduction of this information repository and communication channel will further accentuate information dispersion and task duplication. These attitudes of mistrust seem to be related to the lack of knowledge about the features and potential of the new system. To be introduced, this new software should be presented to and discussed with all team members. As already mentioned and according to the principles of Innovation Communication, individuals who will be “affected” by innovation must be motivated to participate in the development process and to share ideas and prospects, to establish a position of commitment and trust. As so, this procedure of sharing the software status regularly should be a communication action considered by the company, as the best way to develop an internal digital communication system that corresponds to the needs and welcomes the interest of all members who make up project management.

CONCLUSION

Organizations have been facing quite challenging contexts with increased competition, strong market demands and growing requirements for product, service and process innovation. In order to respond to these challenges, companies develop new and more flexible organizational forms in which projects are strategically important. In fact, innovation seems to be highly enhanced through project management, as a set of rules, processes and structures with viable application in organizations and able to create product and process innovation (Hobbs et al., 2008).

But innovation is also a social concept, as it affects society and organizational environments and is affected by them. In that sense, it crosses communication sciences concerns. As showed in the analysis presented here, fluent internal corporate communication may facilitate innovation: it increases the diversity and amount of ideas within an organization, which may enhance new and valid solutions. In line with other empirical studies (Kivimäki et al., 2000), this research shows that a communication culture favors innovation, that can only be reached through high participation and interaction in task performance, but also through motivation and commitment.

It became clear in our research that the traditional one-way model of information transmission (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) can create issue awareness (as already stated by Linke & Zerfass, 2011; Malte,
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2013), but it does not promote team interaction and does not apply for all project phases, as audiences, goals and context need to be considered in order to define the appropriate communication program. Pushing stakeholders from issue attention (awareness) to interest (understanding), through desire (acceptance) to action (as described in the AIDA model, from Elias St. Elmo Lewis, 1925), requires the use of the right tools, in order to allow information absorption, but also team interaction, commitment and collaboration. For example, staff meetings, which showed high relevance for action in this study, can be used in a communication mix with social media, more useful to create attention and interest, also highly valued by PjMs. Thus, a project management internal communication plan for innovation should include different means of communication and, to be effective, it must respond to project objectives and the team’s expectations. Besides, it must also consider information overburden effects. As mention in the interviews, having to attend too many meetings or receiving loads of emails can overload employees with information, which, in turn, hinders innovative activities.

In sum, in order to enhance innovation practices in project management, internal communication should aim to inform, but most also to lead, motivate and acknowledge employees’ participation through the different phases of the process. This seems to increase work satisfaction, performance and productivity. And moving from analog communication to an integrated digital communication solution may be a good path to explore.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Communication Plan:** The strategic design of the interaction moments that should happen between the organization and its internal and external publics, including the definition of channels and key messages.

**Communication System:** The architecture of the information flows that take place in an organization, involving vertical and horizontal levels.

**Internal Communication:** It concerns all the interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organizations and it is crucial to engage employees and achieve the organizational mission.

**Innovation Communication:** Is a field of study that focuses on the analysis of the symbolic interactions between an organization and its stakeholders as they deal with the development of new products or services.

**Leadership:** Can be defined as the process that is carried out to influence others to pursue a certain result or objective.

**Project Management:** It can be defined as the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to design activities that make it possible to respond to project requirements.

**Project Manager:** The person that coordinates the tasks and expectations of all individuals within a project and whose function involves primary communication management.

**Social Project Management:** An approach that advocates the use of social media as an accessible and successful alternative to traditional communication channels in project management, as they increase the volume and speed of communication and information exchange and stimulate sharing, co-creation,
interaction, and debate, bringing the project manager closer to the team, significantly improving communication outcomes.