

THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTRANET ON MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION STYLE. THE COMMUNICATIONAL-STYLISTIC QUANTIFIED MATRIX OF THE MANAGER

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Abstract: Due to its mainly informative and strongly hierarchical character, the Intranet creates distortions in communication. The transparency and democratization of access to information, as well as restrictive centralization of the impact of online expression on the middle management in regard to tensions between the communications structure and the formal relations structure. In the organizations that use the Intranet, the middle management's direct communication is centered on consensus, on understanding and correctly interpreting content. This paper offers a quantified matrix of managerial communication styles in the frame of an organization that uses the Intranet.

Keywords: communication style, Intranet, organizational communication, middle management, communicational-stylistic quantified matrix.

1. Introduction

Managerial communication is at the core of the organization's internal social network and holds a fundamental role in meeting managerial functions. In this paper we aim to study the influences of Intranet use upon managerial communication style, based on the sociological use of digital technologies, from the communication theory perspective. The paper starts from a pragmatic perspective (Jablin and Putnam 2000; Fairhurst 2000, 379-439) and is based on the double nature of communication inside the organization: that of supporting the production of material goods or services with an economic outcome, through the flow of necessary information, and that of production and maintenance of relationships within the organization.

For this theoretical study we focus on the traditional organization – characterized by formal hierarchical relationships in horizontal and vertical planes, highly centralized, in which control holds a major role. This option is justified because:

1. it is a well known historical form, adopted ad hoc and intuitively by small and medium organizations formed by private initiatives in Romania and having an empirical management,
2. it is still a very common structure in large organizations across the world and within Romania,
3. the traditional organization model is often most cited in non-academic papers destined for common users, lacking the formal skillset required in the field, and therefore the most known and implicitly applied model.

The communication style was defined by Somers (2008, 2) as a means of expressing ideas and emotions, of negotiating situations involving others. The style is a trademark of individuality of the communicant and depends on the psychosocial and cultural specifics of the individual (Stănciugelu *et al.* 2014, 175), as well as on the communicator's abilities to adapt to the context (Schifirneț 2004, 163).

"Managerial style consists of a series of particularities of the individual (and especially of their temperament, character and skills) through which the manager performs each of the management functions and their whole. The leadership style is required to report to the

structure, characteristics and dynamics of the micro-group in which the manager exerts their leadership activity." (Moraru 1995, 23-24)

Starting from the premise that the manager as a social actor is influenced by psychological, cognitive and social variables, and that he/she has the freedom to adopt one of the possible communication processes with the prescribed communication plan, we define the managerial communication style as an individual way of fulfilling managerial functions through communication. The communication style individualizes the manager opposite to other participants in communication and influences the relationships that are established within the organizational structure. The communication style is given by the way a manager chooses to mainly use a certain communication process in a certain type of organizational relationship. By the position's nature in the organization chart, the manager is part of the underlying relationships of forces in downward, upward or horizontal communication. The way in which managers combine these types of processes defines their (communication) style.

2. The influences of Intranet mediated communication on the organization

The transfer of an important part of the organization's internal communication volume in cyberspace through Intranet introduces changes in the complex phenomenon of managerial communication. Traditional procedures are disturbed by a new way of communication – the network (Scalia and Duncombe 1999). Changes come from the innovators' vision on this digital technology, from the way in which the senior management understands to adapt this flexible technology to the structure of the organization and from the representation that the senior management has regarding the role and the conduct of communication processes in the organization. The main advantages of this communication tool felt both by employees and by managers from different hierarchical levels are: the speed of information dissemination and archival of information, procedures, decisions, and solutions. As the digital means of communication has become indispensable, its limitations and defects emerged: jams, difficulties in use or unequal access, redundant or unnecessary information (Morillon and Belin 2006).

Studies show that social uses of new technologies are less innovative in organizations than in private space (Besnard *et al.* 2008). The first centralized and hierarchical Intranets (Noyer 2001; Noyer and Juanals 2010), common to this day, employ the French Minitel as a reporting model to the user rather than the Internet. As long as Minitel inventors had in mind a mainly vertical use between institutions that offered information and technologically mediated facilities to subscribers, communication sociologists have found that the most common use of the network was horizontal, between users. If, at a macrosocial level, the Minitel's philosophy proved to be unviable, in the microsocial universe of organizations which have a traditional hierarchical structure, it is recovered by the Intranet technology. Moreover, users denounce the "internal archaism in technology" (Carmes and Galibert 2009, 201). Intranet networks were designed for the internal space of the organization and they reflect the vision of the organization's management regarding institutional relations. The Intranet's transparency goes hand in hand with control. "The leadership perceives the (Intranet) service as an extension of power and attributes it with the spokesperson

condition." (Morillon and Belin 2006, 5), but users develop alternative communication strategies in response to their manipulation and control intentions.

The access to information is open to all members of the network, but the right to public speech within the organization is rather reduced. Just like Minitel, users have the right to consult the information filtered by the IT and Communications departments, and disseminated from the top of the centralized hierarchy downwards, and sometimes have the obligation that arises from the nature of their work, to use the services of the platform.

The inequality of access to digital technology was proven empirically (Carmes and Galibert 2009). As long as the access to the information disseminated via the Intranet network is available to all employees, the study in France showed that access to the Internet at work is related to the existence of a higher education diploma. Employees without a diploma are captives of the Intranet, while the freedom granted by the global network is reserved for those who have higher education in the workplace (207).

Given that in most organizations the Intranet network tends to monopolize the functions of other means of communication within the organization (the internal publication, or the display), social actors who occupy lower positions in the organizational hierarchy depend on the Intranet. Using the digital technology, in addition to its span in some cases, or transparency quite seldom, leads to an exaggerated information flow that takes time and effort to be consulted, selected, and used by employees. Thus, in some organizations, this has led to the closure of communication within the boundaries of an activity sector, limiting the right to information aimed at efficiency and openness, traced in the freedom culture that is part of technology leads to conflicts between the senior management, the medium managements and subordinates (Budd and Velasquez 2014). Employees feel the lack or difficulty of access to the Intranet as discriminatory. The study conducted by Carmes and Galibert (2009) showed that even decision-makers at a lower hierarchical level feel the same information exclusion as the executive staff. Furthermore, they feel deprived of the symbolic power capital necessary in exercising the managerial function (Carmes and Galibert 2009, 209-210). The hierarchical and discriminatory Intranet, through limiting the right to participate only increases employees' dissatisfaction who, digital acculturated, have internalized the values of participatory democracy promoted and put more or less in the practice of Internet communication. The perverse effect for the organization is felt at the level of changing its employee's perception, at the level of negative perception of professional and organizational hierarchy. The mechanism of refusing a form of inequity and the entity that diminished the role of the employee intervenes. Thus, the Intranet, designed as a tool to increase productivity, decreases motivation, participation, satisfaction and the employee's commitment to the institution, therefore the psychosocial factors that contribute to the organization's efficiency.

The forum, as a means of communication among peers within the organization, can relieve some of the inequities and discrimination inherent to the Intranet. Beaudouin, Cardon, Mallard (2001) revealed an important communicative component (jokes, slips from the strictly professional aspect of the discussion, the convivial component contribute to creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships) – which is found in Internet forums, as well – and that adds up to the prevalent information component and to the rest of the Intranet's architecture. Yet the analysis showed that 61% of the forum content is informational and only 39% is communicational (Ely 2006). The forum covers a part of the internal communication functions at motivating employees, organizational participation and co-construction, some functions of interpersonal communication at networking, of (symbolic) exchange, of communication across hierarchical levels and of

solving problems through cooperation and by engaging collective intelligence (Ely 2006). The study of forum relationships showed that the most consistent flows of information are owned by the moderator and the leader at their center. If the forum alleviates discrimination regarding the freedom of speech for the persons at the basis of hierarchy or in middle management positions, speech is still controlled. Beyond the common moderation and filtering of this kind of services that are supported by the Internet network (elimination of obscene expressions, attitudes devoid of civic values or insulting, defamatory or infringing human dignity slips), the Intranet network can filter content that collides with the managerial policy. Practiced or not by communication departments, gate-keeping is accompanied by the fear of probable repercussions of speeches in the area dedicated to employee views, which leads to self-censorship. Applying transparency in Intranet communication does not come by itself, because the management's fear of slippage is accompanied by the oversight fear of the employees. Over controlling leads to the loss of control. Restrictions in Intranet professional communication lead to deterritorialization towards the Internet. The risks are perceived by the IT&C and communication departments, that attempt to restrict the employee's right to speech on issues regarding the organization and work activity in the global network by means of regulations and restrictive measures.

To sum up, we can say that the Intranet:

- takes over some of the functions of internal communication and interpersonal communication in the organization,
- efficiently transfers information from the base to the upper echelons of the hierarchy,
- participates in solving problems through collective intelligence,
- archives the information disseminated in the network,
- is mainly informative,
- introduces a rift in the organization: on the one hand between those who only have the right/obligation to consult the Intranet and on the other hand between those who have the right to speak and among those who are Intranet prisoners and those who have access to the Internet,
- induces a perception of supervision and control over employees,
- decreases employee motivation, participation, satisfaction and commitment to the institution.

The quasi-ubiquity of Intranet networks in large organizations, the persistence of using this means of communication which overlaps hierarchical centralized communication with interpersonal digital communication, the way in which the Intranet has absorbed some of the functions of other forms of communication downward in the organization, lead to the idea that the Intranet is a form of communication mediated by digital technology that is able to meet some of the efficiency and productivity needs of organizations. However, the discussed disadvantages raise social relations and communication management problems within the organization. Discrimination and restrictions in internal communication through Intranet architecture lead to undermining the organization relationally and create tension. Paradoxically, in the past 20 years the army, as an organization based on information transmission to executives, is moving towards a more open, more transparent internal communication. Sociological surveys have shown that for motivating and involving personnel in meeting the objectives are indispensable to understanding tasks, to the context, to the situation and the role of the individual in general collective objective fall (Bryon-Portet 2008). As long as the Intranet can be perceived by members of civil organizations as a step towards strengthening

hierarchy and control, militarized structures found the potential of soft communication in public relations and internal communications. This could be an argument for rethinking the internal communication of civil organizations, as Intranet mediated communication tends to flatten hierarchies and divide the organization between upper management and the rest. Moreover, Samsup Jo and Sung Wook Shim (2005) note that the role of interpersonal communication within the organization was carefully studied only with the coming of digital technologies as mediators of managerial communication. An empirical research on the managers' communication skills revealed that internal communication managers believe that the most important personal quality is empathy, while social media managers appreciate curiosity as important. The study has also shown that communication managers appreciate the advantages of digital communication, but are aware that it does not replace face to face communication and erodes interpersonal communication as a management tool (R. Tench, R. and A. Moreno 2015).

In these circumstances, the role of middle management is fundamental for organizations. Due to the prevailing information load of digital communication, the hierarchical superior bears the task of making information understood and correctly interpreted by executives. The middle management also bears a crucial role in interpersonal communication as a means of motivation, to increase the confidence of subordinates in the organization and establish a stimulating work environment. When the employees occupying executive positions feel discriminated and ignored by the senior management, the middle management should also provide the socio-professional satisfaction necessary for motivation. Therefore, the personal communication style of the middle management is a key factor in meeting management functions.

The intermediate level manager in the hierarchy is deprived of one of the symbolic attributes of power – the right to speech. Through the Intranet information is transmitted from the upper echelons directly to executives, and in this respect the role of interim management is eroded. Overlapping the dichotomous hierarchy of the Intranet (those entitled to express themselves versus those who are obliged to inform themselves) over the organization's hierarchy creates tensions in the social network of the organization that are most strongly felt at intermediate levels and involve a weakening of the middle management's role. The manager's authority largely depends on how they handle face-to-face relationships.

As an alternative to information over control employees develop horizontal informal communication relationships. The lack of transparency and openness in face-to-face communication between superiors and subordinates favor the proliferation of such networks and the establishment of relationships with a marked personal component between managers and direct subordinates. This leads to an ad-hoc ranking of subordinates depending on alternative means of access to information. Those who develop personal relationships that allow them access become central to the informal network centers and informal leaders. A discriminatory Intranet nourishes and stimulates this type of parallel communication network, which only undermines the institutional hierarchy.

In those organizations that adopt Intranet communication the role of communication processes focused on the role of consent and correct interpretation of information content prevails in the direct communication involving the manager. Moreover, Schoeneborn and Trittin (2013) argue the need to shift from messaging to

communication as part of the social construction of the organization and as a driver of becoming.

The attenuation of disadvantages that digitally mediated communication introduces across the organization depends on the way in which superiors choose to engage in communication processes based on information transmission, on the correct understanding and interpretation of content or on obtaining consent. Therefore, the middle management's communication style becomes more important in improving the economic activity of the organization.

1. The quantified managerial matrix of managerial communication style in organizations that use the Intranet

3.1. The method

To achieve the proposed goal we will use the operational concepts and the matrix method.

We consider communication as bond force with direction and sense in relations as prescribed by the organization chart as downward, upward and horizontal.

We operationalize the types of communication processes as follows:

- communication processes focused on the transmission of information by grouping processes that can be adequately described by linear functionalist models,
- communication processes focused on the understanding and the correct interpretation of the message by grouping interactionist models,
- communication processes focused on reaching an agreement among the participants, through the grouping of Rogers – Kinkaid and transactional type models.

The matrix method consists of a set of rules and procedures for the design, use and interpretation of a table with rows and columns in which variables are ordered. The method is frequently used as a tool for managing research data. Synthetic matrices highlight general relationships between variables. Arrays can perform a predictive function.

We will develop an associative-descriptive and combinatorial matrix. We will associate the variables in the columns with those on the line of the matrix. Through this operation we obtain a description of the interaction between the two variables. "The point of intersection is a fertile area of contact for variables and for transfer from one to another." (Moraru 1995, 30).

In the columns we will register as variables the type of communication prescribed by relationships formalized by the organization chart – upward, downward and horizontal. The matrix lines will enroll types of processes – transmission, understanding, agreement.

At the intersection of the lines and the columns we will get a description of possible communication styles as a result of how managers, voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, choose to engage in communication as a force of liaison in relationships prescribed by the organization chart.

3.2. Quantifying the matrix

Based on the above theoretical arguments, we believe that the most important

communication component in meeting middle management tasks is the relational aspect based on obtaining consent, which we assign it the coefficient 3. Also, as long as the Intranet occupies a large part of the information component, we consider the aspect of correct understanding and interpretation of the information as important and we assign it the coefficient 2. We assign the processes of transmitting information the coefficient 1.

No.	Communication processes	Organizational relationships			coefficient
		Communication as a force			
		downward	upward	horizontal	
1	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	1 – –	1 – –	3
2	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– 2 –	– 2 –	6
3	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– – 3	– – 3	9
4	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– 2 –	– – 3	6
5	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– – 3	– 2 –	6
6	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	1 – –	– – 3	6
7	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	1 – –	– 2 –	6
8	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– – 3	1 – –	6
9	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– 2 –	1 – –	6
10	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	1 – –	– 2 –	4
11	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	1 – –	– – 3	5

12	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– 2 –	1 – –	4
13	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– – 3	1 – –	5
14	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	1 – –	1 – –	4
15	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	1 – –	1 – –	5
16	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– 2 –	1 – –	6
17	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– 2 –	– – 3	7
18	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	1 – –	– 2 –	5
19	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– – 3	– 2 –	7
20	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– 2 –	– 2 –	5
21	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– 2 –	– 2 –	7
22	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– 3 –	1 – –	7
23	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– 3 –	– 2 –	8
24	transmission understanding agreement	– 2 –	– – 3	– – 3	8
25	transmission understanding agreement	1 – –	– – 3	– – 3	7

26	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	– 2 –	– – 3	8
27	transmission understanding agreement	– – 3	1 – –	– – 3	7

Table 1. The quantified matrix of the management communication style in organizations that use the Intranet

3.3. Matrix interpretation

As it can be noticed, there is a mutual influence relationship between communication types, as a connection strength in organizational relationships and communication processes. A downward communication relationship can be characterized as centered on the transmission of information, on the understanding and the correct interpretation of the message or on getting the consent of participants. Upward or horizontal type of relationships are characterized in the same way. The type of process in which the manager is involved influences the communication not as a direction or a purpose, but as a nature, thereby influencing the relationships within the organization chart. Conversely, a management communication process centered on information transmission can be described as downward, upward or horizontal. The same for processes focused on understanding or obtaining consent. The direction and purpose of communication within limits set by the organization chart influence the conduct of the communication process.

The communication style is driven by the way a manager chooses to use a certain communication process in a certain type of organizational relationship. Through the nature of the organization chart position, the manager is part of an underlying relationship of forces of downward, upward and horizontal communication. The way they combine the types of processes define their style. The matrix generated 27 managerial communication styles.

Summing up the theoretical coefficients assigned to each of the three types of processes that the manager can be involved in, we obtain a numerical characterization of each of the 27 styles. We note that the coefficients from 3-9 are obtained with a certain distribution of the combinations (Table 1). The matrix generates three mono-dimensional types: those based solely on the transmission, or solely on understanding or exclusively on the relationship, which we remove as being very unlikely. The coefficients distribution after eliminating mono-dimensional styles is shown in Table 2. Hybrid types of communication styles have a uniform distribution that generate five categories of styles that meet the same coefficient. We also notice that the bigger the coefficient, the stronger the relational component in the communication style is and the lower the coefficient is, the more important the information component becomes. It results that a manager who has a communication style that meets a higher coefficient is more efficient in managing their hierarchical position in the organization and perform their duties.

Number of combinations	Coefficient
1	3
3	4
6	5
7	6
6	7
3	8
1	9

Table 2. Coefficient distribution

Number of combinations	Coefficient
3	4
6	5
6	6
6	7
3	8

Table 3. Coefficient distribution after eliminating mono-dimensional styles

The highest coefficient – 8 is obtained from two agreement components and one understanding component. The coefficient 7 can be obtained theoretically by combining two processes centered on obtaining consent and a process of transmitting information, or by combining two processes centered on understanding and the correct interpretation of the task and a process focused on obtaining consent. After we excluded the single-string version six possible combinations remained between the three types of processes balanced evenly distributed between the relationship categories that can generate a coefficient 6. Coefficient 8 is obtained from two information transmission components and one agreement oriented component, or by combining two components centered on understanding the communication task and one information transmission centered component. The lowest coefficient – 4 theoretically results from the combination of two processes of information transmission and one process aimed at understanding the information.

4. Discussion, limits and conclusions

This study addresses the influence of the Intranet on managerial communication from a multidisciplinary perspective that suggests revisiting organizational communication through communication theory, keeping in mind the principles of the French wave of sociology regarding the use of digital technologies. Compared to most studies on managerial communication which treat communication as a unique process, our pragmatic approach takes the complexity of communication into account, which is manifested by multiple processes through which the manager is able to exert communication as a liaison force in the relations formalized by the organization chart.

The manager's communication style was conceptualized as a way of exercising communication in a vertical direction, aiming downward, upward and horizontally, through an own combination of the possible communicative processes. In view of the theoretical description of the manager's communication styles we considered the most common models of communication processes that we grouped into three categories:

communication processes focused on the transmission of information, processes focused on the understanding and the correct interpretation of the message's content and processes focused on achieving agreement between the parties involved in the communication.

The conceptual construction allowed the generation of a quantified matrix of managerial communication style in organizations using the Intranet. The matrix is based on communication models – meaning highlighting some features of communication processes and minimizing others. In social communication practice these types are not found as such, but as mixes in which a particular model prevails. The matrix method has inherent limitations: it is a second-order method (based on the results of methods preceding it) and its results must be confirmed and verified by other methods. Despite these limitations the matrix provides a theoretical framework for analyzing the communication situations and personal styles of managers. Based on the matrix qualitative and quantitative research tools on managerial communication styles can be built.

Combinatorial matrix-style associative communication has highlighted the mutual influence of types of communication (upward, downward and horizontal) and process categories (transmission of information focused on understanding and focused on obtaining agreement). From the influence it has on communication intranet management and the role of middle managers in the organization, efficiency coefficient was provided communication processes that middle manager is free to combine the types of organizational relationships is involved.

The associative-combinatorial matrix of communication style has highlighted the mutual influence between communication types (upward, downward and horizontal) and process categories (of information transmission, focused on understanding and focused on obtaining agreement). Starting with the influence the Intranet has on communication management and on the role of mid management within the organization, efficiency coefficients were provided to the communication processes that the mid-manager has the freedom to combine within the types of organizational relationships that they are involved in.

The manager's communication-stylistic matrix highlighted 27 ideal-types of communication styles. Of these three are mono-dimensional and are unlikely to be found in pure state in social practice. Quantifying the matrix showed that the more the middle management's style is characterized by a higher coefficient, their ability to mitigate the distortions Intranet use introduces into the organization's social network is higher.

The matrix can be practically used by quantifying the proportion of relationship types involving the occupant of a middle management position. Thus, for a given organization and a certain position within the hierarchy we can achieve an optimal model of communication management that relates to the behaviors of the positions occupants. The matrix opens the way to optimizing the manager's communication styles within an organization based on the analysis of personal style by adjustment/correction towards the most effective style.

For full fruition of this exploratory research a deep study of the relationship between communication and managerial functions is needed. The theoretical objective of continuing the study is to understand the impact of communication style on the managerial functions; the practical goal is to identify the most effective communication styles and ways to optimize personal communication styles so as to successfully fulfill managerial functions.

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