Influence of Communication on the Productivity of Portuguese Military Organization

Felipa Lopes dos Reis, Diogo Esteves, Rafael Carriço, and João Pestana

ABSTRACT

Communication is the key to the success and stability of any organization. The very beginning of civilization owes its evolution to effective communication. Therefore, the whole process for the creation of any company is related to communication between the working groups. The present study investigated how the productivity of Portuguese military organizations (Portuguese Air Force, Portuguese Army, Navy, and Republican National Guard) is influenced by the type of communication used. In the methodology used for this research, the questionnaire was adopted as a data collection instrument applied to the three branches of the Armed Forces and the National Republican Guard. Chain communication, characteristic of the military environment, is one of the oldest institutional means of communication. This type of communication is characterized by a downward flow in which the institution’s highest rank transmits a message that must be orchestrated by the other posts until the information reaches the lowest level, the executing or operational level. The viability of communication in these institutions has been demonstrated throughout history. However, there are also certain disadvantages of this type of communication when compared to other institutions where there is greater openness in terms of communication between the various hierarchical levels.

Keywords: Communication, efficiency, military institutions, productivity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication throughout history has always played a preponderant role in organizations and their development, but nowadays, it gains prominence due to the high importance attributed to competition. Organizations that allow their company to develop open, efficient communication channels that always allow feedback when transmitting the message are more likely to be successful in a highly competitive market. The management of a company that seeks to evolve in the market is concerned with communicating with the institution's base to understand employee satisfaction with the company's dichotomies. It is essential to have good organizational communication to achieve the maximum level of productivity, which allows for the effective sharing of knowledge and management of interested parties, which is the basis for the organization's survival and success in the future (Fu, 2022). Portuguese military organizations are characterized by their high hierarchy style. This style brings advantages to it but also a set of disadvantages that can be verified in terms of communication. Communication in these institutions only works on a “ladder” with several steps, and this brings some disadvantages as the message, when it reaches the recipient, has already undergone changes and may no longer be efficient. The same happens with feedback. By carrying out this study, we will seek, through hypothesis 0 – “Communication influences productivity”, to answer the starting question: “Do military organizations use the communication style the most appropriate for their productivity?” The data collection method used was the questionnaire method. The sample consisted of military personnel from the three branches of the Armed Forces and the Republican National Guard. By analyzing the results, we will try to verify which communication style is used, its advantages and disadvantages, how it affects productivity and whether human resources are more or less adequate for organizational efficiency. Having said this, we proceed to the literature review, where we will deepen the theoretical knowledge of the subject.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The meaning of the word “to communicate” is historically related to the word “common” and comes from the Latin verb communicare, which means “to share,” “to make common,” and, in turn, is related to the Latin word communinis (Rosengren, 2000, as cited in Mata, 2022). The human being, as a social animal,
needs to communicate to subsist in the society to which he belongs. Without communication, it would not be possible to establish relationships, and without them, development would be null. This makes communicating a necessary condition for activities in organizations. The same author also mentions that the communicative process requires the presence of a set of elements, namely:

1) Sender or source (prepares the message, converting it into a code that is capable of being perceived by the recipient of the message),
2) Receiver or addressee (decoding and interpreting the code that is transmitted by the sender),
3) Message,
4) One channel,
5) A situation or circumstance and an intention,
6) A purpose or need.

The entire communicative process presupposes the existence of feedback between sender and receiver and aims to share information between everyone in both directions. However, it is necessary to know how to distinguish the communicative process from the informative one. In the latter, the sender does not expect feedback; the information flows only in one direction. Through this understanding, it is easier to analyze the channels through which the communication is transmitted and thus makes it possible to determine which ones have the most noise (Mata, 2022).

Organizations are in continuous change, evolving through their methods of communication. Thus, communication internally must be taken care of and approached with rigor, enabling the dissemination of information, understanding and cohesion essential for its proper functioning (Mata, 2022).

According to Kunsch (2002, as cited in Mata, 2022), organizational communication is the discipline that studies how the communicational phenomenon takes place within organizations within the scope of global society. For there to be excellent communication in the organizational environment, it is necessary that policies and strategies are defined and transparent, maintaining an open dialogue between management and employees and providing the existence of free and efficient channels.

Sousa et al. (2022) also address the issue of organizational communication, stating that it is essential for strengthening the organization’s constitutional image, as it socializes relevant information, promotes social interaction, helps to avoid, or reduce conflicts and integrates people into organizational decisions. In this way, they directly influence the development of the work of the internal public, motivating and stimulating them to perform their functions with excellence, in addition to improving the relationship between the organization, employees and society. The author also mentions that communication within organizations becomes a requirement to ensure the efficiency of processes and productivity, in addition to integrating employees and encouraging them to produce with greater quality and obtain good organizational results. However, failures in communication may occur, which hinder the development of activities, reducing the quality of work.

For Fu (2022), communication can be internal and external, and both allow individuals, groups, and organizations to combine existing knowledge into new ideas. To reach maximum productivity in non-profit companies, it is necessary to have correct communication aligned with innovation, which acts as a catalyst for human, economic, and social development.

In a study addressed by Fu (2022), two types of knowledge-sharing processes emerge: the intra-organizational and the inter-organizational. Specifically, effective inter-organizational knowledge sharing allows an organization to obtain new information from other organizations. Effective intra-organizational knowledge sharing allows employees to locate knowledge distributed within an organization and synthesize knowledge for application. Thus, intra and inter-organizational knowledge sharing through the use of ICT is vital for organizational success.

Currently, organizational knowledge normally occurs through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) through e-mails, teleconferences, and corporate social media. This means that it should not be neglected by organizations with regard to the acquisition, dissemination and sharing of knowledge. ICT has the potential to transform routines and organizational structures, allow better lateral coordination, increase the efficiency of information sharing and facilitate the circulation of knowledge to achieve synergy (Fu, 2022).

The author also addresses the two dimensions of organizational communication, internal and external. The first is the way in which the organization communicates internally with its audiences and stakeholders in the process of creation, development, and growth and where it is possible to guide the behavior of employees and establish interpersonal relationships that allow achieving goals and meeting organizational objectives. It should be used as the basis of the company’s work because only through it is it possible to transmit the mission, beliefs, values, knowledge, and identity to employees, thus making employees feel like an integral part of the entire organizational process. The existence of good internal communication is directly related to the creation of a strong corporate image, which contributes to the company’s success, that is, to increasing its productivity.

Marta (2022) addresses external communication as the way in which the organization communicates...
with its external public. In the case of internal communication, the author consults Rogala and Bialowas (2016) to describe the following functions of internal communication:

1) Provide the necessary information so that employees can make decisions and work effectively,
2) Motivate in order to increase the involvement and efficiency of employees,
3) Express the social needs of individuals in the workplace,
4) Control the flow of information regarding the performance of employees.

The types of internal communication can be informal conversations (e.g., office conversations), and it can also be formal, where it follows official channels and hierarchy rules, addressing the organization’s structural planning, which includes aligning in levels, divisions and departments, as well as responsibilities, job positions or job descriptions (Mata, 2022).

Among the forms of internal communication and their most common problems within organizations, we can highlight what can be seen in Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Communication Channels</th>
<th>Most Common Problems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers and magazines</td>
<td>- Very descending themes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Cold bad language</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Inappropriate look</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Unsuitable portrait of the institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newsletters, brochures, press releases, memos</td>
<td>- Very normative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Little engaging</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Little explanatory</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Incomplete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bulletin board</td>
<td>- Unattractive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Precarious access</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Outdated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings/group meetings</td>
<td>- Tiring and long</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Lack of clarity and goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Weak exposures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Little motivation</td>
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<td>Individual conversations with employees</td>
<td>- Normative and coercive power is greater than expressive power.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Little empathy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Lack of credibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Open door” program, suggestion boxes, bottom-</td>
<td>- Fear of coercive power</td>
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<td>up communication</td>
<td>- Unbelief</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Uncertainties about the results of the suggestions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Pressure from the reference group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Macroevironment pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional promotion programs</td>
<td>- Promotion of certain functional categories or salary distinctions that generate internal dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Descending (or vertical): Flow that runs in a hierarchical direction, from top to bottom.
2) Ascending (or horizontal, lateral): Part of the lower positions in the hierarchy towards the higher ones. Most messages flow through informal channels, thus escaping control.
3) Diagonal: Flow that occurs between a hierarchical superior and a subordinate located in another area or department.

Maintaining an adequate flow of information among all those involved is one of the great challenges of organizations since, when well structured, information flows are characterized as facilitators of activities.

A. Communication Strategies

The tendency of organizational communication is to express itself in digital networks in order to position itself and develop a relationship with the target audience. To keep up with this development and the growing trend in the use of social networks, it is essential that professionals involved in digital communication processes acquire skills and thus manage to reach the target audience. NATO, through Allied Command Operations (ACO) 95-3, issued by the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers in Europe, considers social networks a means to expand and disseminate internal and external communication of the Armed Forces, which adds value relatively to the communication that is conceived through the traditional way (Gonçalves, 2021).

The viability of communication in the Armed Forces has been demonstrated throughout history. However, there are also certain disadvantages of this type of communication when compared to other institutions or companies. Nowadays, most large multinationals operate with greater openness in terms of communication, in which any member of the operational area is able to communicate with the respective CEO and vice versa. In fact, the management itself is concerned with communicating with the base of the institution to understand their satisfaction with the dichotomies of the company (Gonçalves, 2021).

Regarding internal communication, it is considered that the use of social networks in the armed forces facilitates the transmission of the interests of the commander to his team, enables the timely transmission of information from the leadership to the team, and the rapid dissemination of information, helps to team
to understand and improve their role within the organization, promote internal innovation and help improve team interaction. Regarding external communication, the use of social networks promotes the involvement of the target audience, helps to explain the organization’s mission, generates additional support, and is a way to solicit ideas from the public, which can help in the development of specific issues. NATO considers the production of content for social networks to be fast, less technically complex, and cheaper.

The armed forces still have traditional communication today, the same communication used throughout their history. However, nowadays, due to the various resources available, as mentioned by Sousa (2022), it facilitates the transmission of the interests of the commander to his team, enables the timely transmission of information from leadership to the team, and the rapid dissemination of information, helps the team to understand and improve its role within the organization, promotes internal innovation and helps to improve the interaction between the team. There is a growing need for the organization to be closer to its bases, as the distance between the base and the top and the constant need to pass information both downwards and upwards makes the message distorted and inaccurate, creating conflict and demotivating the internal public. The emergence of new technologies has opened new doors for recruitment and attention on the part of the external public. However, new technologies have not yet arrived or are still little associated with internal communication. WhatsApp is currently a work tool that is widely introduced in organizations, allowing the passage of messages and information free of charge. However, despite WhatsApp, internal communication still continues in the military area, following certain protocols that can be harmful in personal or operational cases.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted was a case study, which is a research method that allows researchers to deepen their knowledge about a subject in an organization.

The data collection instrument for this study is an online questionnaire applied to military personnel from the armed forces and the GNR of both sexes aged between 19 and 55 years. This population was chosen based on the main objective of the study, which will be to analyze how communication interferes with the productivity of military organizations.

Considering that communication has become an important management tool that is able to help organizations achieve the desired goals and to verify how this may or may not influence organizational results, the following hypothesis was outlined:

\[ H_0: \text{Communication influences the productivity of organizations.} \]

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As for the question, “Does your institution promote efficient communication?” the percentages are divided (see Fig. 1). With regard to the question, “Is the style of communication the most suitable for the productivity of the institution?” partial answers were obtained or without great certainty (see Fig. 2). However, markedly or confidently, only 3.2% of the military responded that they totally agreed, against 12.9% of those who totally disagreed. This leads us to believe that most of the military think that the culture of the military and militarized institutions end up containing a lot of communication, sometimes creating entropy in its flow.

![Fig. 1. Distribution of the responses to the question “Does your institution’s culture promote effective communication?”](image-url)

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This entropy is evidenced when asked, “Does your institution promote an open communication style?” The style of military communication is often chaining communication, where there is communication that flows through the hierarchical levels, usually starting at the top (descending). In the responses obtained, 25.8% completely disagreed, 27.4% partially disagreed, and 21% neither agreed nor disagreed, which perfectly demonstrates that these institutions do not promote open channels of communication (see Fig. 3).

Curiosity about the motivation of the military and the style of communication used made us question whether this more classic type of communication ends up benefiting productivity. Almost half of the participants partially disagree with this statement. Thus, currently, the military feels that the style of communication should be changed or adapted to create greater motivation and, consequently, productivity in this type of organization.

The only question that generated openness and, in fact, greater indecision was about openness in this type of communication (see Fig. 3). All responses except “totally agree” were around 20%. One can have the perception that this response does not depend so much on the style of communication but on the group in which the soldiers who responded are inserted, despite the fact that military communication foresees a chain communication without great contact between various hierarchical levels, however depending on the person who is in coordination or the person responsible for a section, this can be understood as such extend a greater openness to communication between your team, unlike a person who has more pronounced ideas in the classic military view of communication, then it does not promote that much openness of communication within the bosom of the team and about yourself as a coordinator or top of that chain.

The question that generated less consensus preceded the question that generated greater agreement. This question relates bureaucracy as a communication barrier; 50% totally agree, and almost 40% partially agree (see Fig. 4). Therefore, it is identified as one of the main communication barriers in military institutions.

On whether the information is transmitted effectively between the different hierarchical levels, the military disagrees in general (see Fig. 5). There is still a major problem with the style of chain communication, even more so when it comes to a military institution. The information that originates at the top and is destined for the base sometimes arrives distorted by the filters that are triggered in its flow. If the highest entity gives an order of execution of a certain task or mission, that order of execution of the task and reasons for its implementation are most often filtered, either for security reasons or because not
everyone can have access to all the information content, for example, classified character information, or because the hierarchical chains immediately following the top of the chain find well transmit only part of the information or the information adapted so as not to raise unnecessary fuss to the fulfilment of the mission.

The previous question leads to the following question: “It is easy to transmit information to the top of the hierarchy”. The military once again disagreed (see Fig. 6). This is because the types of communication in military institutions see military strategy as a central point of their day-to-day and war theatre. Therefore, overly open communication can interfere with decisions or give rise to rebellions. Traditionally, chain communication in the military area has a process, which is only cut if there really is an urgent cause that your hierarchical superior or inferior cannot resolve. The way in which information is handled ends up not opening, and if you don’t open up, it’s difficult to transmit information directly to the top of the hierarchy.

The military, in turn, agrees that communication has a direct influence on individual and collective productivity, with 53.2% completely agreeing that this is an important factor in a good work environment. The question that also generated huge agreement, as well as the question about the barrier to communication, was the question about whether communication influences motivation, and almost 100% of the military agreed either partially or completely (see Fig. 7).

Finally, something was questioned that turned out to be a bit of common sense: the greater the motivation, the greater the productivity. In this case, almost all of the military completely agree (see Fig. 8). When they feel motivated, they end up being more productive and more valuable to the institution to which they belong.
The responses to Fig. 8 prove that communication is related to employee motivation, as 50% partially agreed and 43.5% voted completely.

When asked about increased productivity when employees are motivated, the answers were almost unanimous: motivation has a direct influence on productivity, and the greater the motivation, the more productive people are in their work (see Fig. 9).

Regarding Fig. 10, we saw that when asked if they feel motivated in the workplace, the answers were varied: 29% partially agree, 3.2% completely agree, 21% disagree, 24.2% partially disagree, and 22.6% neither agree nor disagree. The conclusion seen through these answers is that motivation can be relative. There are factors that can affect it. Probably, the boss/subordinate relationship, organizational climate, and benefits, among others, can be the basis of these variations in answers.

V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the research carried out, it is possible to understand that there is a set of phenomena beyond the technical skills of the employee of an organization which influence their productivity, such as communication and motivation.

When analyzing the answers obtained from the questionnaire, it was possible to conclude that most of them occurred linearly, with a consensus among those questioned, which reveals that the existing communication problem affects all institutions and is felt in a generalized way by employees, which demonstrates that the basis of the problem lies in the cultural aspect.

The results demonstrate a lack of communicative fluidity between the various hierarchical levels since information occurs downwards, with a high bureaucratic volume, and it is pretty tricky for an element of lower rank (base of the hierarchy) to contact your superiors to solve a problem. In all communication, when it leaves the receiver, there must be feedback, which in military institutions does not happen due to the rule of communication working downwards, which can lead to problems within the mission, a problem that we can see from the results that are perceived by the military of lower ranks since most of the respondents were privates or sergeants, and communication and the reason for organizational problems are seen differently when one is in different posts.
In this way, it was possible to conclude that connecting the middle and senior management posts with the base of the hierarchical pyramid was challenging. The existing communication in Portuguese military institutions negatively influences the achievement of processes and activities and, therefore, the consequence of organizational productivity.

With the research of this work, we can verify that there are few studies on this theme. However, the theme of communication is a factor that is currently having a significant influence on the productivity of these institutions, and that, strangely, is something that is being neglected by the top managers, perhaps because, being military institutions, it is not to their liking that the lower military feels that they have a “voice”, but we have seen from the theorists of the subject that communicative management that does not involve the collaborators brings only disadvantages to the institutions, it is suggested that there are studies and even comparisons with private organizations that these managers have carried out to identify the advantages of a more open and less hierarchical communicative structure.

REFERENCES