

How to promote organizational efficiency?*

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to propose a series of reflections on the options available to improve efficiency in organizations. For this, two categories of analysis traced in the literature are addressed, organizational communication and organizational culture. One conclusive aspect of this work is that a correct articulation between communication and organizational culture is necessary to guide and promote teamwork in each of the members of the organization. However, the most outstanding finding is that the literature suggests that it is still necessary to strengthen the managerial capacities of those who lead organizations, as well as the skills of the leaders who support them, in order to implement strategies that promote efficiency in organizations considering the communicational, cultural and collaborative work issues. Some of the reflections presented in this article in turn constitute practical implications that can be implemented in different types of organizational arrangements.

Keywords

Organizational communication, organizational culture, organizational performance.

JEL classification

L23, L25, M10.

Content

Introduction; 1. Communication and organizational culture; 2. Communication and collective work; 3. Final remarks; References.



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¿Cómo promover la eficiencia organizacional?

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es proponer una serie de reflexiones sobre las opciones disponibles para mejorar la eficiencia en las organizaciones. Para ello, se abordan dos categorías de análisis trazadas en la literatura, la comunicación organizacional y la cultura organizacional. Un aspecto concluyente de este trabajo es que una correcta articulación entre la comunicación y la cultura organizacional es necesaria para orientar y promover el trabajo en equipo en cada uno de los miembros de la organización. Sin embargo, el hallazgo más destacado es que la literatura sugiere que aún es necesario fortalecer las capacidades gerenciales de quienes lideran las organizaciones, así como las habilidades de los líderes que las apoyan, con el fin de implementar estrategias que promuevan la eficiencia en las organizaciones considerando los temas comunicacionales, culturales y de trabajo colaborativo. Algunas de las reflexiones presentadas en este artículo, a su vez, constituyen implicaciones prácticas que pueden implementarse en diferentes tipos de arreglos organizacionales.

Palabras clave

Comunicación organizacional, cultura organizacional, desempeño organizacional.

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Contenido

Introducción; 1. Comunicación y cultura organizacional; 2. Comunicación y trabajo colectivo; 3. Comentarios finales; referencias.

Como promover a eficiência organizacional?

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é propor uma série de reflexões sobre as opções disponíveis para melhorar a eficiência nas organizações. Para tanto, são abordadas duas categorias de análise traçadas na literatura, comunicação organizacional e cultura organizacional. Um aspecto conclusivo deste trabalho é que uma correta articulação entre comunicação e cultura organizacional é necessária para orientar e promover o trabalho em equipe em cada um dos membros da organização. No entanto, o que mais se destaca é que a literatura sugere que ainda é necessário fortalecer as capacidades gerenciais daqueles que lideram as organizações, bem como as habilidades dos líderes que os apoiam, a fim de implementar estratégias que promovam a eficiência nas organizações considerando as questões comunicacionais, culturais e de trabalho colaborativo. Algumas das reflexões apresentadas neste artigo, por sua vez, constituem implicações práticas que podem ser implementadas em diferentes tipos de arranjos organizacionais.

Palavras-chave

Comunicação organizacional, cultura organizacional, desempenho organizacional.

Classificação JEL

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Conteúdo

Introdução; 1. Comunicação e cultura organizacional; 2. Comunicação e trabalho coletivo; 3. Considerações finais; referências.

Introduction

Organizational efficiency refers to the achievement of the goals and objectives that have been defined at a general level in the organization, for which the control processes, the correct management of information and the establishment of clear purposes are important (Dehghani et al. 2014). In this regard, and although it is a bit controversial, Goodstein & Butz (1998) point out that organizational efficiency is not a strategy but a necessary condition for the permanent success of the organization.

Now, it is the organizational members who give life to the labor system by actively participating in the strategic decisions that guide the achievement of the objectives and goals of the organization (DuHadway et al. 2018; Haroon & Malik, 2018). This makes people a determining factor in organizational management, since they constitute the central axis for its dynamism and innovation (Barbour et al. 2018). Consequently, organizational learning and knowledge management are of vital importance because they allow understanding, interpreting, learning and transforming the activities within the organization (Jensen et al. 2020).

Given the above, the organization, when generating new knowledge that radiates outwards, should also apply innovative management towards its interior (Kuhn et al. 2019). In this sense, the formation of work teams that develop complex high-performance activities and are oriented towards a common objective that benefits all members of the organization is essential (Kim & Jang, 2019).

Teamwork is supported by the values and ethical principles of each member, who ideally should be motivated and willing to act in the interests of the organization (Jensen et al. 2020). This individual commitment should be leveraged by effective and assertive leadership on the part of the different leaders, who have the responsibility of controlling the own effort of each work team (Muhamad et al. 2019).

In this organizational context, it is clear that individual values represent relatively stable learning over time, which guide and give meaning to personal or group goals, and that are manifested both in society and in organizations (Barbour et al. 2018). Consequently, the values are the drivers of the performance of the organizational members in the work teams, they promote cohesion and a sense of belonging, and they help to establish ethical commitments among the members of the organization to achieve shared goals (Kuhn et al. 2019).

In the strategic field, the values constitute one of the main components in the conformation of the work teams and in the strategic guidelines of the organization, since they define the identity of each person, the vision and the organizational mission, the reason for being of the organization and the objectives to be achieved (Muhamad et al. 2019). In this sense, the values specify the behaviors and conducts of the organizational members creating an environment of commitment and responsible awareness (Haroon & Malik, 2018).

In another order of ideas, it is possible to identify that in some organizations communication does not work properly, which means that the information and organizational guidelines are not known by all its members. This shortcoming makes the organization less competitive (Abrashi, 2018). Therefore, it is desirable that the organization has a communication system, preferably supported by a technological platform, which makes it possible for the information originating in any of its parts to be transmitted without distortion to all other levels (Priyohadi & Suhariadi, 2020). This makes organizational communication, properly established, a highly relevant instrument for strengthening efficiency and work teams in organizations (Abrashi, 2018).

According to the above, the aim of this work is to propose some reflections on how to improve efficiency in organizations. An exhaustive literature review has been carried out in order to meet the stated objective. Articles published in journals indexed in Web of Science and Scopus were specially reviewed. All the literature used for the construction of this article has been published in English. In addition, attention was focused particularly on two categories of analysis that appeared recurrently in the literature, the organizational communication and organizational culture. The literature suggests the need to strengthen the skills of managers and leaders, taking into account the interrelation between culture and communication, key aspects that affect organizational members.

This article has been structured as follows. This introduction is presented first. Second, the relationship between communication and culture in organizations is discussed. Third, some elements associated with collaborative work and its relationship with communication are analyzed. Finally, some conclusive comments are presented.

1. Communication and organizational culture

The formulations about the meaning of organizations, which represent systematic structures where people, activities and resources are ordered or organized to

achieve common goals, allow the consolidation of a series of fully important criteria, such as efficiency, quality, productivity or decision making (Kim & Jang, 2019; Kramer et al. 2019).

Therefore, talking about organizations, both public and private, implies bearing in mind that they are made up of a set of elements that function independently but seek common goals (DuHadway et al. 2018). According to the above, organizations are social and technical systems where the human component represents an important factor in the planning, organization, direction, control and decision-making processes, in order to achieve the established goals (Haroon & Malik, 2018). In addition, communication is the basis of human relations and, in the organizational sphere, it is related to the timely decision-making process (Priyohadi & Suhariadi, 2020).

Organizations represent a coordinated unit, made up of members with common goals, who function with relative constancy in order to achieve their objectives (Schad, 2019). In any case, it must also be recognized that individual objectives may at times be different from organizational objectives. Although this disagreement may occur, which is common to all organizations, it is through intra-organizational social relations and communication processes that general coordination is achieved, where people and the organization end up fulfilling their respective objectives. In effect, communication constitutes then the fundamental basis of interaction between organizational members, where the content or message is transmitted through some channels, giving rise to the continuous process between sender, content, channel and receiver (Jahn, 2018).

Following the approach, internal communication is considered as a management tool among the members of the organization. It is the human interaction that occurs within organizations and between their members (Akdemir, 2019). This communication must be fluid, motivating and effective in itself, so its functions and objectives must be included within the strategic plan of the organization (Marsen, 2020). Internal communication serves to tell what the organization itself does, creates a climate of involvement and integration among organizational members and, when properly managed, increases motivation and productivity to achieve maximum optimization of the organization's resources and lead carry out projects at lower costs (Jahn, 2018; Kramer et al. 2019).

Some of the most used internal communication tools are internal memos, meetings with team members, bulletin boards, seminars and courses, internal

events, the intranet and, the suggestion box (Akdemir, 2019). This communication is effective when the communication flow patterns, communication channels and the formal and informal nature of communication are adjusted correctly (DuHadway et al. 2018).

The literature allows us to identify some basic premises about organizational communication. First, communication is a process that is based on the transmission of information (Elena-Georgiana et al. 2020). Second, communication has both cognitive and affective implications, framed in the value systems of the organizational members (Marsen, 2020). Third, communication is always an act between subjects, regardless of their hierarchical differences (Knudsen & Nielsen, 2019). Fourth, in organizations, communication does not always correspond to personal interaction, but can have a collective scope (Koehnen, 2019). Finally, communication in organizations does not always follow a stable pattern but is constantly changing (Zalewska-Turzyńska, 2018).

In the communicative act, the sender constructs the message by encoding a thought, for which he must take into account factors such as values, knowledge or the social and cultural system of the other members of the organization (Adeseye & Ariremako, 2019). Therefore, adequate coding requires skill to select the most relevant words, gestures and symbols, since attitudes, preconceptions and beliefs specific to the context must also be considered (Koehnen, 2019; Mukhtar et al. 2020).

An important element associated with the message is the channel through which the information travels (Adeseye & Ariremako, 2019). That channel must be configured in such a way that it allows the message to be translated and interpreted by the receiver (Koehnen, 2019), that is, it is required that the decoding process can take place. It should be considered that in the same way that the sender is delimited by her abilities, attitudes, knowledge and sociocultural system, the receiver is also delimited (Zalewska-Turzyńska, 2018; Knudsen & Nielsen, 2019). That is why the communication process is conceived as a permanent cycle, where interruptions or barriers may occur, eventually forcing the sender to verify the correct interpretation of the message by the receiver, verifying to what extent the transfer of the information was successful (Ada et al. 2018; Juhana & Kadir, 2020).

In this sense, organizational communication, as a basic resource for the development of intra-organizational social relations, must be timely, since it is the fundamental tool to achieve synergy, guide organizational members, publicize

internal policies and, promote the cultural, economic and social development of the organization (Knudsen & Nielsen, 2019; Juhana & Kadir, 2020). Likewise, organizational communication as a process is a management tool aimed at reducing future uncertainty and promoting commitment at all levels (Wirtz & Zimbers, 2018), that is, it is the force of transformation processes and not it is only an auxiliary instrument for organizational management (De Benedicto et al. 2018; Heide, et al. 2018).

Similarly, organizational members are considered the fundamental piece in the communication processes that are managed internally, since it is through them that organizations achieve productivity, quality and excellence in their operations, all due to aspects associated with communication, such as harmonization, feedback, information flow, and mutual respect (De Benedicto et al. 2018; Lee & Lee, 2018). By the way, it can be said that every organization requires adequate communication management as a primary element in organizational processes, and it is in turn the fundamental pillar for the creation of corporate identity, which unfolds in the shared culture among members of the organization (Wirtz & Zimbers, 2018).

However, an inadequate management of organizational communication can impose barriers to daily processes, promoting the lack of fluidity of information, dispersed communication, uncertainty, slowness in the functions and discords between individuals (Basyir et al. 2020). A fundamental aspect that is gathered from these blocking barriers to good communication is the culture, which exerts a significant influence on the attitudes and behavior of all organizational members (Heide, et al. 2018). Therefore, organizational culture is a guarantor of system stability (Lee et al. 2018). In fact, every organization has an associated organizational culture, this is what explains why some of them are rigid or flexible, innovative or conservative (Mukhtar et al. 2020). Therefore, culture affects the attitudes of its members and makes the organization have unique distinctive features, supported by shared values, principles, beliefs, expectations, ideas and behaviors (Primadani et al. 2018; Basyir et al. 2020).

The link between communication and organizational culture is evident. The organizational communication process is materialized through the exchange of information, which can be vertical ascending, horizontal ascending, vertical descending, horizontal descending, or lateral (between employees of the same level or hierarchy). This communication involves a socialization process where the organizational members adapt and feedback according to the objectives

that each one has and the communication tools they use (Barbour et al. 2018; Jahn, 2018). Therefore, communication in organizations constitutes the tool to establish information exchange ties between their members (Schad, 2019), which depend on the organizational culture supported by internal codes of conduct (Elena-Georgiana et al. 2020).

Culture in organizations refers to a system of meanings shared by its members and that differentiates one organization from another (Warrick, 2017). This culture, at the organizational level, is preserved thanks to stories, symbols, rituals, ideology and values (Dubey et al. 2017). Likewise, culture is characterized because it has a significant impact on the behavior of the members of the organization, develops in them attitudes that link them, conditions their principles and beliefs, and mobilizes them to work in a coordinated manner based on the achievement of organizational goals (Warrick, 2017).

Additionally, culture is the product of a process that occurs permanently in the organization through which its members adopt and internalize a series of responses that they offer in certain circumstances. This organizational culture manages to explain to a certain extent some behaviors of the members of the organization that are sometimes expected, but that in others are surprising (Bowers et al. 2017).

Organizational culture, as a concept, allows organizations to be understood as a small community, in which the orientation guidelines of the participants reflect their distinctive and unique character in terms of the elaboration of their processes of socialization, definition and establishment of norms and structures. In addition, this culture is essential in terms of the dynamics and effectiveness of organizations, since it influences the results they achieve (Barrett, 2018).

2. Communication and collective work

In the organizational field, work teams are an essential part since they define how the different operations are carried out, they also produce a beneficial synergy for the organization through a coordinated effort (Doo & Kim, 2020; Barrett, 2018). In this sense, organizations have restructured many of their processes, going from a production focused on individual performance to one where teamwork is more privileged, which increases productivity levels, increases competitiveness, and reaches prominent positions in the industry (Bondoc & Taicu, 2019).

A work team is made up of individual efforts that, when properly managed, usually result in higher performance than the simple sum of the contributions of each individual (Lantara, 2019). The strategic use of work teams creates the potential for an organization to be much more productive. In addition, the fulfillment of the team's goals usually occurs thanks to the supervision of a coordinator or leader, who has the important function of complementing individual capacities, planning activities and assigning responsibilities (Doo & Kim, 2020).

Now, as is natural in any group of people, conflicts and tensions in the organization can appear suddenly and even extend over time. Indeed, in work teams there may be conflict between their members. In any case, these conflicts do not always mean something negative for the team, some of them are functional, that is, they stimulate discussion and debate, promoting constructive critical examination of problems, which tends to lead to better decision-making and improvement team performance (Doo & Kim, 2020). In this way, efficient work teams are characterized by facing certain levels of conflict, and this makes their members assume a shared responsibility with respect to the objectives (Manafzadeh et al. 2018).

In this vein, it is valid to point out that in a work team it is important to link the functions and activities developed by each of its members, since this is what creates that sense of integrity that promotes individual capacities and generates solid trust within the team, where responsibilities are shared by members in a coordinated and planned way to achieve the common goal (Barge, 2018). The latter implies that managers must make use of managerial mechanisms that allow them to promote work in proactive and synergistic teams inspired by the desire to fulfill organizational goals (Bondoc & Taicu, 2019).

Work teams can have distinctive characteristics. For example, some teams meet to share ideas and offer suggestions to improve methods and processes, quality, efficiency, work environment, and can take corrective actions by consensus (Koschmann & Campbell, 2019). Other teams may take on supervisory responsibilities, including collective control of the pace of work, the distribution of tasks, the assignment of breaks, and some inspection procedures (Indrasari et al. 2019). Also, on some occasions temporary teams are formed where their members are grouped to carry out a specific task (Lăzăroiu, 2018). These teams allow people from different areas of the organization to exchange information, develop new ideas, solve problems and coordinate projects.

Regardless of the characteristics of the work team, the challenge is to ensure that each of its members communicate openly and honestly, that they can confront differences and resolve conflicts in a constructive way, and that they are able to establish the distinction between their particular goals and those of the team or organization (Koschmann & Campbell, 2019). In addition, a work team is strengthened when communication among its members is clear, otherwise there would be no efficiencies in the development of that team's work (Ilyash et al. 2019; Manafzadeh et al. 2018). It must also be recognized that adequate communication between organizational members implies transferring meanings and understanding adjusted to a common cognitive framework (Atouba, 2018; Boholm, 2019). This means that the information that is communicated must be encoded and transmitted through the appropriate channel, in such a way that each member receives it, can process it and subsequently understand it (Indrasari et al. 2019; Kang, 2020).

The importance of the transfer of meanings and their understanding is remarkable, since it is what guarantees to a certain extent knowing and understanding the cultural, political, economic, normative and social transformations of the organization, as long as these transformations are communicated in an effective way through convenient channels, regardless of the technology used for it, thus guaranteeing the processing of information objectively (Choi et al. 2018). This ensures efficient teamwork, the generation of reliable results, the addition of value and the benefit of all organizational members (Sanders et al. 2020).

Organizational communication is supported in an important way in the available technology. This situation makes it necessary for people in the organization to familiarize themselves with this technology, for which it is necessary to constantly update about its applications and possible uses, since this would allow the information to be processed throughout the organization and reach all areas (Salem, 2018). It is therefore convenient for the organization to eliminate barriers to the efficient use of this technology, and to the extent possible, to modify those prejudices that hinder its appropriation, because otherwise, it would be difficult for the organization to continuously adapt to the new needs generated by the environment (Atouba et al. 2019; Tracy & Donovan, 2018). By the way, it should be borne in mind that the success of organizations is clearly related to the ways of thinking on the part of their members. It is in this aspect that all efforts to improve organizational communication should be concentrated (Choi et al. 2018; Ilyash et al. 2019).

3. Final remarks

The points discussed in this reflection have allowed us to analyze the possible ways to promote organizational efficiency. However, this article differs from others that have also analyzed this issue, by taking a much more inclusive position on the important role of members of the organization. In other words, this work did not focus on aspects associated with rationality or profit maximization, but instead alluded to the need to strengthen social relations between the different members of the organization in order for it to achieve its objectives, in a harmonious and balanced way. One of the aspects that affect the achievement of the objectives is efficient organizational communication.

An efficient organizational communication provides solid mechanisms for the strengthening of work teams, which allows them to develop their functions effectively and proactively, contributing to the achievement of defined goals and the benefit of the organization (Suh et al. 2018; Atouba, 2018). In those organizations in which communication is weak or fragmented, the tasks are carried out by area, each one orienting itself to its specific objectives taking little account of what the others do (Kang, 2020), which implies that organizational communication tends to not be effective. In these organizational contexts of fragmented communication, managers are called upon to promote the use of abilities and skills that allow each organizational member to give their best, contributing all their abilities and forming efficient work teams to take on the challenges of the environment (Salem, 2018; Boholm, 2019).

Another aspect discussed in this article has been teamwork. The performance of the team depends on the individual work of its members. The literature also shows that this individual performance can be strengthened by the ability of team leaders to positively influence their collaborators. However, in the works reviewed in this article, few references are made to the creation of meaning, a process that allows an individual to make sense of their experience in the organization, helping others to do so as well. That is, the creation of meaning as a collective process. This could be a category of analysis that would allow to advance in the understanding of organizational efficiency leveraged in teamwork in future research.

Additionally, if they want to form efficient work teams, organizations must constantly strengthen the learning of their members. Indeed, an organization that is in continuous learning can more easily adapt to the environment and

thus remain in time (Sumiati & Nikmah, 2020). For this, it would be convenient to strengthen the collective mental schemes in such a way that a vision shared by all the people in the organization is achieved, something that although it is not easy to achieve, would help to achieve the objectives (Lăzăroiu, 2018). Likewise, it is appropriate to enhance the competencies of each of the members so that they are much more efficient in each of their tasks (Atouba et al. 2019). The latter could be guaranteed, to a certain extent, if the selection processes of the people who will join the organization are permanently improved.

Likewise, in order to generate an environment of trust and commitment on the part of each of the members of the organization, a collective compensation scheme can be implemented, in which instead of rewarding a single person for a certain achievement, also recognize the role that others have played in achieving this achievement. Sometimes, for example, an employee is rewarded by assigning her to a higher-ranking position, which is fine, but it fails if her aptitudes for that position are not first verified (Gherardi, 2019; Sumiati & Nikmah, 2020). That is, the training must be focused on the present and future needs of the organization and on the development plan of each individual, since this also covers the expectations and needs of self-realization and personal growth in the organization (Choi et al. 2018).

In addition, through training workshops, it helps people assimilate the change processes experienced by the organization, thus allowing them to adequately face the challenges to their daily work practices (Suh et al. 2018). This, likewise, helps organizational growth in an integral way and promotes the achievement of common objectives (Tracy & Donovan, 2018; Gherardi, 2019). Finally, it is necessary to highlight the importance of fostering favorable communication environments, where the employee develops a sense of belonging, feels valued, their opinions are taken into account, can strengthen their capacities, thus making the organization sustainable over time, which benefits both internal and external stakeholders (Sanders et al. 2020).

As a suggestion for future research on organizational efficiency, it would be convenient to examine the relationship between the objectives of the organization and the objectives of those who belong to it, approaching this analysis from an eclectic perspective. This would make it possible to incorporate explanatory categories, borrowed from other areas of knowledge, such as ethics, social justice, psychological processes, compensation schemes, and the role of institutions.

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