

## **Accessibility for the inclusion of visually impaired people in internal communication**

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Submission ID: 127

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to reflect on the accessibility conditions necessary for the inclusion of people with visual impairments in the internal communication of organizations, from the perspective of Public Relations. It is considered that the area must act in the promotion of the “interests-of-others”, in addition to the organizational one, especially due to its fundamental role in organizational activist awareness. The paper presents a bibliographical research, more specifically the applied technique of narrative literature’s review, with a qualitative approach. The reflection makes it possible to understand the possibilities of using accessibility features in internal communication, in addition to highlighting the aggregation of such practices in Public Relations work routines as a strategic form of communication in the imagetic/visual society scenario. The research is ongoing, and the next stage involves carrying out field research, with the application of questionnaires with visually impaired people.

**Keywords:** Public Relations; Internal Communication; Accessibility; Visual Impairment; Inclusion.

### **Introduction**

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the most diverse areas of society is an important topic in contemporary discussions, since, in recent decades, social demands in search of respect for bodily, mental and social diversity have impacted regulations, standards of

behavior and sociability. However, there are several barriers that these people face in the workplace: from issues such as transportation, access to information and technological devices, to the reinforcement of stigmas and prejudices on the part of other workers and the organizational culture itself (Silveira, Pereira & Barcelos 2014).

This is because organizations are subject to reproducing barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully enjoying their rights and an ableist and exclusionary culture present in society (Oliveira, Andrelo & Maciel 2023).

In the organizational environment, individuals are in constant interactions that enable communication and the performance of work. Thus, considering the centrality of the visual in an imagetic society (Machin 2014; Baitello Jr. 2014), the question arises: what issues should be considered in internal communication for/with workers with visual impairments?

This paper, therefore, aims to reflect on the accessibility conditions necessary for the inclusion of people with visual impairments in the internal communication of organizations, from the perspective of Public Relations. It is considered that the area must act to promote the interests of others, in addition to the organizational, especially due to its fundamental role in raising awareness and opening spaces for publics in situations of social vulnerability, such as the “social conscience” of organizations (Bowen 2005) and organizational activists.

The way in which internal communication is carried out today (channels, programs and communication actions), although they are considered strategic and aimed at the internal public, do not consider sensorial diversity in the reception of information, especially those communications based on aspects visual (images of the most diverse nature - photographs, graphics, corporate presentations, videos, video calls, etc.). As internal communication is a type of Public Relations specialty (Men 2021), it is up to the area to strategically consider how (or if) the internal public accesses the information that circulates in the organizational environment (Oliveira, Escarabello Junior & Maciel 2023).

This work, then, presents a bibliographical research, the initial stage of a master's research in development.

### **Methodological design**

The research has a qualitative approach. Firstly, a bibliographical research was carried out, using the narrative literature review technique (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges 2019), in which works are chosen based on familiarity with authors, groups and themes.

The choice for bibliographic research was due to the issue of circularity and interdependence between the professional practice of Public Relations and scientific research throughout its history in the Brazilian scenario (Kunsch 2022), as well as in the field of Organizational Communication.

In addition to bibliographical research, we intend to apply, in the future, field research (Gil, 2008) with visually impaired workers. It is believed that the participation of people with disabilities is methodologically essential. One must research “with” these people, and not just “about” them, so that it is possible to reveal new ways to do communicational practices (Berni & Maldonado, 2023).

The technique to be used in field research will be to apply questionnaires with people with visual impairments, to understand their perceptions as users about accessibility in internal communication. All data collected will be analyzed using the Content Analysis technique (Bardin 2016). The results of the bibliographical research are presented below.

### **Internal communication: channels, processes and meanings**

Studies on internal communication have soared in the last decade, especially after 2011 (Lee & Yue 2020). And, in addition to the academic sphere, internal communication has also developed in the practical scenario. Internal communication is understood as an area of a

multidisciplinary nature, positioned between Public Relations, Human Resource Management and Internal Marketing (Men 2021), although, as a practical function, it is recognized as a specialization of Public Relations (Men 2021).

Usually, Internal Communication is summarized only as practice, tools and instruments that aim to improve an organization's management process (Marchiori 2010) in a transmissional way. However, we understand with Marchiori (2010, p. 148) that “it is necessary to view communication as a process, as a perspective of greater involvement, as something that generates knowledge for people, that modifies structures and behaviors”.

Andrelo (2013, p. 122) indicates that regardless of the flows or instruments that are used, “internal communication can assume different roles in organizations, beyond the mere dissemination of information of interest to senior management”. Andrelo (2016; 2013) and Marchiori (2014) therefore point to the need for strategic communication practices and instruments aimed at internal communication, so that a personalized communication practice with stakeholders can be built. Thus, “it is known that internal communication should not be reduced to the means used, but they must be considered, since they will often mediate the reality to be produced and debated and the public to be reached” (Andrelo 2013, p. 119).

Therefore, “communication channels can complete and support the process” (Marchiori 2014, p. 116), since communication products also have a dialogical potential in the interlocution between organizational agents (such as leaders, workers , shareholders, etc.) and enable the construction of meanings.

The construction of meaning is continuous and takes place in the context of interaction, in a cycle of production, reproduction, negotiation and resignification (Marchiori, 2010).

Furthermore, Men (2021 p. 2) states that “internal stakeholders, predominantly employees, are active players in the internal communication process, who co-construct meaning with the

organization and co-create the relationship as opposed to being merely passive message receivers”.

In this way, “internal communication, even if on behalf of the organization, must demonstrate commitment to employees” (Almeida & Andrelo, 2022, p. 30), since it is based on communication engaged with enabling workers to access to information (be it about the work, the organization, the tasks to be developed, the organizational culture, etc.) that workers construct meanings about organizations and themselves (Andersson 2020). Therefore, a worker-centered vision is assumed for the construction of internal communication.

### **Accessibility for people with visual impairments**

In the visual/hypervisual society (Machin 2014), people who do not access the world through vision remain on the margins of society. Baitello Jr. (2014 p. 51) states that “we consume images in all their forms: brands, fashions, signatures, trends, attributes, adjectives, figures, idols, symbols, icons, logos”. All the time individuals are surrounded by visual signs that, in most cases, are the home of everyday information: signs, plaques, printed materials, publications in social media, etc. Wiesenberg and Vercic (2021, p. 230) state that “visual elements have become a predominant part of our daily lives, especially through universal internet and social media access at any time”.

Access to information for people with visual impairments occurs through the use of other senses, such as hearing and touch, for example. Thus, accessibility “refers to the condition that objects, devices, environments, processes, goods, products and services must meet in order to be understandable, usable and practicable by all people safely, comfortably and in the most natural and autonomous way possible” (Ancine 2018).

With regard to access to information and communication, the use of accessibility features as promoters of this access is recognized. Greco and Jankowska (2020) name media accessibility

resources as MA modalities. The authors reinforce that “MA concerns access to media and non-media objects, services and environments through media solutions, for any person who cannot or would not be able to, either partially or completely, access them in their original form” (Greco & Jankowska 2020 , p. 64).

There are several accessibility resources and Assistive Technologies for people with visual impairments, such as screen reader software, image descriptions, audio description of audiovisual products, Braille, consideration of accessible typography, such as sans serifs (so that characters are not confused in case of low vision), consideration of a visual contrast between the background and the elements that make up an image, considering low vision and color blindness, among others (Magalhães & Maciel 2021; Moreira 2023). Such resources can be used in the most different contexts in which access to information and communication is sought, such as in the mainstream media, on websites, on social media, as well as in the organizational context.

### **Inclusion of people with visual impairments in organizations**

It is recognized that inclusion is a social process that requires changes in practices, behaviors and culture, in addition to integrative processes. Previously, tolerance prevailed in relation to the presence of people with disabilities in certain spaces, but without a significant effort to guarantee their effective inclusion. Sasaki (2005 p. 21) argues that “none of these forms of social integration fully satisfies the rights of all people with disabilities, as integration requires few changes in society in terms of attitudes, spaces, objects and social practices”.

In the case of visually impaired people field research indicates that few adaptations are made to organizations' internal communications and communications products, or else they are carried out in a “remedied” way, after the requirement of a need from someone already hired

(Pereira & Passerino 2018). Wiesenberg and Vercic (2021) state that organizational communication these days has intentionally used visual elements. The authors indicate that

In the organizational context, visuals can be used for various strategic purposes, for instance, internally (e. g., stimulating organizational culture and identity) or externally (e.g., in product or brand advertising as well as public relations) (Wiesenberg & Vercic 2021, p. 230).

It is then necessary to think about how to enable access to the information contained in these communication products.

### **Reflection: visual accessibility in internal communication**

Internal communication, as seen previously, can be strategic and aimed at promoting worker participation, organizational interests but also promoting well-being in the organizational environment. Wiesenberg and Vercic (2021) state that Public Relations and strategic communication have always used visual communication for the purposes of power agents to create a specific meaning that supports the objectives of these agents. It is therefore necessary to allocate in communication activities the consideration of accessibility to this visual communication as a strategic way of meeting the interests of workers with disabilities.

It is possible, then, to think about communication for people with visual impairments that considers the use of technologies and accessibility features in publications and internal channels (Oliveira, Andrelo & Maciel 2023). Therefore, the integration and use of: audio description in audiovisual products (videos, video classes, pre-recorded training, etc.) should be considered; descriptions of all visual elements in an internal publication (images, photographs, tables, graphs); alternative versions of bulletins, *newsletters* and wall-newspapers (such as audio, Braille, digital versions for reading with screen reader software; audio description of corporate presentations; audio description of people and environments in video calls; installation of screen reader software on the organization's

devices (computers, smartphones, etc.). Other adaptations may be necessary and it is in contact with workers with disabilities that they can be identified by organizations.

Access to information, through the use of such resources, allows employees with disabilities to have access to institutional messages and construct meanings for forming opinions (Luvizotto & Magalhães 2023) based on understanding the communications and information that every other organizational agents already had (Oliveira, Andrelo & Maciel 2023).

### **Non-conclusive considerations**

This paper aimed to reflect on the accessibility conditions necessary for the inclusion of people with visual impairments in the internal communication of organizations, from the perspective of Public Relations. It is recognized that internal communication must serve not only the information transmission interests of the organization, but also meet the communication needs of individuals. Even though it is a technical and transmissional aspect, accessibility must be considered so that workers with disabilities can equally access the same information as everyone else. Even though it may seem merely technical, the use of accessibility resources in internal communication is also a cultural issue: the definition and construction of a constant practice of using accessibility features only occurs with the construction of an inclusive organizational culture (Oliveira, Andrelo & Maciel 2023; Silveira, Pereira & Barcelos 2014).

From the construction of regulations, policies and organizational guidelines, accessibility can be incorporated into the work routines of internal communication professionals, as in the case of public relations, who, in fact, can act in maintaining the sphere of influence in organizations so that such practices are incorporated into the culture.

It is hoped that this paper, although it is only a theoretical reflection, will open doors for the recognition of accessibility aspects in the construction of internal communication strategies in

organizations, and that, in the future, with field research to be carried out with visually impaired people, their experience contributed to a new approach to internal communication.

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