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Ableism in culture and internal communication: meanings evoked by visually impaired workers from the perspective of Public Relations

(Full paper)

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the experiences of visually impaired workers with internal communication in organizations, through the lens of Public Relations. The study has a qualitative approach and does not intend to statistically represent people with visual impairment in Brazil. Based on field research with online questionnaires, it seeks to capture diverse experiences that reveal possibilities for critical analysis of the scenario of inclusion and accessibility for these workers. It starts with a qualitative and descriptive approach of responses from a field survey applied to 34 visually impaired workers. The results indicate that feelings of dependence, inequality and unpreparedness of organizations are evoked, in addition to manifestations of ableism in the structures and cultures of organizations. Public Relations is invoked to denounce power relations and to assume an activist role for a cultural change in internal communication practices.

Keywords: Public Relations; Visual Impairment; Internal Communication; Organizational Culture.



Introduction

Organizations, in any sector, are part of the lives of individuals in contemporary society. Organizations, as part of society and which permeate everyday life, are increasingly influenced by social changes, in such a way that the relationship of interdependence between organizations and society becomes evident (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017).

The system of organization-society relationships presupposes the adjustment of needs, reciprocity and the development of shared actions (Carareto, Andrelo and Ruão, 2020, p. 2), as organizations fit into society based on the roles they play, meeting the needs of society. In this way, this relationship is permeated by issues of power and influence in the social environment (Carareto, Andrelo and Ruão, 2020).

It is understood that the meaning of an organization lies in the relationship it establishes with society (Ruão, 2016; Carareto, 2022), so it is in the relationships and communication processes between organizational subjects and the organization itself that individual and/or group practices reach a collective structure of meanings (Oliveira, 2009), which give meaning to the positions that each subject assumes in this interaction process.

The internal public is an important part of the constitution of organizations. In fact, visually impaired workers are also part of the organizations they work for. However, inclusion in organizations touches on several dimensions. In general, inclusion in the labor market has



gained strength “from political movements, support from social organizations, legislation and with the paradigm shift of the population itself” (Schafhauzer and Silva, 2023, p. 3089).

In the legal field, for example, there is Law No. 8,213 of 1991, also known as the “Quota Law”, which establishes that companies in Brazil with more than 100 employees must progressively fill 2% to 5% of positions by hiring people with disabilities or rehabilitated people (Law No. 8,213, 1991).

However, even when organizations hire employees with disabilities, they have allocated these workers to specific roles, due to a lack of faith in the leadership of these people (Tette, Carvalho-Freitas and Oliveira, 2014). In applied studies, it is clear that the process of inclusion in organizational spaces is not necessarily an egalitarian process, but rather restricted to meeting the quota, without giving workers with disabilities the opportunity to contribute and grow (Pereira and Passerino, 2018; Oliveira, 2024).

In part, it can be said that the lack of respect for inclusion processes is due to the crystallization of stigmas and prejudices in the construction of meanings about people with disabilities. Veronezi (2019) believes that prejudice and stereotypes are the result of misinformation by organizational agents about people with disabilities. Thus, this work aims to analyze the experiences of visually impaired workers with internal communication in organizations, through the lens of Public Relations. The work has a qualitative approach and does not intend to statistically represent people with visual impairments in Brazil. Based on field research with online questionnaires, the aim is to capture diverse experiences that



reveal possibilities for critical analysis of the scenario of inclusion and accessibility for these workers. Below, some basic concepts for the analysis that will be presented below are presented.

Theoretical approach: ableism and inclusion

There is a direct relationship between inclusion, exclusion and the concept of ableism. Campbell (2001) was one of the main authors to explore this concept by questioning the collective sense of the “perfect” body. Campbell (2001, p. 44) explains that ableism is “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human”.

In ableist views, disability is seen as a diminished state of the human being (Campbell, 2001). Gesser, Block and Mello (2020, p. 18) state that the close relationship between ableism and eugenic practices resides in the assumptions of body-normativity, which, throughout the history of humanity, have justified “the compulsory use of practices of incarceration, involuntary sterilization and even elimination of people with disabilities” (Gesser, Block and Mello, 2020, p. 18).



Like racism, LGBTQIA+phobia, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, ableism consists of a lens through which society views the standard of bodies and minds (Gesser, Block and Mello, 2020). Thus,

ableism is structural and structuring, that is, it conditions, crosses and constitutes subjects, organizations and institutions, producing ways of relating based on an ideal of subject that is performatively produced by the compulsory reiteration of normative capacities that consider the bodies of women, black people, indigenous people, elderly people, LBGTI people and people with disabilities as ontologically and materially deficient (Gesser, Block and Mello, 2020, p. 18).

Overcoming these systems of exclusion, segregation and integration occurs through overcoming ableism, that is, through a structural change that encompasses other forms of organization of society, such as paradigms that place equity and inclusion at the heart of how society functions. Thus, inclusion is conceptualized as

the process by which common social systems are made suitable for all human diversity – composed of ethnicity, race, language, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, disability and other attributes – with the participation of people



themselves in the formulation and execution of these adaptations (Sasaki, 2009, p. 10).

Brazilian and international legislation have made progress towards increasing accountability for inclusion. As in previous regulations, the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Brazilian Inclusion Law (Law No. 13,146, 2015) indicate that it is the role of the State and the families of persons with disabilities to promote inclusion. However, they explicitly add that it is also the role of society, institutions and organizations. In other words, all social actors have a legal obligation to include everyone (Law No. 13,146, 2015), including organizations and the professionals who work in them.

The field of Public Relations

The field of Organizational Communication and Public Relations is thus named in the Brazilian scenario. Internationally, in some other cultural scenarios, they are approached as distinct fields, although with many intersections and mutual contributions (Ruão, 2016; Oliveira, 2014). More recently, they have both been contemplated and almost embraced by the broader field of Strategic Communication (Hallahan *et al.*, 2007; Oliveira, 2014; Zeffass *et al.*, 2018).



Zerfass *et al.* (2018) explains that, in some scenarios and by some authors, the term Strategic Communication is used as a synonym for Public Relations, but with the aim of disassociating itself from the bad reputation that the term carries and the polysemy that each cultural scenario has. In other cases, Strategic Communication is considered as a new field of Communication, in which Public Relations and Organizational Communication are sublayers, or subsystems (Oliveira, 2014).

Lemos (2017) explains that Public Relations research on a global scale, although strongly associated with organizational studies, administration and strategic management, has much broader disciplinary connections. L'Etang (2013) indicates that the genealogical tree of Public Relations has roots in fields such as Sociology, Philosophy, Rhetoric, Psychology, Anthropology, Diplomacy, Ethics, etc. Thus, the trend in recent decades has been to rescue these origins and create a multiplicity of perspectives on Public Relations, with a view to its contribution and influence in the social environment (Ihlen and Van Ruler, 2009).

The history of Public Relations in Brazil is strongly marked by the sociopolitical context of the 20th century, especially by the country's economic and industrial development and the military dictatorship (Kunsch, 2022). Kunsch (1997) states that, based on extensive research in the area, the influence of the military did in fact occur in the practice of Public Relations not only in the governmental sphere, but also in the context of private organizations.



Although the activity had existed since the beginning of the century, it was from the 1950s onwards, with the arrival of multinationals, that Public Relations expanded. The foreign companies that arrived in the country “brought with them a culture of valuing communication, especially in the areas of advertising and public relations” (Kunsch, 2022, p. 17). Furthermore, with the growth of the communication and culture industries in the same decade (and in the following ones) and the expansion of the means of communication, there was a great opening of opportunities for the area (Kunsch, 2022).

At that historical moment, Public Relations established itself as an activity strongly linked to the business sector (Kunsch, 2022). This fundamental characteristic was due to the direct influence that Public Relations had from the North American paradigm, “to talk about the history of public relations in the country, the starting point for recurring narratives was always to describe what happened in the United States” (Kunsch, 2022, p. 18).

However, it is undeniable that, since the 1980s, Public Relations have undergone some transformations in Brazil and around the world. This change was especially due to the adoption of new theories that, although they were developed outside of hegemonic theories, signaled new theoretical-practical approaches, such as the Critical School of Public Relations (L'Etang and Peczka, 1996; Silva, 2018).

The most critical perspectives in Public Relations have evolved on the international scene especially since the second half of the 1980s (Edwards, 2016) and from L'Etang and Peczka (1996). They emerged so that Public Relations can use reflections on the power



relations that exist between organizations and audiences (Gonçalves, 2015). The focus now shifts to the different power structures manifested in language and behavior (Ihlen and Van Ruler, 2009), based on the consideration of political, sociocultural and economic conditions that shape the practice of Public Relations (Gonçalves, 2015) and the situations of the audiences.

Furthermore, these critical views consider that Public Relations, as an activity, has privileged the interests of organizations throughout its existence (L'Etang, 2013), to the detriment of the needs of the public and other perspectives of Public Relations other than organizational ones (Henriques, 2021), which are already effervescing in the Latin American and Brazilian context (Lemos, 2018).

In the context of Brazil, this transformative impulse of a managerial and functionalist perspective occurred especially after the end of the military dictatorship and the development of other currents in the academic field – such as Public Relations against the Current/Popular (Peruzzo, 1986). The importance of the critique developed by Peruzzo (1986) for the research scenario in the area is also noteworthy.

Lemos (2018), in a historical review of the development of Public Relations trends in Brazil, finds that, from this period and these other trends, the area evolved beyond the dominant paradigm of the corporate world, achieving a broad vision of public interests and social values.



Peruzzo's (1986) pioneering work brought to Public Relations research a more arduous assessment of the role of the professional and the political nature of the profession. Public relations professionals began to be understood as instruments of capital and social order, who acted to promote instrumentalization (Peruzzo, 1986). The dominant practices and narratives of Public Relations also camouflaged the oppression that public relations professionals themselves suffered and anesthetized other professionals regarding the contradictions of the work they carried out (Peruzzo, 1986).

From this criticism, it is understood that Public Relations have a role in maintaining the system, but could also subvert it when its techniques, processes and instruments were used, mainly, for the public interest and civil society (Peruzzo, 1986).

The turn of the century was essential for the development of critical perspectives in the field of Public Relations, mainly due to the search for theoretical support in other areas of social sciences and thus considering Public Relations beyond a mere organizational agent that acts in favor of organizations.

This work specifically discusses the performance in organizations, which is called the meso-social or organizational approach to Public Relations (Lemos, 2017).

In the organizational dimension, Public Relations are seen as a professional practice of managing organizational communication, but also as a phenomenon of the organization's relationships with various social agents. And, in this reflexive system of late modernity, organizations “experience a need to reflect more on their position and behavior to meet



societal demands” (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017, p. 7), while Public Relations, as the “social conscience” of organizations (Bowen, 2005), are called upon to become activists of the public, so that organizations can identify social demands such as respect for differences (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017).

These considerations specifically address the role of public relations professionals, who, by assuming this role of “organizational activist”, allocate the area as pro-democracy and which integrates other worldviews (such as those of political minorities, social movements and civil society institutions) into daily strategies and practices within the scope of organizational communication (Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002).

From these perspectives of how professionals can act within the organizational sphere, the field of Public Relations begins to be allocated to the field of citizenship. However, this does not necessarily remove the weight of professional performance in corporate business and private interests (Henriques, 2021). Professionals working in the organizational scene are now required to pay attention to their roles as citizens, their moral and civic co-responsibilities (Peruzzo, 2021) as designers of actions, programs and communication managers.

When we consider the organizational scene as a continuity of the other spheres of an individual's sociability (Marques and Oliveira, 2022), all these social aspects also touch on the relationships and communication processes built within the organizations where Public Relations operate.



Workplaces should be spaces in which all employees are treated with equality, respect, and dignity. This involves promoting values such as diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are fundamental to the full exercise of citizenship. However, “by prioritizing the interests of capital, in the logic of the capitalist mode of production, [organizations] end up encouraging individualism, hedonism, competition, and consumerism” (Peruzzo, 2021, p. 279).

In this way, the characteristic aspects of the organizational environment and culture and the practice of internal communication are presented below, as a space for the action/existence of Public Relations.

Organizational environment and culture

Cultures are hardly just something planned and presumable – they are products of the interactive process and are formed by such processes, that is, by communication (Marchiori, 2013). In other words, culture can be understood “as a system of meanings produced within the scope of social practices through communicative interactions between individuals” (França, 2013, p. 89).

In the organizational context, it is understood that “culture is constructed, maintained and reproduced by people, because it is they – rather than an autonomous process of socialization, rites, social practices – who create meanings and understandings”



(Marchiori, 2013, p. 101-102). The human factor must be highlighted: it is in human relationships that culture is rescued and reproduced on a daily basis.

Thus, based on interactions and communication processes, organizational agents place tension and circulate the meanings of their cultures (Baldissera, 2011), so that the culture of the norms and daily styles of organizational action meet, collide and integrate with those of the subjects.

Communication acts directly in the (re)weaving of meanings of organizational culture (Baldissera, 2011), in a relationship of interdependence: the formation of organizational culture occurs continuously and is (re)constructed in the daily relationships between organizational agents, so that communication, in addition to “transporting” current cultural aspects, reorganizes them (Marchiori, 2013).

Organizational culture is transmitted and reinterpreted in internal communication processes: just as organizational culture includes the existence of a culture of communication, that is, guidelines and ways of communicating are presented in the culture, such as in code of conduct, etc. (Almeida and Andrelo, 2022).

Based on such considerations, communication is the record and transport of culture, in documents (such as standards, code of conduct, bulletins), orally (in dialogues, meetings, etc.) (Marchiori, 2013), including the stigmatizing values and meanings that exist about disability and bodies and minds outside of normativity. Based on such meanings, violent



practices and discourses against people with disabilities circulate in organizational cultures (Silveira, Pereira and Barcelos, 2014).

Methodology approach

This research has a qualitative approach and an exploratory-descriptive nature. Field research was carried out with people with visual impairments (Gil, 2008). It is believed that the participation of people with disabilities in research that addresses issues of inclusion and accessibility is essential (Arias-Badia, Bestard-Bou and Hermosa-Ramírez, 2022).

Methodologically, the importance of researching with people with disabilities and listening to them is recognized (Collar Berni and Maldonado, 2023) so that it is possible to reveal new paths for communication (Collar Berni and Maldonado, 2023). In the field of accessibility, there is already a consolidated recognition that the different types and techniques of opinion research and reception research are ideal for the validation and collective construction of accessible media products and user experiences with inclusive media environments (Matamala, 2021; Arias-Badia, Bestard-Bou and Hermosa-Ramírez, 2022).

In the organizational environment, individuals use technologies, languages, and processes to perform their work and also for socialization. In the case of people with sensory disabilities – specifically visual impairment–, the exercise of work and everyday practices may be conditioned by the availability of accessibility features, tools, and opportunities. For



a person with visual disabilities, for example, to work with a computer, it is important that a screen reader *software* is installed.

The technique chosen for field research is the application of a questionnaire to visually impaired people, online and anonymously (it does not require any personal identification, such as name, document or confidential information), with open and closed questions.

This research instrument was chosen based on a convenience consultation with a group of eight visually impaired people who had already worked, together with the authors of the research, in research and extension activities within a laboratory at the authors' home university.

The questionnaire was hosted on the *Google Forms platform* and consists of 17 short, initial questions about demographic data and the respondents' positions, roles and job functions; nine questions about experiences with accessibility in internal communication (four of which were essay questions and five were multiple choice questions); five opinion questions about access conditions (three of which were essay questions and two were multiple choice questions).

The field research was conducted using non-probabilistic sampling (Gil, 2008) and was voluntary. In addition to the criteria a) being a person with visual impairment and b) working at the time of the research; no other intentional filter was applied to participation in the research. The dissemination of the questionnaire was mediated by institutions of



people with visual impairments with which the author of the research had previously contacted. Arias-Badia, Bestard-Bou and Hermosa-Ramírez (2022), based on interviews with people with disabilities, state that organizations of people with disabilities, especially within civil society, are essential in the discussions and validation of accessibility issues, since “ these organizations represent the shared experience of users, their preferences ” (Arias-Badia; Bestard-Bou; Hermosa-Ramírez, 2022 , p. 67) .

The questionnaire was applied (made available and forwarded online) from April 12 to May 28, 2024 and the dissemination strategy adopted mainly had the support of institutions for people with visual impairments, in addition to contact with professionals in the accessibility area.

It is important to emphasize that there is no intention to generalize and completely represent the perspectives of all people with visual impairments in Brazil, especially due to the qualitative nature of the research . Any and all experiences, opinions, needs and demands of workers with disabilities are valid in this context.

The questionnaire was disseminated mainly via email, groups of people with visual impairments and audio description professionals on *WhatsApp* , the institutions' telephone numbers, Instagram and in some groups on Facebook .

After the collection of responses was completed, Content Analysis (Câmara, 2013) began, with an interpretative nature and using the technique of grouping meanings, not necessarily classified by words .



Findings/Results

A total of 40 responses were obtained. However, the question “are you visually impaired?”, which was of an eliminatory nature, received 6 negative responses. Therefore, 34 valid responses were considered.

Of the respondents, 28 are blind and six are visually impaired. Seventeen identify as male, while 17 identify as female. The age range of respondents was concentrated between 31 and 45 years old. Only five people are between 18 and 30 years old and only three are 60 years old or older.

The respondents' level of education varied considerably, with the majority having completed higher education (10 people), completed high school (7 people) and a good number having postgraduate degrees (either lato sensu (specialization, MBA) or stricto sensu (master's degree) (12 people). Three respondents had incomplete higher education. Only one respondent had a doctorate and only one had completed elementary school.

Employment data were also collected from the respondents. Regarding the work model, 16 respondents work in person, while nine work remotely and nine in a hybrid model. Regarding the length of service in the current organization, the vast majority have between six and ten years of service (ten people), followed by those who have worked for 11 to 20 years (eight people). Six respondents have worked in their organizations for two to



five years, while another six have worked for less than two years. Finally, only four respondents have worked for more than 21 years. The respondents work mainly in government organizations (15 people) and private organizations/companies (14 people), with only five respondents working in civil society organizations.

More than half of the respondents work in activities that touch on and/or are related to the area of accessibility, even if they intersect with the areas of Technology, Education or Culture (such as audiovisual, publishing, etc.). This may, to some extent, influence the level of knowledge of the subject when answering the questions in the applied research. However, this is not necessarily a negative thing. On the contrary: because the objectives of the research are aligned with an intention to understand experiences in internal communication, having responses from people with visual impairments who have professional experience with accessibility and/or have knowledge of the area is a positive thing and can generate useful insights for the analysis.

Of the 34 valid respondents, 17 stated that they joined the organization through quotas and/or affirmative action programs, while 14 did not use these resources and three preferred not to say.

Discussion and conclusions



The aim is to address the perceptions and experiences of respondents with visual impairment from the critical perspective of Public Relations, which allocates the view of Public Relations to relational and communicational phenomena between organizations and audiences based on the explanation of logics and power relations (Gonçalves, 2015). First, the perceptions and experiences are analyzed from a social and academic perspective of Public Relations, seeking to discuss how theoretical aspects of the area make it possible to interpret and understand phenomena. Second, the perceptions of workers with visual impairment about the treatment they receive and what they perceive of professional practices aimed at accessibility in internal communication are presented.

Finally, a discussion is presented on the role of Public Relations as a social field that includes professional activity (Lemos, 2017) for the inclusion of people with visual impairments, based on the consideration of accessibility as a cultural element.

Social aspects and evidence of power relations

The focus of Public Relations is on manifestations in the language and behaviors of organizations and audiences (Ihlen and Van Ruler, 2009), seeking to understand existing power structures and relations and, in this case studied, mediated by accessibility.

First, it is important to recognize that visually impaired workers can recognize – and already do – the relationship of dependence that arises from the misalignment of



“contributions” from each party. When an organization does not care about accessibility and places the responsibility for accessing information on the worker, the worker seeks other ways to do so, such as with the support of other workers. R1 comments: “in my case, where work is remote, I always need colleagues to describe the images, in the slides they present, the content they are showing me”. This is a scenario in which, even though the organization does not assume responsibility for guaranteeing access, other colleagues collaborate in this in a positive way. R17 had a different experience, for whom, “depending on the behavior, when we ask a coworker for help, they either refuse or are not very willing”.

The relationship of dependence built between the visually impaired worker and other workers can harm the way the former relates to the organizational environment. There is, implicitly, a misalignment of power and autonomy. From this, organizational relationships end up being based on inequality: the other (with visual impairment) needs someone (or something) to make the information available. This mismatch is due to a structural issue in organizations that do not consider accessibility in internal communication. In addition, these organizations may also not be open to dialogue, as revealed by R35's experience: “it is a huge waste of energy to always try to guess my needs when it would be much simpler to talk, since we live together on a daily basis.”

These situations directly deprive workers with disabilities of the exercise of citizenship, since access to information is one of the prerequisites for this (Bonito and Santos, 2020): “if there is no accessibility, the process of independence for people with



disabilities becomes impossible” (R24). However, it is not the case to state, in a forceful manner, that there is no exercise of citizenship where there is dependence, especially because, in a context in which everyone is a citizen, there are indeed relationships of dependence and the construction of networks based on the relationship with others (Santos and Mafra, 2018). However, it is the case to recognize the weight that the way in which relationships are built exerts on this exercise.

When we talk about recognition, it is necessary that it be of differences and individualities, without value judgments and hierarchy between good/bad, better/worse. It turns out that, in the case of people with disabilities, including those with visual impairment, there is a lens from which these subjects are viewed socially: that of ableism.

Ableism, as a bias through which society defines a standard of bodies and minds (Gesser, Block and Mello, 2020), seeks to shape subjects based on the assumptions of body-normativity. Under this logic, people with disabilities come to be seen as a “diminished, inferior state” (Campbell, 2001) and this is reflected in the structures of organizations and the relationships built in the organizational environment.

Ableism is structural and structuring (Gesser, Block and Mello, 2020) and dictates ideal ways of relating, based on capabilities and norms. It is in communication and daily practices that traces of ableism are exposed as a mediator of relationships. Cabral, Gonçalves and Salhani (2018, p. 253) explain that language (oral, written, visual, etc.) is



configured “as the most subtle mechanism, but it is what will legitimize the system of social and productive control through the social discourses and products of culture themselves”.

Through language, communication, and discourse, interactional practices occur in the organizational environment, and this is how ableism manifests itself in communication artifacts. It is undeniable that, as a structure, it exerts power and influence over how relationships are constructed. Calonego (2023, p. 45) states that “power is intrinsically linked to communication, which enables spaces for negotiations and interactions in accordance with organizational strategies.” The interlocutors (whether organizations or other workers) exercise domination that is legitimized by the way society is organized: in hierarchical relationships through the lens of ableism over people with and without disabilities.

The power exercised by organizations over these individuals is the result of a macrosocial structure, of which organizations are a part (Kunsch, 2014). It is the result of the sum of external factors (which are reflected in the internal environment) with power structures imposed by organizations, even if in a masked form – “smart power” (Calonego, 2023, p. 46). Resistance on the part of organizations and the reinforcement of an ableist and visually-centered structure are ways of exercising power over workers with visual impairments. The words “resistance” and “unpreparedness”, specifically, may be appropriate terms to understand, for example, R37’s experience with the difficulties faced in the workplace:



“I have always had a lot of difficulties. Whenever I had to fight, I had to speak out loud and clear, explaining the best way for me and for them to adapt to deal with me. In other words, it always has to come from us, a way of guiding them on how to deal with this situation. I see that people are very lost. The company really needs to guide and provide conditions for other colleagues and employees to deal with what is different, with what is new. It is very difficult for us, but with communication and dialogue, things will adapt” (R37)

Resistance and lack of preparation are aspects that can manifest themselves in organizational cultures. Culture, as a “system of meanings produced within the scope of social practices through communicative interactions between individuals” (França, 2013, p. 89), may not consider the needs of workers with disabilities, since, for this to happen, dialogue between interlocutors, including the organization itself, would be necessary. As expressed by R35, in the search for changes and identification of needs, “it would be much simpler to talk”.

It is in this context that Public Relations are called to enter the field, even though, so far, this chapter has focused on denouncing situations and presenting reflections and proposals on relations of dependence and power, mediated by ableist structures. It is possible (and necessary) to call on Public Relations to become activists for the public, so that organizations identify social demands such as respect for differences (Ihlen and Verhoeven,



2017) and promote cultural changes in favor of diversity and the inclusion of people with disabilities (Silveira, Pereira and Barcelos, 2014; Veronezi, 2019; Oliveira, 2024; Oliveira, Escarabello Junior and Maciel, 2023).

Cultural changes and professional practices in internal communication

The most recurrent problem identified in the analysis of perceptions and experiences gathered by the research was precisely the lack of accessibility, that is, the predominant existence of a non-culture of accessibility. Now we discuss the role of Public Relations (as a social field that includes professional activity) for the inclusion of people with visual impairments, based on the consideration of accessibility as a cultural element.

Organizational culture is constantly reinterpreted, transmitted and maintained through communication processes (Marchiori, 2013; Baldissera, 2011) and is manifested in organizational norms, guidelines and policies, as well as in publications, training and formal and informal dialogues.

Culture encompasses values, ways of working, being, acting and existing in organizations. In addition, organizational cultures shape the internal and external contexts of organizations and are shaped by them, so that the values circulating in society are also present in the organizational environment, as in the case of exclusionary values and ableist structures. These, in turn, are configured as cultural violence against people with disabilities.



In the context of organizational violence, there is discrimination against people with disabilities in a symbolic way, as a type of violence that can manifest itself culturally or structurally (Cabral, Gonçalves and Salhani, 2018). Failure to comply with affirmative action laws, lack of accessibility and denial of support are violent aspects that can be legitimized by organizations (Cabral, Gonçalves and Salhani, 2018; Oliveira, Barbeta and Cabral, 2024) or even by other organizational agents, such as other workers.

The consideration of accessibility resources in internal communication and their actual uses can promote a change in the situation of vulnerability in which people with visual impairments are placed, even in contexts in which ableism, violence and exclusion are not really explicit, as exemplified by the report of R37:

“My integration and interaction with other colleagues is good. I feel good, I feel welcomed. There is a contribution, a great friendship, but with more adaptations and resources I believe it would be easier for both me and them to deal with me, because many times other people do not know how to deal with many situations” (R37).

R37’s response shows that the issue is not necessarily, in this case, about ableist and exclusionary attitudes on the part of colleagues, but that the scenario of ableism still persists. Pessoa (2019, p. 211) points out the need to discuss “how some imaginaries, which are still crystallized in organizational cultures, would reduce our universe of possibilities” in



the way relationships with people with disabilities are established. Therefore, the idea of the “imagined worker” still persists, built on the implicit norm of the “sighted individual”, and this is why the necessary adaptations and accessibility resources are not provided and offered. In the report presented, it is clear that it is still necessary to take accessibility resources into account so that relationships are better for R37. It is therefore up to the organization to promote a cultural change.

Considering communication as a process that has an impact on organizational culture may be one of the possible ways to break exclusionary paradigms that affect people with disabilities (Veronezi, 2019), since, through changes in communication and in the way relationships are established (and media communication), it is possible to change stigmatizing behaviors and attitudes (Silveira, Pereira and Barcelos, 2014; Oliveira, 2024).

R8's statement corroborates this assessment: “attitudinal accessibility makes attitudes and behaviors towards people with disabilities appropriate, empathetic and without stereotypes”. In the same direction, that is, that it is a structural issue, is R3's statement: “I consider the attitudinal barrier to be the biggest and most difficult to eliminate”.

According to Sasaki (2009, p. 6), attitudinal accessibility at work consists of “eliminating prejudices, stigmas, stereotypes and discrimination, as a result of awareness-raising programs and practices among workers in general and of coexistence with human diversity in the workplace” (Sasaki, 2009, p. 6). Thus, one of the ways to address exclusion in organizations is to promote strategic and planned communication, to be carried



out by professionals in the area of communication and public relations and focused on disseminating information about inclusion and disability. In addition to this path, there is the recognition of diversity, as pointed out by Silveira, Pereira and Barcelos (2014).

One of the relevant results of the respondents' perceptions for this category of analysis is the extent to which they believe that the professionals responsible for internal communication in their organizations are trained to produce accessible messages and communications, using accessibility resources. Contrary to what the author initially imagined and what he found in the literature (Oliveira, Escarabello Junior and Maciel, 2023), a large portion (10 respondents) believe that they are indeed trained, while another seven believe that "yes, partially". In fact, there is a very positive case in the R8 experience: "all professionals have worked so that I have the greatest possible accessibility and experience with the current technical knowledge they have". Even so, another seven believe that they are not trained, and another six believe that they are only trained with rare exceptions. Finally, four believe that "yes, but very little".

In general, these responses can be compared with the profile of the respondents: practically all professionals with visual impairments who work with accessibility responded that they believe that, at some level, the internal communications professionals in their organizations are trained to use accessibility resources. This says a lot about the work environment and the context in which these workers are inserted, that is, in the universe of



accessibility, even if it intersects with other professional areas, such as education and technology.

It is extremely positive to see that, in the respondents' perception, there are internal communication professionals trained to produce messages and communications with accessibility features. This indicates that, in the concrete reality of organizations, this is a possibility.

Respondents were also asked whether they believed that professionals responsible for internal communications should be better trained to produce messages and communications using accessibility features. On this question, 30 respondents completely agreed and none completely disagreed.

Although these responses suggested a positive scenario regarding professional performance, they are not consistent with those given in the other questions and point to the great lack of accessibility resources and alternative formats in the internal communication of organizations. Thus, it is clear that there is still much to be done.

Conclusions

The expression “everything is cultural” sounds a bit exaggerated, but in relation to accessibility and inclusion, it is necessary. Culture in organizations is the web of meanings that carries with it the values, behaviors, and way of being and existing in the organizational



environment (Baldissera, 2011). Culture, however, is often strained and reinterpreted by communication processes. It would be no different when it comes to the culture of accessibility: communication is capable of transforming culture so that it is more inclusive.

Silveira, Pereira and Barcelos (2014) believe that an inclusive culture encompasses the destruction of attitudinal barriers, just as Oliveira (2024) believe that, through changes in organizational culture, it is possible to confront violent structures against people with disabilities.

By encouraging practices focused on accessibility, the use of such resources can be normalized in the daily routine of organizations, so that a new culture can be formed. In general and summarized: the construction of new organizational cultures, however laborious it may be, is one of the possible paths to change the paradigm in organizations, from a perspective outside the dominant and “standard” logic of ableist, exclusionary and violent structures.

Relationships in organizations are permeated by interactional processes that are often exclusionary. In the absence of accessibility, visually impaired workers have their needs unmet, cannot fully perform their work functions, and are also prevented from actively participating in the social space that is the organizational environment. Stigmatizing and exclusionary processes, permeated by relationships of dependence and loss of autonomy, are the result of the failure to consider accessibility.



Such situations arise from the existence of a filter for building relationships with people with visual impairments: ableism. In relational processes, ableism places individuals in positions of inferiority. This is reinforced by the power structures that exist in organizations, which are the subject of analysis in Public Relations.

Thus, the need for a change in the cultural sphere is recognized: Public Relations, as organizational activists and responsible for opening organizations to social issues, such as struggles to guarantee access to information and demands from civil society (including movements of people with disabilities), must act in the sphere of culture and relationships to promote a change in organizations, to the detriment of violent structures.

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