

# **COMMUNICATION, THE CORNERSTONE OF ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION TOOLS USED BY PORTUGUESE COMPANIES**

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## **Abstract**

As a dynamic, complex and multidimensional human process, communication implies a social relation based on which subjects share a certain meaning. Bearing in mind that each social system in which subjects interact is founded and developed through communicational acts, communication is also, therefore, the core of organizational life, both in its endogenous and exogenous dimension. Without communication, there isn't organization, management, cooperation, motivation, sales, offer and demand, marketing, coordinated work processes and even the sharing of a common history, principles, values and symbols — all elements that help the organization build its identity and develop its organizational culture. Ultimately, an organization is a communication network, and if it fails, the organization may also fail altogether. This premise is the basis for the present study, a work in progress that, on the one hand, aims to reflect upon the importance of effective communication in a global, competitive and demanding business context and, on the other hand, intends to identify the different communication tools used by Portuguese companies in their interactions with their different stakeholders. We also aim to analyse the correlation between the used tools and the characteristics of the organization, namely as regards to its sector and dimension.

## Resumo

A comunicação, enquanto processo dinâmico, complexo e multidimensional intrínseco à natureza humana, implica uma relação social na qual os sujeitos compartilham um determinado significado. Tendo em conta que é com base em atos comunicacionais que nascem e se desenvolvem os diversos sistemas sociais nos quais cada um de nós atua, a comunicação é também, por isso, o elemento nuclear da vida organizacional, quer na sua vertente endógena, quer na sua vertente exógena. Sem ela, não há organização, gestão, cooperação, motivação, vendas, oferta ou procura, marketing, processos de trabalho coordenados ou até a partilha de uma história comum, de princípios, valores e símbolos — elementos que conferem identidade à organização e que contribuem para a definição daquela que é a sua cultura organizacional. Em última instância, uma organização é uma rede comunicacional e, se a comunicação falha, uma parte da estrutura organizacional poderá falhar também. É partindo desta premissa que o presente estudo, ainda em fase de desenvolvimento, procura apresentar, por um lado, uma reflexão sobre a importância de uma comunicação eficaz num universo empresarial cada vez mais global, competitivo e exigente e, por outro lado, identificar os diferentes instrumentos comunicacionais utilizados pelas empresas portuguesas nas interações com os diversos *stakeholders* da organização. Analisar-se-á, igualmente, a relação entre o tipo de instrumentos de comunicação utilizados e as características da organização, nomeadamente, no que diz respeito ao sector e à dimensão.

**Key words:** communication tools, external communication, globalization, internal communication, organizational culture.

**Palavras-chave:** comunicação interna, comunicação externa, cultura organizacional, globalização, instrumentos de comunicação.

## 1. Theoretical framework

Each individual is the carrier of patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that are learnt over time within a specific social and cultural context (Hofstede, 2010: 4). These traits,

alongside with the subject's own personal experiences and narratives, provide the necessary elements that constitute the construct we aim to define and explore along the next paragraphs, i.e., the concept of 'identity'.

The path to understanding what identity actually is could start with a definition taken, for example, from the *Oxford Dictionary* where the concept is defined as follows: "1. the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is; 2. a close similarity or affinity". From these two meanings one can infer that 'identity' relates to the notion of 'being identical', i.e. sharing with others a set of characteristics such as language, customs, and traditions, myths, monuments or heroic characters, etc. These features are shared cultural elements and, as a result, they are distinctive attributes of a subject's collective identity. Drawing on this idea of similitude or resemblance within a group, Stuart Hall introduces the central topic of 'identification', which "is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal." In the end, identity is "a process of articulation, a suturing that bounds people" amidst that group (Hall, 1996: 16).

Individuals are, on the one hand, formed upon the variety of relationships they establish with others, in accordance with a dialectic process through which they are, simultaneously, issuers and recipients of a set of axiologies, senses, and symbols expressed in a certain culture. This conscience of social belonging, attained through the act of sharing common symbols, leads to the constitution of a collective identity that is transmitted and perpetuated across different generations of individuals. On the other hand, those symbols (language, religion, ethnicity, etc.) embody a collection of symbolic and identifying elements that assume themselves as differentiating characteristics created to symbolize a group, a society or a nation with the purpose of nourishing a sense of unity and community and stimulating the feeling of belonging to a collective entity (Schnapper 2007: 9).

Identity could also be explained according to the following threefold idea: firstly, it is related to the perception or conscience one has of himself as an individual; secondly, it comprises a sense of belonging to a specific context or place one is a social actor or feels specially bonded with; finally, it is completed upon the interaction one conducts with others in those contexts or places. All in all, in order to form a subject's identity, the ability to self-representation, a social and cultural context and, finally, social interaction are required (Simões, 2014<sup>a</sup>: 134).

Furthermore, in today's world, the concept of identity has been conforming itself to a new reality that constantly evolves and mutates as a result of the continuous need for adjustments. To use Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, we are living in a 'liquid modernity' where everything is fluid and flexible and identity, therefore, is no longer marked by permanence and stability, rather by mobility and change. This means that a subject's identity is not unified and stable, self-centred and parted from a social context; on the contrary, it is undefined and decentralized, it is the result of new life forms that inhibit individuals to have a fixed and permanent identity. Moreover, in the face of such social diversity and, as a consequence having to simultaneously act in different cultural systems, each individual may integrate multiple identity constellations, some even contradictory, which are continuously formed and transformed. In other words, in a context of continuous exchanges, an environment where originally steady borders are easily permeable to external influences, modern subjects inevitably experience many metamorphoses or feel different identifications over the course of their lives (Simões, 2014<sup>b</sup>: 13-14).

Ramalho & Ribeiro (2001: 472) reinforce this idea and underline that identity should be, first and foremost, perceived as a plural and dynamic concept. The idea of plurality and even fragmentation does not invalidate, though, the absolute need for a sense of continuity. By establishing a structured relation between the several temporalities, i.e. by interconnecting past, present and future in a coherent fashion, each individual guarantees a sense of continuity and consistency, on the one hand in his personal history and, on the other hand, in the history of the community where he finds the fundamentals of his identity.

Having this in consideration, some studies consider that identity is based upon a set of three specific concepts – continuity, connection and space and time permanency – which, once articulated, determine a subject's personal identity. In this sense, identity formation is perceived as the outcome of i) psychological and physical continuity or permanence in time, ii) a coherent correlation of the several moments or episodes of our life and iii) the ability to locate oneself in a certain place and specific time (Castañera 2005: 42). Ramalho & Ribeiro also add that identity is a discursive concept (2001:472), precisely because the interconnection of those elements allows the writing of personal narratives which, once put together, constitute the subject's self-definition.

As we have seen, a subject's identity cannot be separated from the social and cultural context it was formed, therefore, culture is another concept that necessarily needs to be analysed.

Culture seems to be a notoriously difficult term to define as well. In 1952 Kroeber & Kluckhohn, two of the most prominent American anthropologists, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture and compiled a list composed of more than 150 different definitions altogether (Spencer-Oatey, 2012), which demonstrates the different possibilities and perspectives this concept encompasses. The same wide range of definitions is also to be found if we look, for example, into *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, which offers six different definitions (including the biological one). However, and as Rothman (2014) puts it, the real problem is that 'culture' is more than the sum of its definitions, in fact, its complexity also resides in the fact that it can hold quite divergent meanings. In fact, we can understand culture as a process of individual enrichment; culture as a group's particular way of life, as when we talk about a national culture or a company culture; and culture as an activity, encouraged by a Ministry of Culture (Williams, apud Rothman, 2014).

Despite all this, one of the most consensual definitions has been the one proposed by Geert Hofstede (2010: 5) who, in his work *Cultures and Organizations. Software of the Mind*, defines culture as the way people think, feel, and act; above all, it is "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another? (by 'category' Hofstede means nations, regions within or across nations, ethnicities, religions, occupations, organizations, or genders).

In the present study, we are particularly interested in reflecting upon the way this 'programming' process is carried out.

To accomplish that goal, we propose a first look at the anthropological definition of culture proposed by Edward B. Tyler, who was the first author to contradict XIX century interpretations centred on biology and social evolution. Instead, he pointed to the fact that culture is not genetically predetermined, instinctive or a biological finding, rather a set of elements that are learned and acquired within a specific environment: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by as a member of society" (1987: 37).

Drawing on from Tyler's theory, many other definitions of culture have been presented over time, all of which having in common the idea that culture is indeed a collective

phenomenon, which is formed within each social group by sharing, transmission and acquisition of a set of elements (Linton, 1945: 32; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 47; Damen, 1987: 367; Lederach, 1995: 9).

According to Clifford Geertz (1973: 89), culture can be described as a system of symbolic forms through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about their attitudes towards life. It can, therefore, be understood as a complex system of communication, whose mechanisms allow the sharing and transmission of multiple symbolic elements (principles, values, actions, gestures, rituals, texts or articles). These, in turn, acquire the status of characterising features of the group and become, thus, fundamental parts of its identity map, which ultimately can only be developed in the presence of communication mechanisms.

As we have seen, culture is simultaneously product and process, as well as shaping mechanism of human interaction and its outcome, which is continuously created and recreated (Jelinek, apud Ricardo, 2003: 184) on the basis of that dynamic, complex and multidimensional process intrinsic to human nature we name ‘communication’. On the whole, communication, which always implies a social relationship in which subjects share a certain meaning, is therefore the cornerstone of any process of sharing, learning and acquisition of social and cultural identity.

Given that it is based on communicative acts that each social system is created and developed, communication is also, accordingly, the core element of the social group ‘organization’ — a social, historical and formal system, where subjects communicate and relate both endogenously, i.e. at an internal level, and exogenously (Kunsch, 2009: 62), that is to say, with other social systems outside the physical boundaries of the organization.

Each organization is, thus, understood as a living social system, an entity with memory and history, the product of the actions of its founder or its leaders, of the individuals that participate in it and in the society in which it operates. It also has an identity and its own language, expressed through its culture, which is based on symbols, on corporate heroes and on the combination of shared experiences and narratives that have been generated over time, making it unique and distinct from other organizations.

It has been more than three decades that the concept of ‘organizational culture’ — often translated as the ‘personality’ of the organization, as ‘the way we work here’ — first appeared in a special issue of *Business Week* entitled “Corporate culture: the hard to change values that

spell success or failure” (October 27, 1980). For the first time, it was considered the possibility that culture, i.e., the features located at deeper levels of the organization, could indeed play a crucial role in defining its success. In point of fact, the notion of ‘organizational culture’, defined by Hofstede (2010: 180) as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization against the other”, has become a widely explored topic in literature, which recognizes its high importance as fundamental element in order to fully understand organizational structures.

The culture of an organization is reflected on the set of characterising elements that individualize it before any other. It encompasses an entire system of values and assumptions and it is expressed through rituals, heroes, myths and habits which corporate members identify with. Furthermore, organizational culture strengthens the sense of belonging and, on the other hand, it provides generally accepted behavioural guidelines, which are adopted as a generic response to situations and problems that may arise. On the whole, culture guides and shapes the behaviour and attitudes of organizational subjects, by defining ways of interaction, both internally and with external stakeholders. To put it differently, culture defines the correct way to perceive, think, feel and address the multiple aspects of organizational life (Dimas, 2016: 27).

Edgar Schein, one of the leading names in the field of organizational culture, also defines organizational culture as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (2004: 17). Moreover, Schein (Idem: 3) also reinforces that, despite the abstract nature of this construct, “the forces that are created in social and organizational situations that derive from culture are powerful. If we do not understand the operation of these forces, we become victims of them”.

On the whole, organizational culture gives identity to the organization and communication is an important tool in the management of that identity. It’s organizational culture that, internally, moulds features, provides a common sense, induces behaviours and provides answers and explanations. On the other hand, at an external level, it projects a public image that reflects the values and principles of the leaders.

Furthermore, all organizational activities involve communicational acts and, therefore, every organization is, in essence, a communicative community (Ricardo, 2003: 189). Or, as

Duarte & Monteiro put it (2009: 334), communication is undoubtedly present in all organizational processes. It is the energy that circulates in all systems and the cement that gives consistency and strengthens organizational identity; it is present in every sector, in every relationship, in every flow of information and spaces for interaction and dialogue.

Additionally, in a global and competitive world, where the quality of ideas, excellence, work ethics and social responsibility, management of interactions or image promotion play a central role, communication is, therefore, an absolutely strategic area for organizations. Without communication there isn't organization, management, cooperation, motivation, sales, offer and demand, marketing, coordinated work processes (Rego, 2010: 25) and even the sharing of a common history, principles, values and symbols — all elements that help the organization build its identity and develop its organizational culture (Hofstede, 2010: 4; Trompenaars & Wooliams, 2003: 102).

Ultimately, an organization is a fully integrated communication network, and if it fails, the organization may also fail altogether — which makes the study of internal and external communication, in general, and its strategies, tools, and channels, in particular, an absolutely essential task.

## **2. Case study (work-in-progress)**

As mentioned before, the present study seeks to identify the different communication tools used by Portuguese companies in their interactions, both at an internal level and with their external partners. On the other hand, it also aims to explore the differences between the types of tools used and the characteristics of the organization. In this section, we shall describe the adopted methodology, as well as characterise the used sample and present the obtained results.

### **2.1. Methodology**

The identification of the companies for the present study was carried out through research on the Internet and on corporate databases. Departing from these sources of

information, the research team built a database consisting of 1000 companies from various industries and different regions of the country.

To collect data, researchers created an online survey using a Google tool, which was then sent to the identified companies. The contact was established through personalized email, where the purpose of the study and the required type of collaboration were explained. Two weeks after the first contact, a second email was sent to the companies that had not yet responded to the survey. This procedure was again repeated a week later. Results refer to the data collected during the months of April and May 2016.

The first part of the survey aimed to characterize the organization: name, business area, location and dimension were requested. In this initial section, the international dimension of the surveyed companies was also assessed.

In the second part of the survey, respondents (senior management level) were requested to assess the use frequency of each one of the listed tools — surveyed subjects were given two lists with tools used for both internal and external communication purposes, the first list contained 8 internal communication tools and the second one presented a total of 15 external communication tools (figure 1). Respondents were asked to choose from a Likert six-point scale, where 1 corresponded to ‘never use’ and 6 to ‘always use’. In case a specific communication tool was not included in the presented list, respondents could complement the initial list of items by inserting the information in the provided blank field.

| Internal communication            | External communication         |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Announcements / Memos             | Correspondence - letters/faxes | Corporate events                |
| Information boards                | Email                          | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| Intranet                          | Cooperate website              | Sponsoring                      |
| Internal instant messaging system | Social media                   | Fairs                           |
| Welcome manual                    | Newsletters                    | Suggestion box                  |
| Events for employees              | Videos                         | Meetings                        |
| Formal meetings                   | Outdoors                       | Others                          |
| Informal meetings                 | Merchandising                  |                                 |
| Others                            | Flyers                         |                                 |

Figure 1: List of organizational communication tools presented in the survey

In order to assess the comprehensibility of the items and the adequacy of the used scale, a pilot survey was conducted on two organizations. One of the surveyed companies presented some suggestions, especially in what refers to the clarity of the instructions; these suggestions were then incorporated into the final version of the survey.

## 2.2. Characterisation of the sample

The final sample consisted of 63 companies, 9 of which are large companies (13.4%), 26 medium enterprises (38.8%) and 28 micro and small enterprises (41.8%). In terms of geographical location, and having NUTS 2 as a reference, 52 companies are located in the central region (77.6%), 11 in the northern region (16.4%), 2 in Alentejo (3%) and 2 in Lisbon Metropolitan Area (3%).

To the question whether companies do business with foreign countries, 58% (N = 39) answered positively (78% of the large enterprises sample report doing business with foreign countries; medium-sized and small/micro enterprises report a percentage of 65% and 58%, respectively). Researchers also inquired about the top five countries with which international business relationships are established. The results revealed that 53.8% of companies do business with Spain, 38.5% in France, 28.2% with the African Countries of Portuguese Official Language, 25.6% with the United Kingdom and 25.6% with Germany (as well as with other countries with less representative percentages). Finally, as regards to the approximate percentage of total turnover generated abroad, results indicate an average percentage of 43.8% (SD = 33.5%).

## 2.3. Results

In this section, the obtained results shall be presented. On table 1, frequencies, means and standard deviations of the various internal communication tools are presented<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1. Internal communication tools: frequencies, means and standard deviations

| Internal communication tools | 1 | 2 | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6 | Mean | SD   |
|------------------------------|---|---|----|----|----|---|------|------|
| Announcements / Memos        | 0 | 5 | 11 | 23 | 15 | 9 | 4,19 | 1,13 |

<sup>1</sup> Only one company complemented the information on the 'Other tools' field, having added Internal TV to the provided list.

|                                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |      |      |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|------|------|
| Information boards                | 1  | 4  | 8  | 20 | 18 | 12 | 4,37 | 1,20 |
| Intranet                          | 12 | 1  | 9  | 12 | 15 | 14 | 3,94 | 1,76 |
| Internal instant messaging system | 8  | 2  | 6  | 12 | 18 | 17 | 4,29 | 1,64 |
| Welcome manual                    | 10 | 5  | 10 | 13 | 7  | 18 | 3,89 | 1,79 |
| Events for employees              | 5  | 11 | 13 | 17 | 8  | 9  | 3,62 | 1,49 |
| Formal meetings                   | 3  | 3  | 8  | 18 | 19 | 12 | 4,32 | 1,32 |
| Informal meetings                 | 1  | 3  | 10 | 15 | 19 | 15 | 4,48 | 1,24 |

As we can observe, information boards, internal instant messaging system, and meetings are among the most frequently used tools.

Along with the characterization of the use frequency of the various tools identified by the overall sample, researchers also sought to explore the significant differences in the use of the analysed tools as regards to the size of the organization. Table 2 presents the results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA General Linear Model procedure); the size of the organization was considered an independent variable and the indicated internal communication tools, dependent variables.

Table 2. Average scores and standard deviations of external communication tools in the organization dimension function.<sup>2</sup>

| <b>Internal communication tools</b> | Small/Micro<br><i>n</i> = 28 |           | Medium<br><i>n</i> = 26 |           | Large<br><i>n</i> = 9 |           | <i>F</i> (2, 60) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------|
|                                     | <i>M</i>                     | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> |                  |
| Announcements / Memos               | 3.89                         | 1.13      | 4.31                    | 1.12      | 4.78                  | 0.90      | 2.42             |
| Information boards                  | 4.07                         | 1.15      | 4.54                    | 1.21      | 4.78                  | 1.30      | 1.65             |
| Intranet                            | 3.14a                        | 1.86      | 4.38b                   | 1.42      | 5.11b                 | 1.27      | 6.76**           |
| Internal instant messaging          | 3.75                         | 1.74      | 4.58                    | 1.42      | 5.11                  | 1.54      | 3.26             |
| Welcome manual                      | 3.11a                        | 1.83      | 4.42b                   | 1.45      | 4.78b                 | 1.24      | 5.70**           |
| Events for employees                | 3.18                         | 1.57      | 4.00                    | 1.30      | 3.89                  | 1.54      | 2.33             |
| Formal meetings                     | 3.89                         | 1.55      | 4.58                    | .99       | 4.89                  | 1.05      | 2.98             |
| Informal meetings                   | 4.14                         | 1.38      | 4.69                    | 1.05      | 4.89                  | 1.17      | 1.96             |

<sup>2</sup> Means with different letters are significantly different at the  $\alpha < .05$  level according to the Tukey test. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

On table 2, as well as on the radial graph presented in figure 2, it is possible to observe that small companies distinguish themselves from medium and larger companies due to the lower use frequency of the indicated communication tools. This difference is significant as regards to the intranet and the welcome manual.

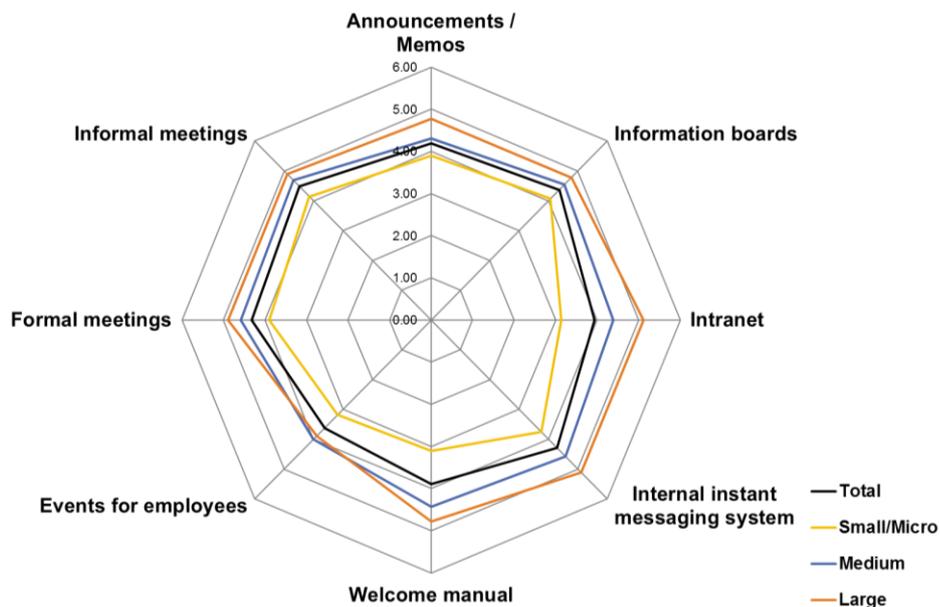


Figure 2: Internal communication tools analysed in the survey

On table 3, frequencies, means and standard deviations of the various external communication tools are presented.

Table 3. External communication tools: frequencies, means and standard deviations

| External communication tools    | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | Mean | SD   |
|---------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|------|------|
| Correspondence - letters/faxes  | 0  | 8  | 4  | 17 | 17 | 17 | 4,49 | 1,30 |
| Email                           | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 8  | 55 | 5,87 | 0,34 |
| Cooperate website               | 4  | 0  | 6  | 12 | 18 | 23 | 4,73 | 1,39 |
| Social media                    | 7  | 0  | 10 | 16 | 12 | 18 | 4,27 | 1,57 |
| Newsletters                     | 15 | 3  | 5  | 16 | 13 | 11 | 3,67 | 1,81 |
| Videos                          | 16 | 1  | 15 | 18 | 8  | 5  | 3,25 | 1,59 |
| Outdoors                        | 23 | 7  | 16 | 12 | 3  | 2  | 2,54 | 1,44 |
| Merchandising                   | 12 | 12 | 12 | 17 | 7  | 3  | 3,06 | 1,46 |
| Flyers                          | 12 | 6  | 10 | 17 | 11 | 7  | 3,48 | 1,63 |
| Corporate events                | 8  | 4  | 13 | 20 | 12 | 6  | 3,67 | 1,45 |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | 6  | 11 | 15 | 19 | 10 | 2  | 3,35 | 1,30 |
| Sponsoring                      | 9  | 11 | 18 | 8  | 13 | 4  | 3,27 | 1,49 |
| Fairs                           | 11 | 6  | 12 | 9  | 16 | 9  | 3,63 | 1,70 |

|                |    |   |    |    |    |    |      |      |
|----------------|----|---|----|----|----|----|------|------|
| Suggestion box | 14 | 7 | 11 | 10 | 12 | 9  | 3,41 | 1,76 |
| Meetings       | 1  | 2 | 7  | 11 | 22 | 20 | 4,76 | 1,20 |

The obtained findings translated into table 3 indicate that email, meetings, institutional websites, correspondence and social media are the most used tools. Again, along with the characterization of the use frequency of the several tools identified by the overall sample, the research team also sought to explore the significant differences in the use of external communication tools as regards to the size of the organization (table 4 and figure 3).

Table 4. Average scores and standard deviations of external communication tools in the organization dimension function.<sup>3</sup>

| External communication tools    | Small/Micro<br><i>n</i> = 28 |           | Medium<br><i>n</i> = 26 |           | Large<br><i>n</i> = 9 |           | <i>F</i> (2, 60) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------|
|                                 | <i>M</i>                     | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>              | <i>SD</i> |                  |
| Correspondence - letters/faxes  | 3.96 <i>a</i>                | 1.23      | 4.81 <i>b</i>           | 1.33      | 5.22 <i>b</i>         | 0.83      | 5.03*            |
| Email                           | 5.82                         | 0.39      | 5.88                    | 0.33      | 6.00                  | 0.00      | 0.99             |
| Cooperate website               | 4.50                         | 1.71      | 4.85                    | 0.97      | 5.11                  | 1.27      | 0.82             |
| Social media                    | 3.86                         | 2.01      | 4.58                    | 0.99      | 4.67                  | 1.12      | 1.80             |
| Newsletters                     | 2.96 <i>a</i>                | 1.97      | 4.19 <i>b</i>           | 1.36      | 4.33 <i>b</i>         | 1.80      | 4.24*            |
| Videos                          | 2.57 <i>a</i>                | 1.57      | 3.62 <i>b</i>           | 1.30      | 4.33 <i>b</i>         | 1.58      | 6.26**           |
| Outdoors                        | 1.71 <i>a</i>                | 1.01      | 3.23 <i>b</i>           | 1.37      | 3.11 <i>b</i>         | 1.54      | 11.08****        |
| Merchandising                   | 2.14 <i>a</i>                | 1.15      | 3.77 <i>b</i>           | 1.14      | 3.89 <i>b</i>         | 1.62      | 14.44****        |
| Flyers                          | 2.82 <i>a</i>                | 1.79      | 4.12 <i>b</i>           | 1.18      | 3.67 <i>ab</i>        | 1.58      | 4.89*            |
| Corporate events                | 3.00 <i>a</i>                | 1.70      | 4.31 <i>b</i>           | 0.93      | 3.89 <i>ab</i>        | 0.93      | 6.65**           |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | 2.89 <i>a</i>                | 1.23      | 3.81 <i>b</i>           | 1.23      | 3.44 <i>ab</i>        | 1.33      | 3.67*            |
| Sponsoring                      | 2.61 <i>a</i>                | 1.32      | 3.88 <i>b</i>           | 1.40      | 3.56 <i>ab</i>        | 1.59      | 5.93**           |
| Fairs                           | 2.82 <i>a</i>                | 1.63      | 4.27 <i>b</i>           | 1.49      | 4.33 <i>b</i>         | 1.50      | 6.89**           |

<sup>3</sup> Means with different letters are significantly different at the  $\alpha < .05$  level according to the Tukey test. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

|                |                   |      |                   |      |                   |      |                     |
|----------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|---------------------|
| Suggestion box | 2.46 <sup>a</sup> | 1.55 | 4.08 <sup>b</sup> | 1.65 | 4.44 <sup>b</sup> | 1.24 | 9.56 <sup>***</sup> |
| Meetings       | 4.54              | 1.40 | 4.85              | 1.01 | 5.22              | 0.97 | 1.23                |

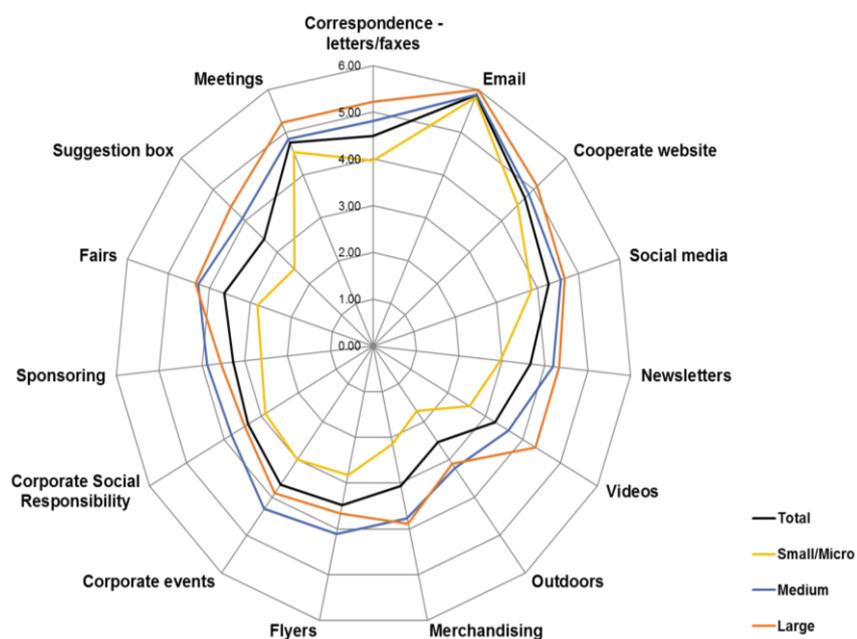


Figure 3: External communication tools analysed in the survey

As it can be observed, and similarly to the results obtained in the internal communication tools analysis, small businesses are characterized by the less frequent use of external communication tools; this difference is significant in the case of newsletters, institutional videos, outdoors, merchandising, flyers, events, sponsoring, fairs and suggestion boxes.

### 3. Conclusions

The present study aims to characterise the usage profile of the several tools of internal and external communication within Portuguese companies.

As far as internal communication tools are concerned, it was found that information boards, meetings (formal or informal) and internal instant messaging are the most used tools. More traditional communication tools coexist, thus, with new communication tools; the latter enable an effective response to collaboration needs, is less intrusive than face-to-face communication and enables multitasking as well. Among the communication tools used with lower frequency, we found events for employees. This result is probably related to the fact that companies use this type of tool only occasionally and on very specific dates (e.g. Christmas corporate celebrations).

Regarding external communication, it is to emphasize the generalized use of email, which already exceeds more traditional correspondence forms such as letters and faxes. Also noteworthy is the high use frequency of meetings, corporate websites, and social networks. Similar to what was observed among internal communication tools, as for external communication tools new technologies have also transformed and shaped the way organizations communicate with their different stakeholders, with a clear primacy of digital means over more traditional resources such as outdoors, merchandising and sponsoring. Despite these developments, meetings didn't lose their central position, on the contrary, they still hold a quite prominent place.

In the present study, we also sought to further explore the existence of differences in the use frequency of the different communication tools depending on the size of the organization. In general, the results indicate that the use frequency of the different communication tools is proportional to the size of the company: smaller businesses use less frequently the various communication tools; medium and large companies have, in most cases, similar use frequencies (the differences between the medium and large companies in terms of use of communication tools never reach statistical significance).

As for internal communication, the fact that in smaller companies information transmission is carried out in more immediate ways, it can, therefore, be inferred that the need for more formal communication tools is less significant (see, for example, the case of the welcome manual, which is a tool that is fundamental to large and medium enterprises, but occupies a less relevant position in smaller companies since it is easier to transmit information orally and, on the other hand, the lower organizational complexity makes its existence less relevant). In terms of external communication, it appears that, probably, medium and large companies are more aware of the importance of the various

communication tools as means to project the company's image and brand. In small companies, perhaps due to the lack of professional experts, the communication area is still underdeveloped.

Although this study allows a preliminary reading on the way organizations communicate with their different interlocutors, the small sample size is a threat to generalize the results. Thus, it is fundamental to expand the sample in the future, in particular by increasing their proportionality in terms of geographical areas.

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