Organizational Communication: contexts, paradigms and comprehensive conceptualization[*]

Comunicação Organizacional: contextos, paradigmas e abrangência conceitual

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ABSTRACT
This article makes an analysis on communication in organizations in the broadest sense. It analyzes the role of organizations in the context of contemporary society, their transformations, implications and new requirements. This work also emphasizes the importance of considering the socioeconomic environment to situate the practices of organizational communication. It highlights the power that the communication plays in the digital age with all the technological innovations and implementations, as well as the impacts of communication in organizations. Besides, it analyzes the paradigms in studies of organizational communication, the transformations from a linear point of view to an interactive practice, exploring the instrumental, human, cultural and strategic dimensions.
Keywords: Organizational Communication, paradigms, digital age

RESUMO
Este artigo é uma reflexão sobre a comunicação nas organizações no sentido mais amplo. Analisa-se o papel das organizações no contexto da sociedade contemporânea, suas transformações, implicações e novas exigências. Enfatiza-se a importância de considerar o ambiente socioeconômico para situar as práticas da comunicação organizacional. Destaca-se o poder que a comunicação exerce na era digital com todo o aparato das inovações e implementações tecnológicas, bem como dos impactos na comunicação das organizações. Analisam-se os paradigmas nos estudos da comunicação organizational, as transformações da visão linear para uma prática interativa, explorando as dimensões instrumental, humana, cultural e estratégica.
Palavras-chave: Comunicação organizacional, paradigmas, era digital

THINKING COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS
IN A BROADER SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

IN MY STUDIES and professional and academic practices I have been much concerned with placing the organizations in a broader context of the society, calling attention to their importance as constituent parts of the global system and as micro-societies that exercise major influence in economic and social development and in the transformations that the contemporaneous world is incurring. They are part of the society and must be seen as important players in the dynamics of the social, political and economic history.

Incidentally, Manuel Castells, in an article named *Para além da caridade: responsabilidade social no interesse da empresa na nova economia* (Going beyond charity: social responsibility in the interest of the company in the new economy), when addressing the interaction between the social responsibility and the social organization of the world, calls attention precisely to this aspect:

> They are not separated, on the one side the worldwide context, the social context, the context of the institutions, and on the other, the activity of the company. Rather to the contrary, there is an absolutely intimate relationship, which is why if the business practice does not assimilate what is happening in the world and fails to contribute to the transformation of the context, its dynamics reach a point of paralysis (2007: 56).

With this I wish to refer to the need that we have of thinking the communication in the organizations in a broader socio-economic context, in order to arrive at an equally profound reflection, more encompassing than the merely economic vision of globalization. So, when we speak today about the socio-economic context, what is the current world? What is the transformation of the technical, social, economic and institutional system in which we are living?

There are numerous considerations that we can make concerning the current society in the digital era and the power of information and communication in this entire context. It is necessary to take new approaches in view of the various events that we are experiencing: violence, wars, terrorism, world financial crises, social inequalities, human rights, digital education, epidemics, multiculturalism, new competencies, etc. To situate the society in which we are inserted is a *sine qua non* condition for analyses of context, for reflections and for the planning of propositional actions of intervention both in the social, political, economic environment and in the market of corporate and governmental communication. Manuel Castells (2007: 57-58) characterizes this digital era, or that of information or of the network-society, under the technical-economic point of view, in three aspects: productivity (production of knowledge and management

of information), the emergence of a new organizational form (development in a potentially electronic network, based on the Internet) and globalization (a new form of economic organization planet-wide unity in real time).

It is precisely in these new contexts that the organizations exist and operate. Thus the need of considering new social realities and demands. To the extent that the organizations cannot isolate themselves from the world in which we are living, which is the world of uncertainty, of the global crises, of the insecurities, of the volatile financial market, etc., all of the social players must participate contributing with what they have best.

In the context of organizational communication it is incumbent upon the communication managers to sensitize the directors that it does not suffice to generate jobs, pay taxes and earn profits, but that one must go beyond, contributing to a better society. There must be a synergic relationship between the world and the organizations. And, in this context, it is communication that renders the entire process viable. The operation of the economic system as a planet-wide unit is only viable thanks to the existence of a new communication and information technological system. So, the major difference of the complexity, today, the major assertion is precisely the power of digital era, particularly of the Internet, with all of its consequences in the forms of sociability and in the management processes. According to Jesús Timoteo Álvarez, we live in a *digital revolution* in which "there is prevalence of the services sector, of information technology, of instantaneous transmission and of digitalization. A fantastic acceleration of information and communication that in a few years has reorganized the global space" (2012: 3).

THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEMPORANEOUS SOCIETY AND IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The power that communication exercises in the contemporaneous world is amazing. This communication must be considered not merely as an instrument of divulgement or transmission of information, but as a basic social process and as a phenomenon that is present in the society. It must be conceived as a transversal power that trespasses the entire global social system, with inclusion of the organizations in this scope.

There are many authors who work on the society of information, of knowledge or digital and that analyze the media, transparent and communications society. The information and communication technologies are definitely revolutionizing the society and its way of life. The examples are evident in the cultural industries, in the multimedia, on television (interactive, digital, cable and high definition), on cell phones and in all of the available media interactions (web 2.0, blogs,

Facebook, Twitter etc.). All of this media convergence is a reality that is present in these days and occurs in the individual, in the society and in all of the spaces – family, work and social participation.

One of the strengths of this media society is the web, the worldwide computers network. According to Manuel Castells, we live in a network society that is dominated by the power of the Internet:

> This network society is the society that I analyze as a society with a social structure that was constructed around microelectronic information networks that are structured in the Internet. In this sense, the Internet is not simply a technology; it is a means of communication that makes up the organizational form of our societies; it is the equivalent to what was the factory of a large corporation in the industrial era. The Internet is the heart of a new socio-technical paradigm, which in reality represents the material base of our lives and of our forms of relationship, of work and of communication. What the Internet does is process the virtuality and transforms it into our reality, creating a network society, which is the society in which we live (2003:287).

In his other book, *Comunicação e poder* (Communication and power), Castells affirms:

> Power is something more than communication and communication is something more than power. But power depends on the control of communication. Likewise the counter-power depends on rupturing the mentioned control. And mass communication, the communication that can reach the entire society, is shaped and managed by means of relationships of power that are rooted in the means of communication and in the policy of the State. The power of communication is in the center of the structure and of the dynamics of the society (2009: 23).

Castells questions "why, how and who constructs and exercises the power relationships in view of the management of the processes of communication, and in which way can the social players that seek the social transformation modify these relationships by influencing the collective mind" (2009: 24-25). For him, the "process of communication operates in accordance with the structure, the culture, the organization and the communication technology of a given society". And today "the concrete social structure is that of the network-society, the social structure that characterizes the society in the beginning of the XXI century, a social structure constructed around the digital communication networks" (Ibid.). This new network-society structure modifies the power relationships in the organizational and technological context that derives from the "heights of

the global digital communication networks and is raised in the fundamental system of processing symbols in our era" (Ibid.).

Rafael Alberto Pérez relates the power of communication with the power of strategic communication and summarizes as follows: "communication has a much greater power than we are accustomed to grant to it" (2008: 445). For the author, "this power can be 'tamed' if we act/communicate strategically" (Ibid.). Thus it is possible to perceive the relevant role exercised by the players involved in the communication industries and in the spheres of the social, economic and political power.

Thus, it is an unquestionable reality that the power that communication, in its most varied aspects and typologies, as well as the traditional massive means and the social media of the digital era, exercises on the contemporaneous society.

In this sense one reiterates that communication must be considered as a basic social process and as a phenomenon. The power that it and the media exercise on the contemporaneous society is an unquestionable reality. Dominique Wolton, in the book *Pensar a comunicação* (Thinking about communication), highlights this power: "Communication is one of the most brilliant symbols of the XX century; its ideal of bringing the men, the values and the cultures together offsets the horrors and barbarities of our era" (2004: 27). And, in *É preciso salvar a comunicação* (It is necessary to save communication), the author reaffirms that communication is one of the greatest issues of the XXI century:

> In less than one hundred years the telephone, radio, major public press, cinema, television, computers and the networks were invented and democratized, transforming on a definite bases the conditions of exchange and of relation, reducing the distances and accomplishing the so much desired global village (2006: 9).

To think communication today remits to analysis of the power of information in the network or digital society with all of the resulting implications.

THE POWER OF THE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SOCIETY AND THE NEW CHALLENGES

Another aspect that one must also not fail to consider is the power that the organizations exercise in the society and the new challenges that they face. They are constituent parts of the global economic system. Arie de Geus, author of the book *The living company*, quoted in the book *Presence: human purpose and the field of the future*, by Peter Senge et al. (2007), says that "the XX century saw the advent of new species in Earth, that of the institutions, particularly the global corporations" (Geus, 1997 apud Senge, 2007: 19). So, this power of

the organizations, mainly in the XX century, in an accentuated form in terms of economic development, was a sign. But, from then to now, contesting what Milton Friedman defended, the profit at any price, this isolation of the corporate world gave way to a new way of thinking. To stress what is the power of the organizations, of the companies, I highlight a quote by Stuart Hart, in his work *Capitalismo na encruzilhada* (Capitalism at the crossroads):

> As we enter a new century the companies outstand as the most powerful institutions of the Planet. 700 years ago it was the religion. The cathedrals, the mosques and the temples are witnesses of the leadership of the organized religion at that time. Two hundred years ago it was the State. No tourism would be complete without a visit to the impressive palaces, the congressional buildings and the governmental complexes, which remind us of how the government was centrally important in the era of enlightenment. Today the most powerful institutions are the companies: look at the office towers, banks and shopping malls that dominate the large cities. Although nobody denies the permanent and crucial importance of the governments, of religion and of the civil society, there is no doubt that business has become the most dominant institution (2006: 222-223).

An example that shows well this reality is to perceive that certain historical monuments spread around various countries have become headquarters of major financial institutions and/or multinational and transnational companies.

Other striking examples concern the economic weight of the companies in comparison with the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the countries. Ignacio Ramonet says that, "in actuality, of the two hundred top economies of the world, more than half are not countries, but rather companies" (2007: 103). José Antonio Pupim de Oliveira (2008), author of the book *Empresas na sociedade: sustentabilidade e responsabilidade social* (Companies in the society: sustainability and social responsibility), taking as a base the *Fortune* magazine, in an edition of 2005, which showed the following data: the businesses of General Motors excelled the GDP of Denmark and also of Finland and of Portugal (Oliveira, 2008: 4); those of Ford were greater than the GDP of South Africa and that of Toyota surpassed the GDP of Norway (Oliveira, 2008: 103); in 2005 one hundred companies were among the 150 largest entities in the world in economic terms –Walmart was the 22nd, followed closely by the petroleum giants, like BP, Esso and Shell, with revenues that were greater the GDP of Portugal, Greece and Finland (Oliveira, 2008: 3-4). In relation to African countries, the sales of Nike were the size of the GDP of Nigeria (Ibid.); those of Carrefour were equivalent to the GDP of Ethiopia (Ibid.); and those of Nokia were comparable to the wealth

of Cameroon (Ibid.). According to a publication of the Exame.com electronic magazine in August 2012 in Brazil there were ten major companies the assets of which were more than the GDP of many developing countries.

This shows something about the power of the organizations, which are being called for a new questioning as to their role in the global social system. Today the great challenge of the organizations is particularly of excelling that merely economic, technicist vision. It is excelling also that empty speech of social responsibility and sustainability without any public commitment. The environmental issue and the preservation of the planet are part of the agenda of major themes of the contemporaneous society. The climatic alterations, the global warming, the social inequalities, the major natural disasters, among many other problems, are matters that must be faced by all of the agents, comprising the State, the business production sector and the third sector.

All of these transformations have completely altered the institutional behavior of the organizations and communication proceeded to be considered in a different way. Such as advertising had a fundamental role after the Industrial Revolution, organizational communication, in the corporate and governmental sense, began to be seen as something essential and, in many institutional realities, as a contemporaneous strategic area. The isolated actions of marketing and public relations communication are insufficient to cope with the new competitive markets and for the relationships with the publics and/or interlocutors of the various segments. These are increasingly more demanding and require from the organizations social responsibility, transparent attitudes, ethical behaviors, respect for preservation of the planet etc., thanks to a more conscious society and an always vigilant public opinion. And, in this context, communication becomes strategic and its management must be seen under a new vision of the world and in an interdisciplinary perspective.

THE PARADIGMS OF THE STUDIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Throughout history the studies of organizational communication have been developed under certain paradigms. Understanding as a paradigm (Kuhn, 2007) being the vision of the reality, whether implicit or explicit, which influences the concepts and the ways of observance and analysis by a researcher, encompassing beliefs, values and ways of thinking the world and the subject of research, these concepts have oriented the visions and focuses of the studies of organizational communication by a number of authors.

The researchers of organizational communication, particularly in the U.S., have produced books, articles and numerous reflections concerning the different

theoretical perspectives or paradigms of study of this field of communication sciences. The theoretical matrix most used goes from the classic work by G. Burrel and G. Morgan (1979), who conceived the social theory pursuant to four perspectives: functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralistic. The studies that are available on the paradigms of organizational communication show that they are centered basically on three: functionalist, interpretative and critical. Starting from these the authors customarily expand the theoretical perceptions, as is the case of Linda Putnam (1982), who analyses the paradigms under the mechanical, psychological, interpretative perspective and by the interaction of systems. Tom D. Daniels, Bany Spiker and Michael J. Papa (1997) refer to the same paradigms, but also emphasize the critical perspective, as a result of a dialectic vision. While Eric M. Eisenberg and Harold L. Goodall (2001) present five paradigms: transfer of information; transnational process; control/strategy; equilibrium between creativity and constraint/coercion/subjection; and dialogue effort. Dennis Mumby (2013:15-28) analyzes five perspectives of organizational communication: funtionalist (transmission of information); interpretative (communication as a dialogue and creation of meanings); critical (communication as creation of meanings of ideological systems mediated by the relationships of power); port-modern (communication as an unstable system and the carrier of senses); and feminist (communication as a creation of senses and identity of gender).

As already mentioned, in the studies of organizational communication the use of the functionalist, interpretative and critical paradigms is recurrent. According to Thomas Kuhn (2007), a paradigm is effective and legitimate for as long as the members of a given academic community or area of specialization endorse it as a vision and manner of acceptable research. Thus, between the decades of 1960 to 1980 the functionalist perspective was accepted and was predominant in the studies of organizational communication. This paradigm considers and assesses communication under the mechanical/instrumental prism and that of organizational efficacy. It starts from the assumption that the communicative behavior can be observable and tangible, measured and standardized. It is concerned with the formal and informal structures of communication and with the practices on account of results, putting aside the analyses of the social, political, economic, technological and organizational contexts.

While the interpretative perspective considers the organizations as being cultures. Organization is a phenomenon that is more subjective than objective. The organizational reality is socially constructed by means of communication and interactions between persons. It is based on the symbols and meanings that are shared and are involved in a number of forms of organizational behavior

(Gareth Morgan, 1996; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1984). It values and cultivates the symbolic interactionism, having as a base the pioneering studies of George Herbert Mead. This is to say, people create meanings during social interactions. The individual, when bringing his/her meanings, acquires new ones through his/her interactions. Thus, the interpretative perspective within the scope of organizational communication considers all of these aspects and values the individuals, creating spaces for dialogue and interactions in the work environment.

The critical perspective is supported by the critical theory. The studies of Critical Theory[1] developed by the Frankfurt School have had major influence in the research and in the teaching of communication in Latin America for decades. The denouncement of the ideology of consumption, the manipulation of the means of mass communication, the power and the invasion of the multinationals in the region, as well as the proposition of national communication policies, were some of the icons of the critical studies of communication that were most present in past eras.

For Marcos Nobre, a student of critical theory,

> it is an essential characteristic of Critical Theory (both in the broad and restricted sense) to be permanently renewed and exercised, and cannot be established jointly with immutable theories. Which means to say, likewise, that to take the works of Marx as the first reference of the investigation does not mean to take them as a finished doctrine, but as a combination of problems and of questions that must be updated one by one, according to the specific historical constellation (2004: 23).

The critical perspective depends on a dialectic vision. It works using the relationships of power. The organization is perceived as an arena of conflicts. Researcher Dennis Mumby (2013), in his work *Organizational communication – a critical approach*, analyzes in depth the issue of the critical theory in the studies of organizational communication. The focus is on the oppressed classes (workers, women, minorities and other groups). Inserted in this context is the issue of diversity of gender, by assessing how the organizations are dominated by patriarchicalism (institutionalized male domination) as an instrument of this oppression.

North American researcher Stanley Deetz (2001: 3-39) questions the predominant vision of the studies of organizational communication based on the models proposed by George Burrel and Gareth Morgan (1979). According to Deetz, this has given rise to certain limitations, rendering impossible new alternative forms of approach. The emphasis became considerably centered in the somewhat rigid differentiation between functionalism and other perspectives,

1. For more details, consult Barbara Freitag (1990) and specific works of communication theories in general.

such as, especially, the interpretative and critical ones. The author proposes a matrix with four quadrants to position the studies of organizational communication: the normative, interpretative, critical and dialogical studies. Their categories are compared following two criteria: emerging or elitist orientations; and, in contrast, in a different direction, consensual positions (hegemonic, which reproduce the dominant discourse of the organization) or dissenting ones (when the studies propose rupturing with the dominant vision)[2]. Within the ambit of dissent, in summary, the studies of organizational communication can be characterized as being dialogical, post-modern, deconstructionist, critical, reformist. And in the dimension of consensus, as interpretative, pre-modernist, traditional, normative, modernist and progressive.

In addition to these possible visions and perspectives, another paradigm that has been mentioned in scientific research and productions in organizational communication is the theory of complexity, according to the thoughts of Edgar Morin. The foundation is in considering at the same time complexity units, such as the human being or the society, as being multidimensional. In other words:

Complexus means what has been weaved together; actually, there is complexity when different elements are inseparable consistent parts of all of them (such as the economic, the political, the sociological, the psychological, the affective, the mythological), and there is one that is woven interdependently, interactive, and inter-retroactive between the subject-matter of the knowledge and its context, the parts and the totality, the totality and the parts, the parts among themselves. For this reason the complexity is the union between the unit and the multiplicity (Morin, 2011: 36).

One of the Brazilian researchers who has stood out when using the paradigm of the complexity in his a doctorate paper (2004) and in other publications based on Edgar Morin is Rudimar Baldissera. This author described that this option is fundamentally due to the fact that this paradigm enables one to reflect deeply on the processes of organizational communication, maintaining present the contradictions, the uncertainties, the tensions, the deviations, the resistances, the disorder and the disorganization. His fertility is also in the possibility of conducting theoretical articulations, as well as in the fact that he does not propose a search for final, universal answers and/or absolute truths, but the comprehension/explanation of the true complex (2009: 146).

As one can notice, all of these mentioned paradigms consist of possible theoretical and methodological options in order to study and understand the wealth and the depth of the various senses of the scope of communication in, and of, the organizations. They are extremely valid perspectives both for academic research and for the practices of organizational communication.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: FROM THE
LINEAR FLOWS TO THE INTERACTIVE FLOWS

Up to the 1980 decade the studies of organizational communication were characterized by a strong functionalist aspect and a linear-instrumental perspective. In the beginning of the 1980 years, the picture began to modify, when many learned individuals perceived the need to avail themselves of the critical theory, proceeding to use the interpretative-critical research, which has been considerably strengthened in recent decades.

The organizational communication, in the first decade of the third millennium, is characterized with an interdisciplinary identity, covering various theoretical perspectives and epistemological assumptions, including modernism, realism, interpretativism, rhetoric, critical theory, post-modernism and post-structuralism, feminism and post-colonialism. It can be considered to be a field of multiple and universal perspectives in its approach, due to its methods, its theories, its ranges of research and its philosophical postulates. This scope and the numberless possibilities of studies will enable major advances in the sense of truly studying the communicational phenomena in the organizations as subject-matters of a proper discipline, and not only as sociological and psychological analyses. Thus, the studies are more focused on the theories of communication, in comparison with the past, when the focus was more organizational. The publishing of the work entitled *The new handbook of organizational communication: advances in theory, research, and methods*, organized by Frederic M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam (2001), with contribution by other important authors, expresses how much this area has advanced in the academic and scientific field and the plurality of studies in process.

With the changes of the paradigms that previously were so stagnant, both the studies and the practices, and with all of these new perspectives and trends, the significance of organizational communication has acquired new perceptions and implications.

In this sense for some time I have defended the need to abandon the fragmentation and to adopt a philosophy and policy of integrated organizational communication. What would be the principal challenges of this communication and of its players in this whole process? Firstly it is necessary to replace that linear and instrumental vision of communication by a much more complex and encompassing one. Organizational communication needs to be understood in a broad and holistic form. It is possible to say that it is a discipline that studies how one processes the communicational phenomenon within the organizations and all of its political, economic and social context. As a phenomenon that is inherent to the nature of the organizations and to the groups of persons

that integrate it, organizational communication involves the communicative processes and all of their constituent elements. In this context, it is necessary to see communication inserted in the symbolic processes and with focus on the meanings of the agents involved, of the interpersonal and group relationships, appreciating the day-to-day communicative practices and the interactions in the various forms of manifestation and social construction.

Another aspect to consider in its scope is how the various different categories that permeate its conception and its practices are configured. It is what I call *integrated organizational communication*, comprising institutional communication, merchandising communication, internal communication and administrative communication (Kunsch, 2003: 149), which occurs starting with the specific objectives and purposes.

The concept of *integrated organizational communication* that I have been working on since 1985 stresses the need for a holistic view to conceive and practice communication in the organizations. In fact, what I defend is the adoption by the organizations of a non-fragmented communication philosophy. I highlight two fundamental areas to direct the organizational communication: public relations and marketing. The first, due to its theoretical essence, would encompass the institutional communication, the internal communication and the administrative communication. Marketing would be responsible for all of the merchandising communication[3].

3. For more details on the communicational categories of these concepts, consult Kunsch (2003: 152-178).

As one can notice, organizational communication, in this encompassing perspective, is in itself complex. In this sense the communication area ceases to have a function that is merely tactic and proceeds to be considered as strategic. In other words, it needs to take into account the human aspect and add value to the organizations. Meaning that it must assist the organizations in appreciating people and accomplishing its mission, fulfilling its global objectives, contributing to the public establishment of its values and on the actions to achieve its ideal in the context of a vision of the world, under the shelter of ethical principles. It must be stressed also that the communicative actions must be guided by a philosophy and a policy of integrated communication that take into account the demands, the interests of the society and the requirements of the publics and of the society.

In the digital era and that of the social networks and/or media, the organizations no longer have control when the publics see themselves affected. If there is no coherence in the institutional speeches and if there is no truth in its certificate of sustainability or in that of its social balance sheet, this is susceptible of being questioned and reaching the social networks. The pressures come from outside – from the society, from legislation, etc.

Companies do not change because they want to, but because of the social and market pressures.

This change from the analogical paradigm to the digital one inverts the traditional form of issuing information, of communicating by means of a unilateral flow and a passive receiver, presently undergoing an interactive process, where the receiver also becomes an issuer. Thus, digital communication presents itself as a network of relationships that uses a wide variety of ways to interact via the Internet, in the blogosphere, in the 2.0 web, in blogs, photologs, wikis, Wikipedia and social media such as Facebook, MSN, Twitter etc.

Which, then, would be the challenges that should be set forth for the communication area? To conduct constant monitoring and social audits, to assess the scenarios, to listen to the public opinion and accept the demands and expectations of the public. In other words, one must draw the public to the dialogue and be attentive to what is happening and, particularly, to have as a target the ethics and the transparency of the communicative actions. Meaning to say, the linear informative flows are replaced by the interactive ones and the communication that occurs in the scope of the organizations proceeds to have new paradigms.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS INSTRUMENTAL, HUMAN, CULTURAL AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS

In addition to all of the concepts worked on and exploited by numerous authors on the meaning and the scope of organizational communication, I have sought new ways of seeing in order to understand how this communication is configured presently and what are its dynamics in the organizational practices. For this I propose analyzing it in four dimensions: instrumental, human, cultural and strategic. In previous studies (Kunsch, 2006, 2009 and 2010) I have also developed this thematic. I have sought to base it theoretically and expand it with new incorporations comprising the cultural dimension. It concerns a study that is in construction and never something that is finished.

The principal source of inspiration of this analysis comes from a reflection on the book *Pensar a comunicação* (Thinking communication), by Dominique Wolton, when the author analyses the normative and humanist dimension of communication, comparing it to an instrumental vision dominated by technique and by economic interests. In summary, Wolton (2004: 27) calls attention to the discrepancies and problems deriving from the technical and economical triumph of communication in relation to the society. Thus, he questions:

How to save the pedantic dimension of communication, one of human's most beautiful, the one that makes him/her wish to begin to relate with others, to interact with others, when everything points the other way, aimed in the direction of the interests? How to save the *humanist* dimension of communication, when its *instrumental* dimension is the one that triumphs? What relationship is there between the ideal of communication, which crosses the times and these civilizations transforming it into one of the strongest symbols of humanity, and the interests and ideologies having the same name (Ibid.: 28, our emphasis).

If we direct our reflections towards organizational communication, we will see that this ambiguity also exists in the communication in, and of, the organizations. There is a whole institutional speech that praises the value and the ideals of human communication. However, in the day-to-day of the organizations in general one notices, even if between the lines, a predominance of technical communication and of the search for efficacy of the messages and communicative actions. As Wolton affirms, "it is possible to rationalize human communication as one can rationalize technical communication. But if the rationality of the communication techniques is much superior to the rationality of human communication, it is at the same time much poorer" (Ibid.: 37).

The second major risk is in relation to these two forms of communication attempting to limit this insurmountable abyss between the two and seek "to rationalize the inter-subjective communication to make it become more efficacious. Or in other words, believe that the functional communication, broken down by the techniques, would approximate it to the normative communication" (Ibid.: 39).

Instrumental dimension

This is the dimension that is most present and predominant in organizations in general. It is characterized as being instrumental, functional and technical. It is the one that is considered more as a transmission of information and a *tool* to render viable the processes and permit full operation of an organization. Linda Putnam analyzes it under the metaphor of the conduit, which treats communication as a channel for transmission of messages. For the author this metaphor "describes the organization as a container or an object that shelters communication, while also supporting a functionalist ideology related to the managerial objectives" (2009: 45-47). In this context communication is seen and worked on as transmission information, within a linear vision. The channels used are only one-way and thus the communication is asymmetric.

It is believed that this instrumental dimension is the predominant one in organizations in general. It is characterized as being functional and technical. It is the one that is considered as an instrument to render viable the operation of an organization so as to achieve its global objectives. It concerns a linear communication that ignores contexts and other more subjective aspects. Obviously it is necessary and will always exist. What one proclaims is that the organization should not restrict itself only to this aspect, but should take into account that communication happens also in other forms that must be considered.

Human dimension

This dimension, despite being the most important, can be considered as the one that is most forgotten, both in literature on organizational communication and in the daily practices in, and of, the organizations. How should the human dimension of organizational communication be understood? What is its importance for the improvement of the quality of life in the environment of the organizations?

When analyzing this dimension of organizational communication, naturally one must consider human communication. There are countless conceptual contributions on human communication in the literature of communication theories and of other areas of knowledge, which, for the sake of limiting the space of this chapter, is not worth recording here. We wish to remind that all that has already been researched and analyzed about the evolution of the currents of theoretical studies of communication, with the proper adaptations, is applied in the practice of the communicative process in the organizations. In this topic we will present a summary of some references that in themselves express the reasons and the importance of human communication, and how the latter can be considered in organizational life.

Portuguese researcher Evaristo V. Fernandes, in *Sociopsicologia da comunicação humana* (Socio-psychology of human communication), when stressing communication as a fundamental means so that individuals can establish relations with other persons and with groups, affirms:

> This total involvement of human nature in the communication causes the latter to be understood, in a general sense, as a combination of interactions that individuals carry out with each other, with Nature, with the social organizations, with the institutions and, further, the relationship that each individual establishes with him/herself. Thus the focus of communication not being only a means or an instrument available for the individuals, for the formal or informal groups, organized or non-organized, so as to inform facts, events, thoughts, ideas, wishes

or affections, but also a process related to the constitution of the public sphere, the sphere that is responsible for creation and maintenance of regularities that establish the norms of conformity and of co-existence, of language, of actions (2000: 21).

Based on these ponderings of the author, it is possible to infer how communication is incommensurable and surpasses all of the public and private spheres in which there are human beings and social groupings.

When one introduces communication in the sphere of the organizations, the human, subjective, relational and contextual factor becomes a fundamental pillar for any long-lasting communicative productive actions. Many other aspects could be included, but we will limit ourselves to these, which in our view contribute well to demonstrate the complexity in which organizational communication is involved.

Subjectivity gains strength in contemporaneous organizations, and is one of the aspects that needs to be most studied and considered by the communication managers in the organizations. Jorge Ruben Volnovich, when analyzing critically the exhaustion of modelistic efforts that the organizations have been adopting in the course of history to obtain managements that are centered on efficiency and yield, calls attention to the need to redefine the place that subjectivity should occupy in the organizations. According to him, this subjectivity is inferred in the practices of an individual, group or institutional order, whereby it is not inserted in a purely rational field, but in a chain of unperceivable significations (i.e., suppressed) for the individual or for the organization to which it belongs (Volnovich, 1995: 61).

When working on personal and organizational values Álvaro Tamayo ponders that

the organizations represent the privileged place in which the professional identity of the worker is developed and the social environment in which the person accomplishes him/herself from the personal, social and professional point of view. A major portion of the contentment of a person is constructed in the work environment. It is obvious that the identity, the accomplishment and the contentment cannot be achieved if the person could not fulfill in the organization the fundamental purposes of his/her existence (2005: 169).

The question of subjectivity then becomes much more valued and considered in all of the ambits, even interfering in the actual perceptions of the subject-matter of the area of psychology. According to Sandra Sanches and Edna Kahhale,

the subject-matter of psychology is no longer either the conscious, nor the behavior or the unconscious, but is the study of subjectivity, as an expression of the construction of each individual inserted in a given social and historic context. In order to understand subjectivity it is necessary to look for its process, thus seeking the social, historic determinations and the actual senses constructed by the active, singular and social subject (2003: 39).

The organizations, as sources of issuance of information and when communicating with their universe of public must not have the illusion that all of their discursive messages are received positively, or that they are automatically answered and accepted in the way that they were intended. It is worth keeping in mind that communication occurs first at the interpersonal and subjective level. Each individual has his/her cognitive universe and will receive the messages, interpret them and give them meaning in his/her own way and within a given context.

In this sense, organizational communication must be thought about in a perspective of the dynamics of contemporaneous history. In other words, according to Jean-François Chanlat, "the contexts are ways of reading the situation. They are the *structures of interpretation, the cognitive schemes* that each person has and uses to understand the events that occur and, in particular, to understand what interests us" (1999: 49, our emphasis).

In relation to the context, one must consider that communication in the organizations, such as in the society, suffers all of the impacts caused by the digital revolution. As a consequence, the way of producing and divulging the organizational messages is also submitted to profound transformations. These new dynamics for processing information and for communication in the digital era alter completely the forms of relationships and the way of producing communication. All of this causes profound transformations in the organizational environment and questions the vision and the traditional classification of the publics.

It is necessary to consider the relational aspects, the subjectivity that is present in the organization, the contexts, the internal and external conditioning, as well as the complexity that permeates the entire communicative process. Thus the necessity of going beyond the merely mechanical vision or the instrumental dimension of the communication for a humanist vision, with conceptual contributions of the interpretative and critical perspectives.

Thus, there is need to work on the communication in the organizations under the human dimension and to go beyond the merely instrumental vision. Recalling James Taylor, "communication is no longer described as a

transmission of messages or knowledge, but as a practical activity that has as a result the formation of a relationship" (2005: 215).

Jean-François Chanlat (1993: 29), an international reference in the studies of individuals in organizations, is very decisive in this regard:

> To then reduce human communication in the companies to a simple transmission of information, a vision that is directly inspired by engineering, as can be seen frequently in the organization behavior manuals, is to eliminate the whole problem of the sense and of the significations. It is to forget that every discourse, each word pronounced or the entire written document is inserted in a greater or lesser degree in the sphere of action, of doing, of thinking and of suffering (Grize, 1985). It is to convict oneself to not being able to learn in depth neither the organizational symbol nor the individual and collective identity (2003: 39).

Gary Kreeps, when emphasizing the importance of human communication in the relationships of people in the organizational environment, defends communication as a process of organization:

> Communication is a dynamic and continual process. It is the process that enables the members of the organization to work together, to cooperate and to interpret the needs and the activities of the organization that are always changing. Human communication does not begin nor end. People are constantly involved in communication with themselves and with others, particularly in the life of the organization. The life of the organization provides a system of messages that is particularly rich and varied. The members of the organization must be capable of recognizing and interpreting the large variety of messages available, enabling them to respond in an appropriate way to different persons and situations. They cannot exist without communicating. Communication is an inevitable reality that is pertinent to an organization and to life in general (1995: 28).

Thus, when treating communication and organizations, one must not disassociate this group of persons from the true sense of human communication, which presumes understanding and proposing common ideas. According to Whitaker Penteado, human communication has as a main objective the understanding between people: "So that there can be understanding it is necessary that the individuals that are communicating have a mutual understanding" (1976: 1).

Another important aspect to be explored in the ambit of human communication and of the organizations is the appreciation of interpersonal communication. Organizations do not always propitiate informal and favorable spaces to cultivate this form of communication in their internal environments.

Interpersonal communication is considered to be an interaction of a conversational nature, which implies verbal and non-verbal interchange of information between two or more participants in a face-to-face situation. Tânia Casado (2002: 279) considers it as one of the important pillars in the management of people in the organizations, highlighting four forms of interpersonal communication that are most present: verbal, non-verbal, symbolic and para-linguistic.

In the institutional ambit communication has been understood as a part that is inherent to the nature of the organizations. Gareth Morgan, when analyzing the organizations as cultures and all of the implications deriving from them, affirms "the truly human nature of the organizations is the need to construct it as a function of the people and not of the techniques" (1996: 142).

The organizations are formed by persons who communicate among themselves and that, by means of interactive processes, render viable the functional system for survival and consecution of the organizational objectives in a context of diversities, conflicts and complex transactions. Thus, without communication the organizations would not exist. Incidentally, as defended by James Taylor, "the organizations self-organize themselves and do so as a result of the dynamics of the local interaction. Self-organization is a communicational phenomenon" (2005: 215). Thus the author analyzes the organizations as communication and communication as organization. In other words, the organization is communication and it self-organizes itself with and thanks to communication.

When emphasizing the human dimension of organizational communication, my main purpose is of defending its importance within the organizational scope, for improvement of the quality of life of the workers within an environment that is increasingly complex, competitive and having conflicting and paradoxical scenarios in view of the uncertainties that characterize the globalized society in the digital era.

To act in favor of the humanization of the organizations as never been so necessary than in the globalized and unequal world of today, where employment is a privilege of few and these few often need to work for many others if they wish to continue employed. This dichotomy is a serious problem for the life of the individual at work. According to Odair Furtado, there exists,

> for the worker that holds the job the constant risk of termination and for the unemployed the little hope of returning to the labor market. [They are] sources of tension that [...] disorganize the life of the worker and of his/her family. At this moment we are dealing with unemployment as a central emerging factor for the psychic suffering of the worker, but those that remain employed also suffer pressures that represent a strong risk factor that recently has been studied by researchers that use the reference of labor psychopathology (2003: 321).

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This crucial reality that is present today creates doubts about all of what has been defended as humanization, quality of life at work and the defense of valuation of people, of the management of talent, of participative internal communication, etc. that are so much proclaimed by many business organizations.

Despite the major conquests in the form of changes of mentality of many companies, in the course of recent years, particularly with the advent and implementation of social responsibility and sustainability programs, there are still organizations in which the issue of humanization and appreciation of people is nothing more than a speech. It happens that, in everyday practice, the employees, despite being called *collaborators* – an inappropriate term, because they worker has an employment bind and is not a volunteer – suffer many pressures and the interests of capital are always above the social and people interests. An ascertainment of this situational reality can be exemplified with what happens at the moment of mergers, acquisitions and corporate crises. The first one to be sacrificed is always the worker. There is a promise that there will not be any termination of people, but it is always a question of time and soon this promise either *collapses or dies at the beach*, in the local popular saying.

All of the aspects explored herein converge to emphasize and reaffirm the importance of human and social appreciation in the organizations. Only in this way is it possible for cooperation, involvement and satisfaction of the individuals to exist.

The classical thinking of Chester Barnard (1938), in his work *A função dos executivos* (The function of the executives), in times when communication in organizations were not even subject-matter of studies, already called attention to the importance of communication in the processes of human communication in the organizations. Barnard's theory is

> that the organizations can only exist by means of human cooperation, that cooperation is the vehicle by which individual capabilities can be combined to carry out superordinated tasks. [...] Firstly, the persons are seen as active beings, endowed with motives and purposes. Yet the persons are severely limited in their capacity of accomplishment. There are biological, situational and social limitations to what a person can do alone. The necessary cooperation can only occur by means of interaction. The cooperation will only persist if it is effective and sufficient. The participants in a cooperative system must be satisfied with the results si that the cooperation can continue (Barnard, 1938 apud Littlejohn, 1982: 301).

I reaffirm that the appreciation of people in organizations must be a determinant parameter for production of organizational communication. The

healthy organizations that consider the quality of life of the worker and are concerned in a responsible way with the consequences of their communication, certainly are the most creative, productive and admired by their publics. The fact is that the "organization is creative as a function of its human resources", as pointed out by Albertina Martínez (2007: 62), who justifies her statement:

> it is the individuals and the groups of the organization that perceive the new possibilities, produce new ideas, develop innovative projects, act boldly when taking decisions, in short, generate creative products. On the other hand, it is the individuals that make up the organizations that are the principal players in the creation of social subjectivity, who characterize and participate actively in the creative expression of the organization (Ibid.)

Lastly, "strictly speaking, the sphere of human business consists in the web of human relations that exist wherever human beings live together", as Hannah Arendt says (2005: 198). It is in this web that, by means of discourse and action, while interconnected between each other, that the individuals are capable of revealing their identity and constructing their history of life. It concerns a context in which communication in the organizations has an important mission to complete.

Cultural dimension

Another important dimension of organizational communication to be considered is the cultural one. Which would be the aspect that could justify thinking about communication in the organizations from the cultural perspective? The organizations are formed by persons with different cultures. These individuals, when becoming members of the team of employees of an organization need to adapt themselves to the culture of the founder and/or to the current organizational culture, as well as to its values and philosophical principles. And the organizations, in turn, are located in a given country that has its national culture and still incur interferences of a multicultural and global culture of the worldwide society.

With these initial considerations one can perceive that organizational communication does not occur in isolation both from the organizational culture, at a micro level, and from the multicultural context, at a macro level. All of the theoretical referentials available (which will not be subject-matter of analysis in this article), both concerning organizational culture and concerning intercultural communication and the multiculturalism, certainly will be of great value to establish the bases of the production of organizational communication in a local and global perspective.

In this sense I defend the need of the organizations and, particularly, of their communication managers to consider the cultural dimensions as a constituent part of the planning, of the communicative actions and of the participative management processes. Thus, one must consider the cultural dimension in synergy with the other dimensions of organizational communication.

The organizational environment is a social reality experienced by persons that coexist with their different cultures. The latter need to be considered and appreciated in the daily communicative actions, without being suffocated by an excess of technical and instrumental communication, centered only on the results and on the interests of the corporate businesses. It is understood that an initiative such as the opening of direct dialogue channels between top management and the workers can be the way to appreciate the cultural and individual space of the persons in organizations, thus fomenting the interactions between persons and groups.

Strategic dimension

When addressing the issue of strategic dimensions, two focuses should be considered. The first is based on a more conservative and rational view centered on the results, and the second on a more complex perspective that takes into account the uncertainties and seeks new alternatives to rethink the strategic communication.

In relation to these two possible visions, it is possible to avail ourselves of theoretical contributions by many researchers on the strategy. However, I limit myself here to make a brief summary of two individuals: Richard Whittington and Rafael Alberto Pérez, with the purpose only of illustrating in a panoramic form what is possible to address when we refer to the strategic dimension.

Richard Whittington (2002: 1-48) proposes four generic approaches to the strategy: 1. Classical: would be the most ancient, influential and is used often in strategic planning; 2. Evolutionary: is centered on survival and is related to biological evolution; 3. Procedural: has to do with the imperfect nature of human life, as a fallible process that could err; 4. Systemic: relativist, in which the purposes and means of the strategy are related to the large structure and to the local social systems in which the strategy is developed.

I consider that these different visions enable us to perceive that the strategic dimension of organizational communication must effectively contemplate other aspects beyond the predominant perspective that is classical or traditional, much practiced by the majority of the organizations.

In the more rational and classical perspective the strategic dimension of organizational communication is very similar to the instrumental one. It is related to the pragmatic vision of communication, aiming at efficacy and at the results. It is considered to be a factor that adds value to the organization and to the business. It aligns itself strategically by means of strategic planning and management, to the global objectives of the organization and to the principles established in relation to its mission, its vision and its values.

Top management and the executive responsible for communication, as well as all of the agents involved in it, actually conceive it as a fundamental strategic factor of results in relation to the organization and that is indispensable for the fulfillment of its mission and vision. It is centered on the more traditional strategic planning.

Another way of looking at strategic dimension is to face it under the *nueva teoría estratégica* (new strategic theory) (NTE) proposed Rafael Pérez (2008)[4]. There are numerous theoretical grounds stressed by the author, who defends other perspectives and new paradigms to conceive and practices the communication strategy in the most varied social, political and economic spheres.

The author's ideas are compared with the different practices, theories and ideas that have been dominant over the last decades concerning what are and how the strategies should be studied. According to Pérez, they represent a true *strategic jungle*: paradigms that privilege conflict and competition; that ignore the uncertainty; that do not see the human being; that believe in certainties and formulae and that, on account of such factors, are doomed to failure.

The principal criticism by Pérez is directed to the administrative/economic paradigm that sees the strategies as instruments – policies and plans – to achieve objectives, defeating competitors in the market, which are seen as enemies. According to such paradigm, the strategies are constructed following the actual logic under which the administrators have acted throughout the past decades: the belief that only the internal resources of the organization are what are important for its success, with the illusion that it is possible to avoid that external changes generate impact on its organization and the vision of communication as an instrument aimed at transmission of information.

I reproduce a summary made by him, in *Claves del pensamiento* (Keys of thought) of *Rafael Pérez*, showing a new vision to think about the communication strategy in organizations:

What new theory are we talking about? The truth is that I have not completed this theory, but only drafted it: "A new strategic theory that is less geometric and more hermeneutic, less rational and more relational" and that provided five agendas – which in reality were six – in order to develop it:

4. See also his other work developed jointly with researcher Sandra Massoni (Pérez; Massoni, 2009).

1) Understanding that the key to every strategic theory involves recovering the human being currently substituted by artificial constructions, such as the *homo oeconomicus*, the rational player, etc.

2) Conceiving the strategy as a science of relation and of social articulation and not a science of conflict and of war.

3) Putting oneself in the place of the other and thus providing for the strategy a more dialogic, negotiating, cooperative and consensual orientation.

4) Adding to the economic factors – which will always be in it – others that are more relational and intangible.

5) Instead of worrying oneself in providing paradigmatic and exact rules, the "new strategic theory" seeks to provide hermeneutic, orienting and articulating rules (Pérez, 2008: 672-673).

Starting from these new focuses, I believe the strategic dimension of organizational communication should incorporate a much more complex vision and appreciate, above all, the human and social aspects, overcoming the vision that is merely technicist and is of economic rationality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article I have sought to set organizational communication in the socio--economic context of the digital era to provide a reflection on the implications and the complexity of communication in the organizations. When addressing the paradigms it was sought to show how they have oriented the studies of this field in the course of time. It must be stressed that the instrumental, human, cultural and strategic dimensions of organizational communication do not occur separately, but blend with each other and are interdependent in the context of the organizations.

When highlighting and prioritizing the human dimension, I wanted to stress that the organizations, the managers and those responsible for communication cannot stick to only that pragmatic and instrumental vision of communication. It is necessary to think about the persons with whom we deal with daily, in the internal and external environments. It is not possible to disregard human communication and the multiple perspectives that permeate the communicative act inside the organizations. I believe that it concerns a requirement of new times. The question of the subjectivity of the social interlocutors in the organizational environment needs to be considered. Communicative production cannot be restricted to the question of technique and of the media. A constant target should be the quest for more coherence between the institutional speech and the day-to-day practice.

To re-dimension the vision of conservative strategic communication for a more holistic vision, capable of interpreting hermeneutically the contemporaneous world, was also one of the purposes, as well as incorporating the cultural dimension as something that is essential in the communicative processes and in the interrelations between people.

My great interest at this time is exactly of delving deeper in the studies of how communication can contribute to the humanization of the organizations in a complex world where the persons suffer pressures from all sides – which is no different in the organizational environment – under new paradigms that contemplate studies of innovative communicative strategies and of the organizational and intercultural culture. ◼

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