



## THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CONDITIONINGS AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

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Proper management of the internal communication process in an organization is crucial for its effective functioning. However, it should be remembered that communication is a complex phenomenon, and as such, it is conditioned by various factors. Taking into consideration the objectives of internal communication within the company, it is necessary to seek the highest level of its effectiveness. The main purpose of this paper is an in-depth analysis of internal communication process and its conditionings. Moreover, the factors contributing to increase or decrease in the degree of internal communication objectives' achievement will be analyzed as well. Based on the statistical analysis of the survey results, conducted on a sample of 1,354 respondents, and the qualitative analysis of data obtained from 23 focus groups interviews, a list of areas affecting proper communication within the company was created. For the model presented in this article, the dependent variable is the effectiveness of internal communication, defined as the realization of its objectives. As for the independent variables, they are the categories of efficiency and quality of communication within the organization and the factors determining the effectiveness of the undertaken communicational actions.

**Keywords:** Internal communication, Conditionings, Determinants, Effectiveness.

### Introduction

The process and results of internal communication are most often evaluated from the point of view of its performance or efficiency and less frequently – its effectiveness. In the majority of cases the analysis is limited to establishing whether the sent message has been properly understood by the recipient. However, this approach is appropriate in linguistics, but seems insufficient from the perspective of organization and management. Communication between a company and both internal and external recipients should induce them to undertake, refrain from, or modify particular actions. In order to assess the organizational process of communication, special attention should be paid to its objectives and the degree of their achievement.

This article deals with determinants of internal communication effectiveness on the praxeological grounds. Therefore, performance, efficiency and effectiveness of internal communication activities will be related to particular qualities of an efficient action. Additionally, concepts connected with the components of the process assessment and their mutual relations will be redefined. Thanks to the in-depth analysis of internal communication in the researched companies, its conditions and factors increasing or decreasing the degree of achievement of its objectives, a model of relationship between internal communication and its conditions and effectiveness will be created.

## Literature Review

The communication process in a company is evaluated from the point of view of a number of aspects, among others: results, input, used tools, or the degree to which consumers' needs are met. However, taking into account the purposefulness of an organization's existence and the considerable influence of communication on its functioning, achieving the set results seems to be of the highest importance. In literature performance, efficiency and effectiveness of internal communication are analyzed, but they are not clearly distinguished. Effectiveness is identified with both performance and efficiency, whereas these categories are not identical. In the author's opinion, to analyze the communication processes in a company it is necessary to accept the praxeological perspective, i.e. their assessment in the context of performance, effectiveness and efficiency, identified with the praxeological economy. An additional category is quality, which may significantly raise or lower effectiveness.

Praxeologists assume that performance is an universal measure, allowing for the assessment of any activity. Its basic forms are: effectiveness, economy and profitableness. According to B. Sobkowiak, the performance of communication in an organization can be assessed only with reference to its universal meaning, identical with effectiveness [2005, p. 244]. In her definition, the author emphasizes mutual understanding, cooperation, also affecting attitudes and behavior of other participants of communication processes. In this approach the category of performance of internal communication is treated as equal to its effectiveness. However, performance can be understood as either skillful organization of some activities or actions, or a practical ability to do something. Therefore, analyzing the performance of internal communication will refer to a number of aspects, among others:

- access to information,
- speed of information flow,
- amount of information received in relations to information needed
- reliability and completeness of received messages,
- adopting communicational activities to employees' needs,
- communicational atmosphere.

The category of performance is most of all related to the purpose of sharing up-to-date information about the organization with employees, i.e. information flow. Summing up, the performance of the communication process contributes to the achievement of the communicational aims of a company, but it does not guarantee it.

The performance of the communication process influences its efficiency, which is also ambiguously defined in literature. As it was mentioned earlier, in English-language publications efficiency is identified with effectiveness, though these terms are far from equivalent. A quantitative understanding of efficiency is often used in these publications. Many authors point to the relationship between communication processes in an organization and the efficiency and performance of various aspects connected with its functioning. [Cf. Clampitt& Downs, 1993; Finney, 2011; Hargie et al., 2003; Linke&Zerfass 2011; Stayer, 1990]. There are attempts to apply the quantitative approach to assess communication in a company, with a view to confirming its contribution to the improvement of financial results, possibly by means of the return on investment (ROI) index. However, neither scientists nor practitioners are unanimous as to the way of measuring profitability in relation to communicational activities. In the author's opinion, the efficiency of internal communication can be analyzed with reference to the following issue [Rogala 2013]:

- proper, i.e. economically justified use of tools, so that the measurable effects of their use are lower than the input;
- assessment of the information policy of a company in the context of its costs and generated effects such as: increased work productivity, saving the staff's time spent on looking for information, etc.;
- the comparison of the cost of the used communication tools with the benefits from the information passed by means of these tools.

All the remaining aspects of the communication process in an organization are related to either its performance or effectiveness. In the light of the above considerations, the category of the efficiency of internal communication should be identified with praxeological economy. Nevertheless, due to the difficulties in measuring it, the author did not include this area in her research.

Effectiveness is a crucial aspect of communication in a company, as it is indispensable for the achievement of good results in any other area of a company's activity. It refers to achieving the purpose for which a given activity was undertaken. The purposes of internal communication comprise [Rogala & Kaniewska-Sęba 2013]:

- sharing up-to-date information necessary for proper functioning in a company,
- preparation for pending changes,
- unifying around a mission, a value, or a strategy of a company,
- creating a good working atmosphere,
- building a positive internal image of an organization,
- motivating workers to work for the company.

Typically for the theory of communication, it is analyzed at the level of the information flow: the level of effectiveness of communication depends on the degree of convergence between the sender's intention and the understanding by the recipient. As for the theory of praxeology, the measure of effectiveness is the degree to which variously defined objectives are achieved. In this way we can analyze the effectiveness of internal communication in reaching particular purposes, e.g. a motivational one.

Besides its performance, efficiency and effectiveness, a significant aspect of internal communication is its quality, because it is quality, rather than quantity of received information which is of the key importance for the strengths and weaknesses of communication processes in an organization. Quality is the degree to which a given object, action, or service meets the requirements of the evaluator. High quality of internal communication not only facilitates the achievement of its purposes, but also raises the efficiency of the used tools. In earlier studies it was only treated as a combination of efficiency, effectiveness and performance. In the author's opinion, though, such a comprehensive approach, however valuable, may lead to the reduction of differences and overlapping of the assessed areas. That is why, in this article the quality of internal communication is analyzed from the point of view of the way of achieving the objectives of communication, which assumes respecting social norms and the interlocutors' feelings. Therefore, it is assumed that a high level of communicative competence of staff, good relations among employees, appropriate organizational structure, as well as culture and organizational climate contribute to a high quality of the process. Depending on the organization, all these aspects positively or negatively influence the quality of internal communication. Because of the consequences of a defective communication process, aiming for its high quality should be one of the objectives of communicational activities undertaken within an organization [Rogala 2013].

The communication process in an organization, its performance, efficiency and quality depend on various factors. These are, among others, conditions related to the organization, its units, as well as interactions within the company. For the proper management of internal communication, it is crucial to establish which of the factors is of the highest importance for the achievement of its objectives.

## **Methodology<sup>1</sup>**

The presented analyses are based on the quantitative research in the form of direct and online surveys, conducted in: production, service, trade-production and trade-service types of companies in Wielkopolskie voivodeship (Poland). The research comprised 1,398 employees in total, representing all levels of management. Throughout the survey 787 direct and 611 online questionnaires were collected, 1,354 of which were qualified for the further study.

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In the second stage of the research the qualitative method based on the focus group interview (FGI) was applied. 23 focus group interviews were conducted among 142 employees of production and service companies selected by means of purposive sampling. The focus groups included representatives of all the hierarchy levels of the companies. In the case of small entities with a flat organizational structure, the number of interviews was limited to two – one for the low and one for the middle level. The selection of respondents was based on the following criteria of purposive sampling:

- being employed on the basis of a contract of employment;
- working on a specified hierarchy level;
- working in technical and administrative positions;
- excluding people in charge of the information flow in a company.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the funnel strategy, on the basis of a previously prepared script, within the so-called affinity group. The biggest number of participants were representatives of the middle level of management (72 people), whereas the smallest number represented the top management (16 people). 62 respondents work for production companies, 51 for service companies, and 29 for production-trade and service-trade types of companies.

## **Findings**

The obtained results were analyzed from the point of view of the relationship between particular aspects of internal communication and its effectiveness. In accordance to the integrated approach to the effectiveness of the communication activities within a company, it was assumed that it would also be necessary to define their efficiency and quality. The category of efficiency includes: access to information, speed of information flow, the amount of information received compared to the information needed, reliability and completeness of obtained information, as well as the adjustment of the communication activities to the employees' needs and the atmosphere of communication. Among the aspects determining the quality, the following were indicated: communicativeness of superiors, communicativeness of subordinates, the organizational structure, corporate culture and relationships among employees. The effectiveness of internal communication results from the degree of achievement of the following objectives:

- supplying employees with up-to-date information, essential for their proper functioning in the company;
- motivating employees to act for the organization;
- creating a positive atmosphere in the workplace;
- unifying workers around the company's mission, its values and its strategy;
- building a positive image of the company among its employees;
- preparing workers for the pending changes.

In the course of the analyses we decided to test the efficiency level of internal communication. It was also checked whether any of the studied areas predominantly contributes to the general communication efficiency. To achieve this aim, the analysis of the r-Pearson correlation between the assessments of particular aspects of communication within the organization and the obtained efficiency was conducted (see table 1).

All the achieved results prove the existence of the statistically valid, strong relationships between particular aspects of communication and the efficiency of communication in an organization. The highest correlation coefficients were obtained for the amount of information received in relation to information needed ( $r = 0.825$ ), as well as for the speed of the information flow ( $r = 0.811$ ), whereas the lowest coefficients reflected the communication atmosphere ( $r = 0.756$ ).

**Table 1.** r-Person correlation coefficients between different categories of efficiency and overall efficiency assessment.

<b>Category of efficiency</b>	<b>Overall efficiency</b>
access to information	.784**
speed of information flow	.811**
amount of information received compared to the information needed,	.825**
reliability and completeness of obtained information	.783**
adjustment of the communication activities to the employees' needs	.775**
atmosphere of communication	.756**

\*\* Significance level  $\alpha=0,01$  (two-tailed)

Source: own elaboration based on conducted questionnaires (N=1354)

The next step was to verify whether there is a statistically valid interdependence between the efficiency and the effectiveness of internal communication. What was taken into account were: individual aspects of efficiency, the mean of the overall efficiency, as well as the arithmetic mean and the weighted average of the effectiveness (see table 2).

**Table 2.** r-Person correlation coefficients between different categories of efficiency, overall efficiency and arithmetic mean and weighted average of internal communication effectiveness.

<b>Category of efficiency</b>	<b>Arithmetic mean of internal communication effectiveness</b>	<b>Weighted average of the internal communication effectiveness</b>
access to information	.390**	.392**
speed of information flow	.402**	.398**
amount of information received compared to the information needed,	.413**	.414**
reliability and completeness of obtained information	.395**	.388**
adjustment of the communication activities to the employees' needs	.374**	.380**
atmosphere of communication	.424**	.414**
overall efficiency assessment	.504**	.507**

\*\* Significance level  $\alpha=0,01$  (two-tailed)

Source: own elaboration based on conducted questionnaires (N=1354)

The conducted analysis of the r-Pearson correlation proved that the categories of efficiency and effectiveness are interrelated. The correlation coefficients are presented in the table. There is a clear correlation between the access to information, reliability and completeness of the received messages and tailoring the communication activities to the employees' needs on one hand, and the effectiveness of internal communication on the other. The strongest relationship occurred between the average assessment of efficiency and the weighted average of the effectiveness of internal communication. ( $r = 0.507$ ). The obtained results justify a conclusion that the categories of efficiency and effectiveness of communication in a company are correlated in such a way that the higher the efficiency the higher the effectiveness of the communication process.

The integrated approach to the assessment of internal communication requires taking into consideration also its quality. The respondents regard the communicative abilities of employees as the most important factor for the communication in a company. Factors occupying the further three places in the ranking are: the communicative abilities of the superiors (2nd place), the organizational structure (3rd place), as well as the corporate culture and the organizational climate, all of which scored a similar

number of points. The next step was to find out how the internal communication level is assessed in companies. The most highly evaluated factor was the one assessed as the least important by the respondents, i.e. relationships among employees (average value 3.64). The most significant in the respondents' opinion communicative abilities of the subordinates were also highly evaluated (3.60). The lowest position in the respondents' view was taken by the organizational structure (average value 3.32).

This article rests on the assumption that the categories of effectiveness, efficiency and quality of internal communication are correlated and interact with each other. Therefore, it was necessary to check if there is any statistically valid interdependence between individual variables. To begin with, an attempt to verify the following hypothesis was undertaken:

**H1:** The effectiveness of internal communication is positively correlated with the quality of the communicative activities directed towards employees.

With a view to verifying this hypothesis, the analysis of the r-Pearson correlation between the assessed effectiveness of internal communication and the assessed quality of the communicative activities directed towards employees was conducted. The achievement of particular objectives of internal communication was analyzed as well (see table 3).

**Table 3.** r-Person correlation coefficients between assessment of the degree of internal communication objectives realization, arithmetic mean of internal communication effectiveness and overall quality of communication assessment

Assessment of the degree of internal communication objectives realization	r-Pearson coefficient	Significance level
supplying employees with up-to-date information, essential for their proper functioning in the company	0.45	< 0,001
motivating employees to act for the organization	0.43	< 0,001
creating a positive atmosphere in the workplace	0.42	< 0,001
unifying workers around the company's mission, its values and its strategy	0.36	< 0,001
building a positive image of the company among its employees	0.43	< 0,001
preparing workers for the pending changes	0.36	< 0,001
<b>arithmetic mean for internal communication effectiveness</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>&lt; 0,001</b>

Source: own elaboration based on conducted questionnaires (N=1354)

The analysis of the correlation showed that the respondents who more highly evaluated the quality of internal communication also had a higher opinion about the degree of implementation of its individual targets. In each of the researched areas, the correlation coefficients fluctuated between  $r = 0.36$  and  $r = 0.45$ . The coefficient value of the correlation between the assessed quality and effectiveness was the highest for the objective of giving the employees information indispensable for their functioning in the company. The lowest value of the coefficient was for the objectives of unifying employees around a mission, a value, or a strategy of the company, as well as for preparing the staff for the pending changes. It was also noted that there is a statistically valid moderate interdependence between the general assessment of the quality of the internal communication and its effectiveness ( $r = 0.43$ ). Therefore, it has been decided to accept hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, in order to obtain the full view of the existing correlations it was checked if there are any statistically valid correlations between the particular categories of the assessment of communication within the organization, i.e. its efficiency, quality and effectiveness. As a result, statistically valid moderate correlations were noted between these categories (see table 4).

**Table 4.** r-Person correlation coefficients between mean of the internal communication efficiency, quality and effectiveness

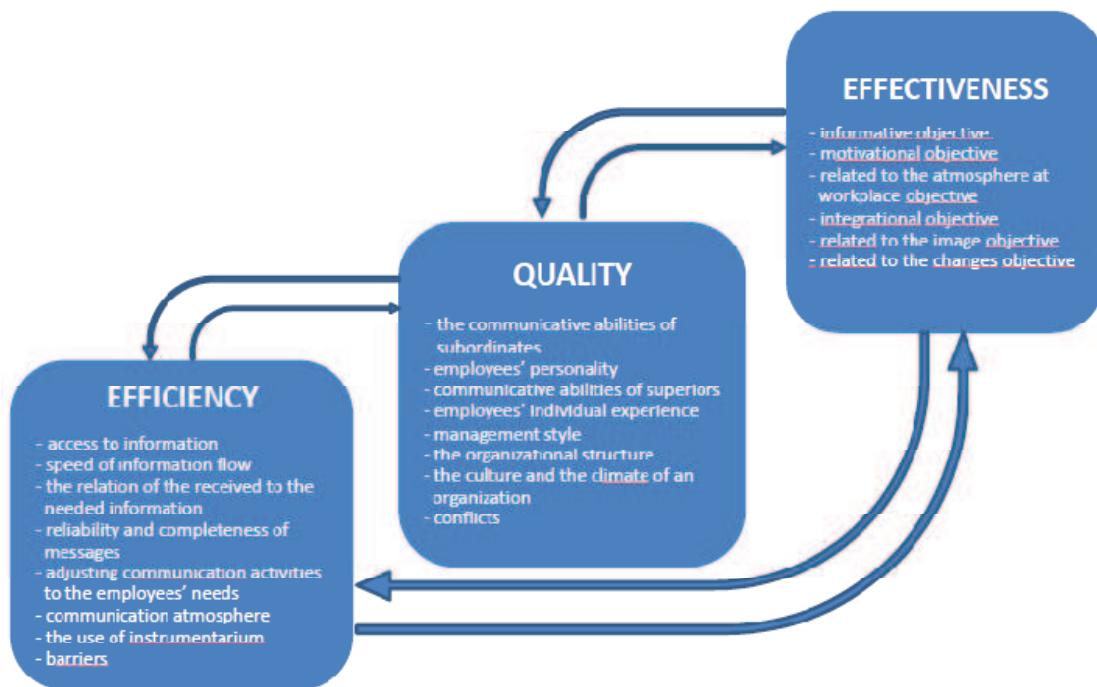
Variables	AM efficiency	AM quality	WA quality	WA effectiveness	AM effectiveness
AM efficiency	1	.613**	.637**	.434**	.431**
AM quality	.613**	1	.613**	.486**	.481**
WA quality	.637**	.613**	1	.434**	.431**
WA effectiveness	.434**	.486**	.434**	1	.982**
AM effectiveness	.431**	.481**	.431**	.982**	1

\*\* Significance level  $\alpha=0,01$  (two-tailed); AM – average mean, WM – weighted mean

Source: own elaboration based on conducted questionnaires (N=1354)

The correlation coefficient had the highest value for categories of efficiency and quality of communication (in the case of the arithmetic mean of the quality assessment  $r = 0.637$ , based on the weighted average  $r = 0.631$ ). Moreover, moderately strong correlations were observed between the effectiveness of the communication activities in an organization and the quality and the efficiency in the researched area.

The in-depth analysis of internal communication in a company, its determinants, and factors increasing or decreasing the degree to which its targets are met allowed for creating a model of correlation between the effectiveness of internal communication and its determinants. the statistical analysis of the results of the survey and the qualitative analysis of the focus group interviews were a basis for preparing a list of areas influencing the proper course of communication activities in a company. The dependent variable of this model is the effectiveness of internal communication understood as the achievement of its objectives. This effectiveness can be full or partial. Activities undertaken for the sake of facilitating communication in a company can also bring results opposite to the expected ones – it is the



**Figure 1.** Model of relations between the internal communication conditionings and its effectiveness.

Source: Rogala 2013.

so-called counter-effectiveness. The overall assessment of the effectiveness (expressed as the arithmetic or weighted mean) comprises the degree of accomplishment of the partial objectives of internal communication (independent variable), whereas it is acceptable to assign each objective a separate weight. There are the following objectives: informative, motivational, related to the atmosphere at workplace, integrational, as well as related to the image and changes. Other independent variables are the categories of efficiency and quality, which comprise sets of specific factors (see figure 1).

As far as efficiency is concerned, the following constituents are taken into account:

- access to information,
- speed of information flow,
- the relation of the received to the needed information,
- reliability and completeness of messages
- adjusting communication activities to the employees' needs,
- communication atmosphere,
- the use of instrumentarium,
- barriers.

The general assessment of the quality of communication is determined by the following factors:

- the communicative abilities of subordinates,
- employees' personality,
- communicative abilities of superiors,
- employees' individual experience,
- management style,
- the organizational structure,
- the culture and the climate of an organization,
- conflicts.

The created model illustrates the correlations between various aspects of the internal communication management and factors determining the effectiveness of the undertaken activities. What is more, it shows areas requiring the special attention of people planning communication strategies and implementing communication solutions in organizations. In the author's opinion, the categories of efficiency and quality determine the category of the effectiveness of internal communication. Therefore, the achievement of a high level of its implementation requires obtaining satisfactory results in both of these areas.

## **Conclusions**

In the light of the above analysis it can be concluded that a high level of achievement of communication objectives in an organization requires an integrated approach. The obtained results justify a statement that the categories of performance and efficiency of internal communication are interrelated. The relation: the higher the performance, the higher the efficiency of the process ( $r = 0.43$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) seems to be of a particular significance. The analysis of the correlation between efficiency and quality of internal communication proved the existence of a statistically significant, moderately strong relation between the general assessment of the internal communication quality and its efficiency ( $r = 0.43$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, it has been stated that the categories of performance and quality are also interrelated (the results were statistically significant).

Knowing the aspects of particular categories of the process and the effects of internal communication, it is possible, on the one hand, to identify areas requiring improvement, and on the other, properly allocate the resources meant to raise the effectiveness of the process. At the same time, it should be stressed that communication audits should be conducted regularly, by means of reliable tools and their results should be confronted with the employees' expectations in this respect. Depending on the results obtained for a given organization, people responsible for internal communication may stimulate changes

in the specific areas of the process, in this way contributing to the increase of effectiveness of communicational activities addressed to the staff.

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