

External and internal communication in the Salesian Family

Introduction

Institutional communication refers to the activities performed by an organization and its representatives to generate and transmit information to individuals, groups, and communities, as well as to obtain feedback. Organizations carry out external and internal communication activities, in the course of which they communicate relevant information to the public about events as well as the organization's objectives, values, mission, and vision. The communication channels are sometimes different, as is the audience itself. In recent years, institutions have placed a clear emphasis on obtaining feedback from recipients, whereby this communication is sometimes defined two-way communication.

External communication refers to the transmission of information outside the organization, to a broad audience. In this case, the entity aims to build a positive image and to reliably inform those who are not directly involved in the organization about its activities. Internal communication, instead, is the transmission of messages within an organization to those who are part of it. Such statements help people understand the mission and vision, as well as orient themselves toward the organization's specific activities and plans.

In the fundamental principles of communication, we find the affirmation that when an institution ceases relevant communication activities, this role is taken over by other actors, with different results: negative or positive. Silence in an institution's media space is not the preferred *casus* of the media and of journalists. In this case, the organization does not construct a narrative and is not proactive, but reactive in its communication activities. This is why it is so important to gradually raise awareness of appropriate communication, but also to prepare specific people from a professional point of view for these activities.

In this context, however, it is important to recall that "(...) communication is often instrumentalized so that the world sees us as we would like to be and not for who we are."¹ Communication in the Church "(...) must never be reduced to an artifice, to - we would say today - a marketing strategy, but must be the reflection of the soul, the visible surface of a nucleus of love invisible to the eyes".²

The corollary of institutional communication is its identity, that is, the set of characteristics that have shaped it. In the case of the Salesian Family, it is necessary to recall the history, the charism, the saints and blessed of the Salesian community guided by Don Bosco, all the institutions and activities of the Salesian Family in the world, the leaders and, above all, the actual people who make up this great family.

External communication

External communication often takes place through media not belonging to the organization, whether public or private. In this case, contact with journalists and those who produce content for these media is very relevant. In doing so, it is essential to try to engage individual media outlets in positive activities and not just in mobilizing forces during emerging crises. Building bridges with the media in 'peacetime' is a difficult and time-consuming task, but one with tangible benefits. Conversely, the rapid and reckless tearing down of these bridges, often for emotional reasons and lack of proper knowledge, leads to isolation, confusion and to swimming in solitary informational waters far from shore.

¹ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 57ma Giornata Mondiale Delle Comunicazioni Sociali, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/communications/documents/20230124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html>, 2023.

² Ibid.

The transmission of information to the outside world can also take place through the media owned by the institutions, in this case the Salesian Family. These allow project proponents to better control the process of transmission and creation of content. For some activities, it happens that this content is prepared in an unprofessional way. As a result, faced with the vast amount of data present in the infosphere, those that are not very carefully prepared disappear. For this reason, it is worth making sure that the content is prepared in a way that interests the audience and influences its decisions.

Probably an important task that the Salesian Family should address is the professionalization of content, which goes hand in hand with the collaboration of specific figures in the created group. The experience of the past decades shows that the creation of professional media messages usually occurs in teams. Creating content by oneself, alone, creates the risk of remaining on the lonely island of one's own expectations and information bubble. To obtain the desired results, it is advisable to consider inviting competent professionals to work with them, being prepared to invest a measurable amount of money. At this point, it should be emphasized that in many parts of the world, the Salesian Family successfully and professionally manages its traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, as well as those associated with the rapid development of the Internet and social media.

Within the Salesian Family, all over the world, it is quite easy to find interesting, even fascinating personalities who attract millions of viewers, listeners or readers. They have a special responsibility for the messages they promote. For millions of viewers in the digital media space, these cutting-edge content creators or influencers become a shining light, an authority and a beacon. In such cases, these innovators and influencers should be supported and, if necessary, actions should be fraternally corrected. On the other hand, in situations where the emotion of public performance or the so-called 'media narcissism' wins over a logical, rational and evangelical approach, it is worthwhile to intervene firmly.

Creating content for traditional and digital media requires a range of skills. Just as a small child slowly learns to walk, so an institution builds its know-how and its media laboratory. To prepare and conduct a press conference, write a statement during a crisis, or participate in a live televised debate on the difference between Pope Francis' and Pope Benedict XVI's approach to the Church, appropriate qualifications and media training are required. Probably, this sensitivity will be different in Africa, Asia, America and Europe for cultural reasons, technological tools, access to the Internet and social media. That said, on all continents, modern forms of media make it easier to reach the younger generation, which is slowly taking responsibility for institutions related to the Church, politics or economics.

In the media-related work of many institutions of the Salesian Family, the figure of the press officer and the press office is precious. The press officer can be defined as the 'frontman', the face of the organization, while the press office helps to build and disseminate appropriate written, audio and video messages. Content creators have a basic understanding of how to build messages depending on the medium and audience. A short video on Tik Tok about a children's holiday will be prepared very differently from a serious debate show on national public television about the election of a new Pope. An article in the Salesian Bulletin and a Facebook post will be written differently. It will be different to broadcast the funeral of a Pope and completely different to broadcast a live concert by a Christian hip-hop group.

Another issue is that of emotions in external communication in the people who represent the institution. Hence the importance of studies, training or courses in speaking in front of the camera, in writing crisis statements, in the ability to formulate social media messages concisely, in the

principles of rhetoric and eristics. Both on the part of the leaders of the institution, and on the part of those who communicate with the media, powerful emotions may arise during a real crisis, and therefore an information crisis. Likewise, the expression of emotions related to positive feelings and news within the institution must also be properly balanced.

A considerable challenge is the correct external communication in the so-called crisis situations within the Salesian Family. Practice shows that, literally overnight, media cases can arise that surprise and disrupt the day's agenda. At the same time, it is a fact that most crises can be predicted, and often these are the so-called creeping crises that have been building up for years but have not been adequately monitored. Once the bombshell of a media crisis explodes, it is worth remembering the principle of talking to the media, sending appropriate messages, creating a crisis team and, if necessary, making use of the advice of specialists. Journalists and the public perceive very poorly an attitude of silence on the part of institutions during a crisis. In the minds of the general public, moreover, this usually amounts to an admission of guilt. In these cases, speech is silver, but silence is not gold.

External communication is the daily positive communication that systematically builds the image of the institution and presents the real activities related to the statutory objectives. Throughout the world, the Salesian Family is a powerful force for change in countries and societies. Don Bosco's charism in times of pandemics and wars is all the more a seed that, thanks to the media, falls on fertile and fruitful soil. People, in an epoch of confusion, expect hope: good information about wise educational activities, commitment to the mission field or guidance for a profound religious life. It is also important to remember that never in human history has there been a pulpit like the Internet and social media, which theoretically has an impact on several billion recipients.

Internal communication

Internal communication within Salesian Family institutions is as important as external communication. It consists of planned activities and presupposes specific communication objectives. A proper communication process translates into strong motivation to work, commitment and loyalty. In this way, through feedback, managers are able to better understand the actions taken within the institution. The objectives of internal communication include sharing knowledge and strategy, transferring information, integration, motivation, and creating relationships.

To increase the efficiency of internal communication processes, it is especially important to ensure that press offices operate appropriately. A diversified message across multiple information channels, prepared by those in charge, will ensure the success of the information provided. At the same time, it should be emphasized that internal communication is a two-way process that takes time.

"Influence and engagement refer to the implementation of two-way communication, wherein not only is information communicated, but information is also sought from employees. In this regard, it is very important to encourage their opinions, ideas and opportunities for co-decision-making in the implementation of activities important for the development of the company."³

Organizations usually have adequate internal channels for communicating information: newsletters, websites, fan-pages, closed social media groups, flyers, spreadsheets, e-mails, bulletin boards, posters, training courses, workshops, instant messaging groups, live and online meetings, informal visits from superiors, and information provided directly in meetings and groups. Good communication in an institution often begins with a bulletin board (either paper or electronic on the Internet) placed in an appropriate location. Comprehensive information about the institution's activities is very stimulating for further exploratory and innovative initiatives among colleagues. In

³ Klaudia Smolań, Beata Ślusarczyk, Komunikacja wewnętrzna – innowacyjny aspekt współczesnego zarządzania organizacją, Studia i Prace WNEIZ US, nr 52/2 2018, p. 206.

contrast, a lack of internal communication increases the risk of increasing irritation, incorrect assessment of processes, and a decrease in work motivation.

The following elements of internal communication can be found in the Encyclopedia of Management:

- always tell the truth, speak clearly and simply,
- crises arise as a consequence of a lack or defect of internal company communication,
- the more you know about the organization, the better you can achieve the results of communication,
- the employee must be informed before the press,
- one group of employees must not be pitted against another,
- two-way communication must be established and maintained,
- simple tools work as effectively as complex ones,
- the effects are not immediate,
- Internal communication is an ongoing process.

Crisis situations seem to be a special moment in internal communication, when care must be taken to guarantee that information is communicated uniformly. It is widely acknowledged that the main source of internal crises in institutions is the lack of adequate communication among colleagues. According to one study, 86% of employees and managers cite ineffective communication as the principal reason for failure in the workplace.⁴ Without clear communication, objectives remain vague, leaving room for misinterpretation and increasing the likelihood of errors and misunderstandings. When miscommunication occurs, employees feel ignored, undervalued or deceived. This not only affects productivity, but also morale, increasing the turnover rate. In some cases, therefore, it is advisable to ensure that the current state of internal communication is diagnosed correctly.

Poor quality communication and lack of proper strategy can do more harm than good. Common mistakes include: a lack of clarity in communication - the most effective internal communications are direct and simple; the choice of inadequate communication tools - understanding what is important to people and knowing how they want to communicate is crucial; a reluctance to receive feedback - then it is one-way communication, which greatly impoverishes collaboration; overly authoritarian or insufficient leadership; information overload; overly fragmented communication; mismatch between employee and company goals; lack of a unified corporate culture; failure to close the so-called feedback loop with an appropriate response.⁵

Thoughtful internal communication processes bring tangible benefits. In a well-functioning institution, employees also care about personal culture, expression, and ethical principles of content presentation in traditional and Internet media, often referred to as *netiquette*. This attitude shapes a positive image of the individual and the institution as a whole in the media. The responsibility for content published today is enormous and requires specific actions at the individual and institutional levels. Furthermore, it should be remembered that: "The correct functioning of internal communication largely determines the effectiveness of external communication, as there is a

⁴ Pumble, Workplace communication statistics, <https://pumble.com/learn/communication/communication-statistics/>, 2022.

⁵ Bitrix24, Errori di comunicazione sul posto di lavoro? Ecco i 5 motivi principali, <https://www.bitrix24.it/articles/errori-di-comunicazione-sul-posto-di-lavoro-ecco-i-5-motivi-principali.php>; Workplace, I 7 strumenti...

significant relationship between the two types of communication, and it is also one of the fundamental dimensions of effective organizational management."⁶

Conclusion

External and internal communication are complementary processes. One without the other will not work well, it will be lame. In this case, a comparison from the field of sports can be used successfully. A sprinter who starts a race with only one shoe risks not having the necessary effectiveness. He will certainly not reach 100% of the objective and at the same time put his image at risk. The aforementioned complementarity in communication also presupposes awareness of the interpenetration of the two processes, which, although aimed at different audiences, intersect at many points and lead to a single objective, a common goal.

For the Salesian Family, the same principles of communication apply as for large organizations and companies. Proactivity, various forms of communication or professionalism ensure the right message. In this way, the target audience will be oriented towards specific activities and interested media will receive the right amount of information. It is clearly observable from the statements presented above, that coherent external and internal institutional communication is an expression of the Church's concern to inform and evangelize, but also to be present in the public life of society as a whole.

The Salesian Family functions on a global scale and, perceived in this way, manifests great strength in a broad perspective. Few institutions can boast such an elevated number of members united around a single objective. Few organizations have such a powerful influence on decisions and actions at the local, national and international levels. An additional characteristic, in the case of the Salesian Family, is a strong common purpose, very different from typical profit-oriented companies and institutions.

In this context, Pope Francis, in his Message for World Day of Social Communications 2023, speaks of his dream. "I dream of an ecclesial communication that knows how to let itself be guided by the Holy Spirit, gentle and at the same time, prophetic, that knows how to find new ways and means for the wonderful proclamation it is called to deliver in the third millennium. A communication which puts the relationship with God and one's neighbor, especially the neediest, at the center and which knows how to light the fire of faith rather than preserve the ashes of a self-referential identity."⁷

Source texts:

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⁶ Ewa Mazur-Wierzbicka, Komunikacja wewnętrzna w organizacji – wybrane aspekty, *Studia i Prace WNEiZ US* nr 44/2 2016, p. 69.

⁷ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 57ma Giornata Mondiale...

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