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Communication as the Axis of a Change in Administrative Style in a Higher Education Institution

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Abstract. This work arises from a project developed in a higher education institution, aimed at identifying areas for improvement in internal communication and strengthening training courses for operational staff. From a theoretical analysis, the need has been observed to move from a predominantly coercive administrative model toward one oriented toward participatory leadership. Therefore, this study presents an analysis of paradigms in administrative styles, starting from the traditional conception and highlighting the advantages of a contemporary approach that pays greater attention to the human dimension, thus fostering a more effective dynamic with the members of the organization. The work is structured into three clearly differentiated parts. The first offers a brief explanation of the difference between the administrative style proposed for implementation and the traditional style, based on the principles of classical and scientific management. The second part delves into how communication constitutes the backbone of the proposed contemporary style, where attention and trust-building among members become more relevant than the exercise of authoritarian control. Finally, the third part describes how some of the aspects reviewed in theory have begun to be operationalized for practical application, which will lead to a subsequent work presenting the results of the organizational intervention in the higher education institution, based on these premises. For the practical application of this conceptual model, a series of inter-institutional efforts are being developed within the educational organization to implement a different administrative style. In practice, obstacles and details evidencing some resistance to change have continued to arise, making the comprehensive adoption of these notions difficult. Nevertheless, thanks to the management's willingness to promote positive transformations, it is expected that a successful intervention—albeit with some nuances—will be carried out, allowing for an evaluation of the results in terms of communication and administration, derived from the implementation of the practices proposed in this conceptual model.

Keywords. Organizational Communication, Management, Human-Centered Approach

1. The Traditional Management Style Facing Contemporary Challenges.

This work explains the efforts carried out in a Higher Education Institution to address internal communication problems and to integrate members more effectively into the organizational dynamic. In this first section, a theoretical and conceptual explanation is provided on how to evolve from a traditional conception of management toward a contemporary

approach that considers the human dimension of both those who work within the organization and the beneficiaries of its products or services.

The importance of management paying attention to the smallest details that enable the achievement of the greatest results is analyzed, properly managing the different narratives present in the organization and generating synergies that enhance individual capabilities within a collaborative framework.

It also addresses how to implement more effective communication, oriented toward a human-centered understanding of the administrator’s role, focused on people. Finally, elements are proposed to align consultants’ strategies toward building trust, enabling administrators to establish relationships based on credibility and closeness with their collaborators.

Management, from its professional conception, has been understood as the set of activities that allow an administrator to foresee, plan, direct, organize, control, and monitor actions within an organization [1], [2]. This classical vision has given rise to multiple disciplines that form part of the professional profile of students in economic and extractive fields. However, changes in the contemporary environment demand a reinterpretation of management, oriented toward more flexible and human approaches [3], [4].

Three perspectives of management become necessary in the complex environments of the contemporary world. They are briefly explained below:

Management as the Art of Providing What Is Essential

From its etymological sense, to manage implies —*Ad-ministrāre*— the impulse to serve in order to achieve what is great. In other words, to provide what is necessary, including what is minimal, to ensure that what is great —the *magister*— is accomplished. Under this idea, management is conceived as the care of details that, together, allow the achievement of greater objectives [5], [6]. This approach highlights the importance of the small to achieve what is great, masterful, and meaningful.

Management as Narrative Management

The second approach considers the administrator as a manager of narratives. Shared narratives within an organization are fundamental to aligning efforts toward a common goal [7], [8]. The administrator, in this sense, facilitates the construction and articulation of narratives that promote cohesion and collaboration.

Management as the Provocation of Synergies

Finally, management can be understood as the ability to generate synergies among the different groups that make up an organization [9], [10]. The administrator acts as a catalyst for productive interactions, fostering mutual understanding and integrating individual tasks into a collective effort. Table 1 shows the elements emphasized in each management style.

Table 1. Comparison Between Management Styles (own elaboration).

Focus on:	Traditional Management	Contemporary Management
Control	Very High	Very Low
Direction	High	Low
Delegation	Low	High

Collaboration	Very Low	Very High
Innovation	Low	High

These three perspectives share a common goal: to transform traditional management, focused on control and direction, into a model that prioritizes delegation, collaboration, and appreciation for the work of others. This change responds to the demands of more dynamic and human organizational environments [11].

2. Organizational Communication as the Key to the Management Style.

Since contemporary management requires approaches that transcend the rigidity of the classical model, the proposals presented here—provision of essentials, narrative management, and synergy creation—offer alternatives for building more adaptive and cohesive organizations, where the administrator’s role is redefined as a facilitator and coordinator.

Communication is the guiding thread that defines the administrator’s role in contemporary organizations. Beyond the mere transmission of information, communication involves interaction, role exchange, and the construction of understanding. Following Luhmann’s perspective [12], communication is an improbable act, which poses challenges for organizational management. The administrator’s role can ensure the functioning of the communicative system within the organization, overcoming the improbabilities of contact, comprehension, and message acceptance.

Communication implies an effort to make two or more interlocutors feel they share a common space. Contrary to common assumptions, it is not simply about transmitting information or ensuring it reaches its recipient but about initiating a cycle of interaction—a back-and-forth between the communicator and the listener, exchanging roles whenever necessary until understanding is achieved [13]. In a very general sense, it is said that everything communicates because everything has the capacity to send a message. However, understood as an improbable act, effective communication only occurs when obstacles are overcome making oneself understood, ensuring the message reaches even those who are not present, and achieving message acceptance [12]. Additionally, establishing initial contact is also improbable. Proximity or physical presence does not necessarily guarantee the interaction and behaviour required to show interest in listening or receiving a message [14]. Likewise, it is improbable that a message will have a single meaning [15]; that a message will cease to reflect ourselves even when speaking on behalf of a larger entity such as an organization [16]; and it is even improbable that in all cases we will truly listen to the message.

Nevertheless, the organization is a communicative system, where each interaction contributes to the construction of meaning [12]. The administrator must implement mechanisms that reduce these improbabilities: clear protocols, collaborative tools, and feedback spaces. Their role, therefore, is not to control but to create conditions for effective interaction. Communication is, thus, the core of contemporary management. Overcoming the improbabilities described by Luhmann requires an active role from the administrator as facilitator, mediator, and designer of communicative systems.

2.1.1. *The Dilemma of Balancing Objective Communication and Interpretive Communication*

Communicative understanding within organizations requires considering both objective reality and the meaning individuals attribute to that reality. Cultural aspects—habits, narratives, artifacts, ceremonies—interact with the historical, political, economic, and social context to construct organizational narratives. The reality that “is,” explainable through formal models, contrasts with the reality of what “means,” expressed through metaphors and allegories. Balancing these two extremes is essential to communicate the ultimate sense of the organization [17].

Although things objectively “are,” it is inherent to human nature to assign them a meaning that goes beyond their own reality. What “is” can be explained through isomorphisms, that is, with mathematical language, maps, holograms, or even algorithms. But what “means” is translated and manifested through metaphors, pareidolias, artistic symbols, or allegories. In an organization, balancing both expressions is important. It is not reasonable to experience organizational life as something predetermined, nor is it reasonable to reach the extreme where only subjective perceptions matter. Hence the challenge of how to communicate the ultimate meaning of the organization to its members.

This balance is fundamental: a purely objective vision generates rigidity, while an excessively subjective interpretation leads to ambiguity. Table 2 shows some aspects of what happens when communication leans toward extreme.

Table 2. Comparison Between Communication Approaches (own elaboration).

Way of Addressing Communicative Elements	Objective: «What Is»	Subjective: «What It Means»
Objective Data	Acceptance without criticism	Discarded in favor of ad-hoc interpretations
Interpretations	Acceptable if validated with data	Imposed by consensus, sometimes by coercion
Narratives	Not explicitly recognized	Configured alongside interpretations that become dominant
Models	Acceptable if they show strong internal coherence	Acceptable if they reinforce dominant cultural assumptions
Metaphors	Avoided or confused with objective facts	Encouraged, but often confused with objective facts

Organizational habits, narratives, artifacts, and rituals must be analyzed in relation to the historical, political, economic, and social context. This interaction defines the narrative that guides effective communicative action.

2.1.2. The Purpose of Communication as a Guide to Understanding.

To achieve balance between objective elements and interpretive spaces for understanding, Habermas' proposal of four elements—intelligibility, truth, sincerity, and appropriateness—is followed as the basis for purposeful communication [18].

Thus, communication in organizations is not limited to transmitting information but to generating shared understanding. This balance prevents predetermined structures from overshadowing personal development and collective dynamics.

Habermas identifies four conditions for communicative validity: intelligibility, truth, sincerity, and appropriateness [18]. Intelligibility ensures that messages are understandable; truth guarantees they reflect reality; sincerity expresses authenticity; and appropriateness ensures respect and coherence.

Effective communication combines objective data with meaningful interpretations. Formulas and equations provide precision, while metaphors and narratives facilitate emotional connection. Integrating Habermas' elements with objective and interpretive approaches strengthens organizational cohesion and improves communicative effectiveness [5].

Purposeful communication requires intelligibility, truth, sincerity, and appropriateness to achieve balance between objectivity and interpretation. This approach enables the transmission of clear and meaningful messages, essential for organizational sustainability.

2.1.3. Consequences of the Traditional Management Style on Communicative Dynamics.

The traditional management approach, institutionalized in robust bureaucratic structures, hinders adaptation to change. This model, centered on control and the administrator's absolute rationality, generates unilateral dynamics, manipulation of information, and suppression of emotions. Based on Simon's critiques and contemporary theories, an alternative approach has been proposed that prioritizes the human side of organizations, fostering collaboration, transparency, and alignment with organizational purpose [19].

Although the traditional management approach has become institutionalized and makes change difficult in organizations with strong bureaucratic structures—and even in companies that have consolidated processes to reasonably achieve their objectives—the approach proposed in this essay promotes a more effective approximation to the human side of organizations. Traditional management places special emphasis on control. There is a prevailing notion that the higher the hierarchical rank, the more ideas become decrees. The assumption is that those who hold power are right, and others are not. This leads to unilateral control under the premise that the administrator is a fully rational being while others are not. Among organizational members, the assumption prevails that errors—whether real or determined by executive decision-makers—deserve punishment. All this entails strategies such as unilateral objectives, the desire to defeat other parties in disputes, manipulation of information, appeals to external motivations to carry out actions misaligned with the true purpose of the organization, and the perception that feelings must be suppressed in organizational dynamics [20].

As a result, certain communicative dissonances arise in everyday organizational life, causing stress among those who experience them. These include paradoxes such as: being asked to inform but also to conceal; being required to always tell the truth but hide anything that could harm the organization's image; asking employees to take risks but demanding they never fail; mandating victory under the idea that no one loses; requiring teamwork while imposing the categorical imperative of improving personal performance; inviting expression but forbidding

contradiction of the dominant discourse; encouraging creativity but insisting on strict adherence to rules; recognizing limitations while urging total commitment; suggesting the organization is a space that encourages questions while making it clear that ignorance must never be shown; promoting panoramic thinking while demanding focus only on one's own tasks; claiming to work for long-term benefits while enforcing categorical demands for immediate results; and finally, insisting that things must be accepted as they are and cannot be changed, while simultaneously asking individuals to embrace the proverb that they are in a space of freedom [20].

The human-centered management approach proposed as an alternative offers a more sustainable and ethical solution compared to this traditional model.

2.1.4. Communicational Advantages of a Different Management Style.

The approach of management with greater sensitivity to the human dimension implies accepting that, regardless of a person's position in the hierarchical scale, while one may have a reason, others may also have valid reasons [20]. This involves mutual learning, recognition of bounded rationality, and acknowledgment that other points of view can be complementary and a source of enrichment for existing perspectives. Organizational strategies stemming from this communicative approach include, among others: defining consensual objectives; winning alongside others rather than defeating them; sharing and listening to opinions; and committing based on freedom of information and recognition of the validity of feelings.

For example, according to Rogers, the idea of obligation as a way to achieve desired outcomes in a space of human coexistence often leads people to perform tasks either poorly or correctly but with emotional strain that results in disenchantment or apathy. There is, of course, the possibility of open or covert rebellion against what is imposed as mandatory. As an alternative, Rogers proposes an approach that, while less attractive in terms of urgency for achieving results, can be more powerful in terms of permanence and sustainability. It consists of prioritizing genuine attention and authentic support for the people one works with from a managerial or leadership position. In this way, empathy can be achieved—not by equating oneself with others, but by accepting, from a space of mutual vulnerability, that it is possible to visualize situations similar to those experienced by those we coexist with. Therefore, true motivation can be managed based on a shared sense of the real value of pursuing a goal. These three steps—attention, empathy, and motivation—generate trust, which is the foundation of interpersonal relationships that guarantee collaboration [21].

3. Toward the Implementation of Consultative and Participatory Communication.

Many authors and theories have highlighted the benefits for healthier organizations of moving away from rigid administrative styles toward others that consider the importance of the human dimension. Likert, for example, classifies administrative systems into four types: two authoritarian and two where authentic and effective leadership is exercised [22]. Since contemporary management requires approaches that transcend the rigidity of the classical model, the proposals presented here—provision of essentials, narrative management, and synergy creation—offer alternatives for building more adaptive and cohesive organizations, where the administrator's role is redefined as facilitator and coordinator. In Likert's terms, these are administrative systems with consultative and even participatory leadership.

To conclude this work, we mention how, based on the approaches of two organizational consultants, an intervention has been proposed in a Higher Education Institution supported by the points developed and the attitude necessary for collaboration mentioned by Rogers [20].

This effort sets the stage for applying these concepts in practical terms. On one hand, we have the proposal of an expert in organizational consulting, Koffman, who starts from diagnostic tools for identifying organizational development opportunities.

In summary, the diagnostic aspects explored in his proposal include detecting communicational paradoxes, the latent contradiction between creativity and organizational rules, and the level of risk associated with making mistakes [20].

On the other hand, from an expert in internal communication, Tessi, elements are taken that imply that each member of an organization knows they can speak, be heard, feel heard, know they are heard, have the desire to listen to others, and create meaningful connections. His proposal is presented through seven steps to complete the process of aligned communication: listen to others first; capitalize on complaints; organize what will be said; narrate with meaning; offer the floor again; measure achievements; and share them [23]. Table 3 shows the three stages involved in a communicational intervention in terms of diagnosis, action, and attitude.

Table 3. Diagnostic, Action, and Attitudinal Elements for a Change in Communicational Approach (own elaboration)

Kofman (Diagnosis)	Tessi (Acción)	Rogers (Actitud)
Detect paradoxes (inform vs. conceal)	Listen first and capitalize on complaints	Authentic attention
Contradiction between creativity and rules	Narrate with meaning and offer the floor	Empathy
Risk vs. punishment for errors	Measure achievements and share results	Motivation

As a starting activity—whose results will be reported in a subsequent article—two very simple instruments have been developed. One is a semi-structured interview script consisting of five trigger phrases for a broader conversation with key organizational actors:

- I can speak
- I know I am heard
- I feel heard
- I want to listen
- I create connection

Based on the interview results, it will be possible to qualitatively analyze the sense of connection that different members of the organization have regarding communication within the organization. It will also provide elements to describe opportunities for change in the management style.

Additionally, a diagnostic questionnaire of 12 questions proposed by Kofman is intended to be applied, with all answers being “yes” or “no.” Each negative response signals opportunities to work toward a better organizational climate. Table 4 shows the correspondence between Kofman’s questions, Rogers’ trust-building attitudes, and Tessi’s communicative premises.

Table 4. Matrix of Relationships Between Organizational Development Questions, Trust Attitudes, and Communication Premises (own elaboration)

Organizational Development Question [20]	Trust Attitude [21]	Communication Premise [23]
Do I know what is expected of me at work?	Congruence (clarity and transparency)	Organize the message (clear communication)
Do I have the materials and equipment to do my job well?	Acceptance (recognizing needs)	Measure achievements (ensure aligned resources)
Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best?	Empathy (understanding talents)	Listen first (identify strengths)
Did I receive recognition in the last week?	Positive acceptance	Narrate with meaning (give feedback with purpose)
Does my supervisor care about me as a person?	Empathy	Offer the floor (create dialogue spaces)
Is there someone who encourages my development?	Acceptance and empathy	Capitalize on complaints (turn concerns into growth)
Are my opinions important?	Congruence and empathy	Offer the floor
Does the mission make me feel my work is important?	Congruence (alignment with purpose)	Narrate with meaning
Are my coworkers committed?	Empathy (genuine relationships)	Listen first
Do I have a best friend at work?	Acceptance	Listen first
Has someone spoken to me about my progress?	Empathy and acceptance	Measure achievements
Have I had opportunities to learn and grow?	Congruence (authentic development)	Link to results (align growth with objectives)

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Are my opinions important?	Congruence and empathy	Offer the floor
Does the mission make me feel my work is important?	Congruence (alignment with purpose)	Narrate with meaning
Are my coworkers committed?	Empathy (genuine relationships)	Listen first
Do I have a best friend at work?	Acceptance	Listen first
Has someone spoken to me about my progress?	Empathy and acceptance	Measure achievements
Have I had opportunities to learn and grow?	Congruence (authentic development)	Link to results (align growth with objectives)

Although not all the necessary conditions to carry out the project can be taken for granted, the possibility of diagnosing and intervening in internal communication has initially been well received. This exercise will also serve as input for a serious reflection by the organization regarding its management style.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, although traditional management has proven effective in driving economic development for years and decades, the growing complexity of the contemporary world demands an approach that gives greater relevance to the human dimension within organizations.

Therefore, it is recommended that once an organization has ensured its survival through mastery of hard skills, it should begin to strengthen soft skills. Under this premise, the administrator's role ceases to be merely that of a director and controller and transforms into that of a conscious manager, responsible for attending to the smallest details that enable extraordinary results. This new approach involves ensuring the alignment of the narratives of the various actors within the organization and guaranteeing the creation of synergies that make

possible achievements that, individually and under purely technical criteria, would be unattainable.

Likewise, the fundamental role of communication in this process of change has been highlighted: shifting from conceiving the administrator as a purely rational entity oriented toward instrumental efficiency to a leader who fosters trust and nurtures the shared narrative among members. This change is essential for organizations that have moved beyond the survival stage and seek to project themselves toward a greater purpose aligned with the deepest needs of the society in which they operate.

Many authors and theories have emphasized the importance of moving from rigid administrative styles toward others that recognize the significance of the human dimension for healthier organizations. Likert, for example, classifies administrative systems into four types—two authoritarian and two where authentic and effective leadership is exercised. Since contemporary management requires approaches that transcend the rigidity of the classical model, the proposals presented here—provision of essentials, narrative management, and synergy creation—offer alternatives for building more adaptive and cohesive organizations, where the administrator’s role is redefined as facilitator and articulator. In Likert’s terms, these are administrative systems with consultative and even participative leadership.

It is expected that the practical application of this proposal will yield practical knowledge on how to transform an institution governed by highly bureaucratic processes into one more aligned with the educational purpose and humanistic spirit that give it origin and meaning.

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