

## How can organizational communication impact society? Reflections from the communication practice in Portuguese communication agencies

¿Cómo la comunicación organizacional puede impactar a la  
sociedad? Reflexiones por la práctica de comunicación en las  
agencias de comunicación portuguesas

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### Abstract

This investigation<sup>4</sup> aims to reflect on the impact generated by organizational communication in society, considering its capacity to interfere in the public sphere construction, through the perspective of Portuguese communication professionals. For this, supported by a theoretical perspective of organizational communication and communication for development, in-depth interviews were conducted with communication agencies. To understand the impact, results show that it is necessary to discuss the organizational communication power in the interactional context and the discourse influence in individuals' perceptions and behaviors.

**Keywords:** organizations, organizational communication, impact, society.

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## Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre el impacto que genera la comunicación organizacional en la sociedad, considerando su capacidad para interferir en la construcción de la esfera pública, mediante la perspectiva de los profesionales de la comunicación portugueses. Para ello, y siguiendo una perspectiva teórica basada en la comunicación organizacional y la comunicación para el desarrollo, se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad con agencias de comunicación. Para comprender el impacto de este trabajo, los resultados muestran que es necesario discutir el poder de la comunicación organizacional en el contexto interaccional y la influencia del discurso en las percepciones y comportamientos de los individuos.

**Palabras claves:** organizaciones, comunicación organizacional, impacto, sociedad.

## Summary

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical framework
3. Methodology and results
4. Discussion
5. Conclusions
6. References

## Sumario

1. Introducción
2. Marco teórico
3. Metodología y resultados
4. Discusión
5. Conclusiones
6. Referencias

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current business organizations conjuncture, it is possible to observe in the organizational communication practice the increase in positions on various issues involving social problematics that indicate a change in posture and in the way of interacting with society. Given their power, it is relevant to observe this change due to the potential of these positions to generate impacts on society by influencing the individuals' conduct regarding social interest issues that interfere with social dynamics.

Reflecting on it, an attempt was made to analyze the changes that are taking place and to identify key factors in organizational communication practice that impact society through

the perceptions of Portuguese communication agencies. Thus, this study aims to reflect on the impact generated by organizational communication in society, considering its ability to interfere in the public sphere, through the perspective of Portuguese communication professionals. The proposal assumes that communication has the potential to influence action, an opinion, or a debate, being guided by the following question: how can organizational communication impact society?

For this, a theoretical-bibliographic study was carried out that addressed the social perspective on organizational communication and communication for development. Subsequently, in-depth interviews with managers of Portuguese communication agencies were conducted. The results indicate, with limitations, a communication power impact, and the need for organizations to assume responsibilities in the social context.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGES**

Considering that "[...]organizations are established, composed, designed, and sustained" by communication practices (Cooren et al., 2011: 1150), they are permeated by cultural, symbolic, discursive, and power processes that are in constant interaction with the social context (Lima and Oliveira, 2014). With these relations, it is understood that social transformations reflect on the organizations' role in society and allow us to observe issues related to organizational power and responsibility in social dynamics.

These factors indicate that organizations and communication are phenomena capable of transforming reality and impact on society's construction. Consequently, they transform with social changes and transform society with their actions (Lima and Oliveira, 2014). So, organizations are directly related to the socio-economic, political, and cultural realities that turn inevitable to perceive their social impacts and the relevance of their relationship with society.

This perspective means a mutual involvement that "creates a fundamental responsibility of the organization for its stakeholders" and, in addition, for all individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by its activities (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017: 01). Therefore, the

relationship should not only be directed towards stakeholders but towards an approach that thinks about it at a macro level, because:

At the macro level, it is possible to discuss the place of organizations in society, including their influence on political, social, and economic matters. Important questions here are, for instance, the values and interests that organizations further and whether or not these are self-interested or in the interest of the larger society. (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017: 01).

According to Putnam and Mumby (2014), the macro perspective approach is relevant to show the growing fluidity of organizational boundaries that indicate, for Fulk (2014), the influence of social context on organizational communication and the way organizations engages with society. This view guides the study because it indicates that organizations can contribute to social changes through communication if they act considering their power and responsibilities in social dynamics. It is an approach to analyzing the obligations, transformations, and conflicts between organizations and society (Fulk, 2014). Thus, we have an organizational communication focused more on thinking about social phenomena than business performance.

For Ihlen and Verhoeven (2017), this view represents a perspective based on social theories that allow looking at the positive and negative influences, effects, and social consequences to professionals understand the impacts of their actions and the behavior of their organization. The authors' vision allows us to make "different descriptions and diagnoses of society, and questions the value and meaning of what we see around us"; to provide "an increasingly common view that society is not only maintained by communication, but it is constituted by it"; and to understand "how language, communication, and relations (or networks) help us to interpret, deconstruct and reconstruct meaning" (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017: 04-05).

The public relations societal approach looks at this through the communication's public role not for organizations themselves but on a major structure for society (van Ruler, 2016). According to van Ruler (2016: 20), public relations is "work done publicly, with audiences and for audiences", so there is an organization's impact in the public sphere by stimulating what is "potentially known and can be discussed by all". This view observes issues and values

considered publicly relevant, as public relations create a basis for public debate that produces meanings in society (Van Ruler and Vercic, 2003). In this sense, despite the traditional theories focusing on relationship management, this perspective focuses on the organizational communication consequences for society (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2017).

Because organizations disseminate messages to achieve social legitimacy, the symbolic communication interventions represent a relevant element in the relationship with society due to intentions and values used to build meanings about them through interaction processes (Lima and Oliveira, 2014). Therefore, business organizations can make decisions that interfere with individuals and community life due organizational communication builds representations and important meanings in the social sphere (Lima and Oliveira, 2014).

In this sense, it is relevant to think of communication that collaborates for development and can generate social change by addressing society's problems for individuals. Organizations must rethink what is communicated, recognizing that communication impacts social relations. This idea can be enhanced by the communication proposal for development, which demonstrates how organizations can strengthen social development programs and campaigns.

The idea of development “can be described as a significant change of structured social action or of the culture in a given society, community, or context” (Servaes, 2020a: 58). This proposal is oriented to thinking about communication's social role in view of structural changes because scholarships show that communication can “have a fundamental impact on the entire question of development or social change” (Servaes, 2020b: 90).

According to Wilkins, Tufte, and Obregon (2014), communication for development is an intervention process with the strategic use of communication and the media to achieve socially beneficial objectives, that is, to articulate and drive social changes, political and cultural. This approach looks at social problems, thinks about ways of communicating for the different contexts and subjects, considering solutions sustainable that enable transformations (Wilkins, Tufte and Obregon, 2014).

Communication can change behaviors using persuasion techniques and disseminate new ideas and information through campaigns broadcast in the media and social marketing (Morris, 2003). Furthermore, considering communication as a horizontal interaction and dialogue process, it is possible to allow individuals to be protagonists, recognize the problems that impact them, and propose solutions, developing skills to make decisions that promote social equity and democratic practices (Morris, 2003). For this,

Communication for development and social change is the nurturing of knowledge aimed at creating a consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned. It is thus a social process, which has as its ultimate objective sustainable development/change at distinct levels of society. (Servaes, 2020a: 71).

Given this, communication collaborates by engaging "critical reflections of discourse and praxis" that impact issues such as the environment, human rights, gender and racial equality, violence, social justice, and others (Wilkins, Tufte and Obregon, 2014: 02). Among different perspectives about this approach, we can extend this communication capacity "to all sectors, and its success in influencing and sustaining development depends to a large extent on the adequacy of mechanisms for integration and coordination" (Servaes, 2020a: 57).

Business organizations are an example. In the current intense interactional process scenario, organizations have to respond constantly to their actions and responsibilities, which often involve communicating public interest issues and creating discursive practices that attending society's interests and needs (Carareto, 2022). Considering the ideas of Kotler (2017), this communication is a way for organizations to get involved with the interests of social groups that are looking for brands that act based on strong values that represent relevant impacts on society.

In this sense, individuals believe that a business's role is to create value for society too, so societal issues must be at the center of business decisions (Kotler, Hessenkiel and Lee, 2012). For the authors, companies must look beyond socially responsible actions because of legal, ethical, or moral obligations: they must have a voluntary commitment to contribute to society, which means including social, cultural, human, and environmental conditions. So,

organizations can help with a series of global issues. It is possible if they support causes and assume commitments:

[...] to community health (i.e., AIDS prevention, early detection for breast cancer, timely immunizations); safety (i.e., designated driver programs, crime prevention, use of car safety restraints); education (i.e., literacy, computers for schools, special needs education); employment (i.e., job training, hiring practices, plant locations); the environment (i.e., recycling, elimination of the use of harmful chemicals, reduced packaging); community and economic development (i.e., low-interest housing loans, mentoring entrepreneurs); and other basic human needs and desires (i.e., hunger, homelessness, protecting animal rights, exercising voting privileges, anti-discrimination) (Kotler, Hessenkiel and Lee, 2012: 06).

These are ideas and issues aligned with the proposal of communication for development. Considering the power of organizations to influence, affect interpretative processes and mobilize resources (Zoller, 2014), this communicational process demonstrates that thinking about communication for development is related to how organizations can use the communication power to generate social transformation.

Furthermore, this view can be an alternative to organizations assuming a social leadership posture, which means acting at the root of the problems, not because of what they will gain from it, but because of their positive impact (Doane, 2003). It is about a business revolution in the way to act (Doane, 2003). Given this, it is necessary to defend that organizations, as society members, need to adopt attitudes not only of self-interest. If they act as social leaders, they can change individuals' attitudes and behavior and increased awareness, mobilize opinions and force the pace of change (Hilton, 2003).

### **3. METHODOLOGY: THE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF PROFESSIONALS**

Considering the discussion about organizations' role in society as a global trend (Edelman, 2021), this research has a guiding question: how can organizational communication impact society? As a data collection method for answering this question, in-depth interviews were carried out based on semi-structured scripts with professionals from Portuguese communication agencies, who have skills to offer plural views on organizational

communication due to the diversity of strategies and sectors they serve. The selection considered executive professionals (CEOs or presidents) of associated agencies of APECOM (Portuguese Association of Council Companies in Communication and Public Relations).

Six executives were interviewed through a semi-structured script that addressed: (1) organizations' importance, power, and influence in society; (2) organizations' interaction with society, addressing the communication practice, relationship strategies, and the organizational discourse characteristics; (3) society's interference in organizational communication and the organizations' posture; and (4) the organizational communication role and challenges for the relationship with society.

Considering the attributes to be analysed, the following analysis model (Table 1) guides the mainly question reflections from two dimensions. The first dimension comprises a set of characteristics to direct the communication understanding in the organizations' context and their practice in relationship with society. The second dimension comprises a set of factors to consider that organizational communication has the potential to influence individuals.

**Table 1. Analysis model**

Phenomenon	Dimensions	Dimensions' components	Indicators
Organizational communication impact on society	(1) Organizational communication perspective	(1.1) Communication's role  (1.2) Organizational communication practices	- Relationship type with the public - Perceived communication benefits - Professionals' perceptions about the communication activity - Organizational discourse characteristics
	(2) Organizational communication impacts	(2.1) Ability to influence  (2.2) Relationship objectives with society	- Organizational communication power factors - Interference types in organizational communication - Interaction intentions with society - Perception of organizational communication's role in society

Source: Elaborated by the authors.



In the organizational communication perspective dimension, the professionals indicated that communication is relevant to building favorable scenarios both for the organization's financial sustainability and the relationship needs with society, suggesting a greater expectation about the fulfillment of an organization's civic role. The first-dimension component, communication's role for organizations, assessed the relevance of the relationship with the public and the communication benefits. The research identified that organizations are social structure members with great financial power and interdependence on society. Consequently, organizations achieve the social license to operate, which is the individuals' recognition of the organization's importance, enabling its performance.

According to the interviewees, it is necessary to think about the relationship with society through communication because of its benefits: to generate knowledge about the organization, identification with individuals, reputation, more organization participation in social needs and problems; to enable active listening and surveillance and to communicate about your social commitment.

The second-dimension component, organizational communication practices, evaluated the professionals' perception of the communication activity and the organizational discourse characteristics. According to them, the communication activity depends on each organization's financial power and cultural and market characteristics. These factors allow for greater or lesser performance and lead to relationship strategies. In general, communication works to generate perceptions in public opinion by communicating to different audiences through different integrated tactics that are concerned, most of the time, with the organization's visibility.

However, in the current global context with an intense interaction, it is observed that organizational communication must go further and assume a listening posture. For professionals, listening is essential, because of a constant increase in pressure from society to affirm the organizations' social commitment and fulfill their civic role. For this reason, organizations increasingly seek to communicate their purposes: the contributions to justify their existence and generate a positive impact on society. Consequently, they are taking

more positions about collective interests, which is observed by the frequency of positioning about social problems and causes.

In the professional perception, these positions represent a great contextual influence due to situations or issues on the public agenda that exert force in the way of acting and in what is communicated. Thus, for interviewers, the communication pace is being guided by thematic waves laden with human values, social causes, and positions on social issues, such as, for example, gender equality, racial issues, the carbon footprint, plastics use, etc. So, the discourse has reflected a more emotional and humanized communication.

The second study dimension, organizational communication impacts on society, suggests that organizations influence individuals considering their power and generate positive or negative impacts. The first component, impact capacity, assessed the organizational communication power and the society interferences it faces. Concerning power, professionals see organizations and their brands as communication vehicles with reach and financial power, which influence individuals through the dissemination of the messages with meanings that interfere with their lives. Thus, they understand that organizational communication can generate the impact that organizations want because, with their power, they can be activists or not about social and public topics.

Respondents agree that the main factor is the greater interference intensity in organizational communication from different social spheres. The interferences refer to various discussions that occur in the public sphere and reflect on the posture assumed by the organizations. For them, because of the interaction provided by social networks, organizations started to be more questioned by individuals, potentiating the confrontation due to the ability to mobilize.

Thus, it is clear that organizations are not isolated from the social context, and their communication influence and is influenced. According to professionals, these factors make the relationship more susceptible to risks, controversies, and crises that affect organizational legitimacy, and make individuals potential influencers in the organizational context. The shared opinions in circulation have an increasing weight for organizations, which realize that, in the interactional reality, it is necessary to listen to society's demands and incorporate

them into the organizational action to generate trust. Given this, the main interferences originate from public debate, causes in circulation, and cultural aspects. These aspects manifest consequences in information consumption changes because of the participatory consumer profile; the need for more human relationships; the need for individuals to identify with causes; and the new generation's interests.

The change in generational behavior is an important example cited because young people are concerned with issues related to the organizations' civic role when consuming a product or in choosing the companies they would like to work with. According to professionals, the new generation establishes relationships based on principles and values that are felt represented, being more concerned with the society's problems. In this scenario, there are macro themes that interfere with organizations guided by discussion in the public sphere and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In general, they are social and environmental issues that involve actions to act ethically and combat environmental degradation, violence, and inequality.

For the interviewees, these interferences need to be heard by organizations due to the social legitimation, but they are also alert to the importance of generating transformation and assuming responsibilities. This is a challenge due to the speed that discussions and needs change in society, which requires: constant surveillance of the context to meet the demands; adaptation to learn how to incorporate them into the organizational culture; and establishing a much more transparent communication and relationship with individuals. For this reason, the organizational purposes are pointed out as fundamental to be demonstrated in the organization's practices, not only in its speeches.

Given the reflections on the capacity for influence, the second component looks at the relationship objectives with society, considering the possibility of evaluating the impacts generated from the organizations' intentions and the communication role. At this stage, we observed that the organizations intend to know scenarios and respond to audiences to build lasting relationships, guaranteeing business results. This is recognized as a continuous reconstruction process, as the interaction is influenced by different everyday situations and aims to build a trust bond through identification generation.

For this, the professionals believe that the communication must consider the relationship construction by the public opinion, which makes it possible to carry out active and vigilant listening, understanding the social context movements and changes. Therefore, the main interaction intention is to become responsive, meeting the demands that originate in the public sphere to integrate with the society's interests.

Consequently, the organizational communication role in society is the search for a balance between the interference coming from the social context and the influence that the organization can exert on it, which will depend on the interaction intentions and the influence type that it wants to exercise. According to the interviews, it can be: an institutional role, to disseminate to organizations what they offer intending to meet the individual and collective society needs; a transparency role, by opening space both to inform its processes and practices, and to establish a dialogue with society; a transforming role, in the sense of changing the organizations and individuals attitudes; and, an educational role, to guide the knowledge construction and the collective society construction.

#### **4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

With these reflections, some factors were identified on the communication society impact that can be linked to the theoretical perspective. In general, we understood that the impact goes through reflections on the communication power, which is related to organizations' action, intensify by an interactional context. This power comes from three factors: their centrality in society, due to their presence in the social dynamic; financial power, due to the degree of importance to the economic and individuals' life; and the reach power, as they manage to disseminate their messages in considerable proportions.

Together, these factors generate the organizational communication power to influence, just as pointed out by Zoller (2014) about the organization's power to influence, affect interpretative processes, and mobilize resources. Given this, communication is a phenomenon capable of creating bonds with different audiences, which provide the ability to guide public opinion, encourage public debate, interfere in government decisions, and stimulate individuals' attitudes. Therefore, it impacts behaviors and thoughts in society from the reaffirmed symbolic values and interaction in the speeches.

However, despite the organizations' power, they are not exempt from social interference as indicated by Lima and Oliveira (2014) when they affirm that organizations and society affect and transform each other mutually. Regarding that, professionals' perspectives demonstrated that, in the interactional context, individuals become potential influencers and can expand their voices, interfering in the organizational posture because of the information reflexes and communication technologies that brought interaction new habits. In this sense, the impact generated by communication permeates the power it exerts and, to an increasing degree, the individuals' interests with whom organizations interact, which also is pointed out by Kotler (2017).

In Portuguese professionals' perception, these impacts are identified from a positive perspective due to: the potential to generate social changes because of the impact generated by organizations in the local and global economies movement; the cultural impact by enabling the essential products consumption and services that meet the individuals needs with constant innovation; and the social impact, considering that organizations are making commitments to intervene in society's problems and demonstrating their purposes. Similarly, Doane (2003) and Hilton (2003) indicate this positive perspective when they talk about the importance of organizations being social leaders and their ability to drive social change.

There were few reflections on negative impacts, most of which were related to the environmental impact of organizational action. For example, human rights, gender equality, poverty, prejudice, and homophobia issues were cited as relevant to intervene in because they are social problems that need transformation, but without the perception that organizations are also responsible for many of these problems. In a way, there is a lack of perception that organizations, within the current system, generate negative impacts for the various spheres through the communication action, which, loaded with symbolic values, is capable of influencing attitudes related to social issues.

When talking about impact as social change, communication professionals believe that it occurs due to the organizational positioning on the various issues in circulation in the social context. This view shows that it is not only relevant to demonstrate to society the

organization's concerns, but also its vision can be influential in the long run. In other words, by taking a position in the organizational discourse on women's rights, for example, organizations collaborate on reflections and behaviors related to gender equality. The professionals' ideas show that organizations have to support causes and assume commitments, as Kotler, Hessenkiel, and Lee (2012) pointed out about issues of community health, safety, education, employment, environment, community and economic development, and other basic human needs.

Here we observe the relationship between the organizational discourse and the social context, in which both are in constant interaction. Because of this, it is possible to identify that the organizational communication phenomenon occurs in a change in the way of relating and interacting scenarios. The interdependent relationship and the interferences drive the need for them to take positions as social leaders. For that, it is increasingly essential to assume a social commitment to exercising their civic role by listening to society's voices.

This is an important professional view to consider because the diverse movements and discussions that spread around the world are forcing organizations to rebuild their relationship logic. Organizations must rethink the way they communicate and understand the interaction process as an infinite reconstruction in the face of changes, uncertainties, and diversity in society. For this, large organizations are adopting a new communication strategy based on values and action in the face of social issues. An example is an attitude toward certain issues to be more participative about social, environmental, political, cultural, or economic. Organizations understand that individuals value those who act to make an impact.

As affirmed by professionals, thematic waves guide orientations, making organizations align themselves with causes or issues that make sense to the business niche by guiding an image construction and ensuring visibility. Even recognizing the importance of assuming leadership and social commitment, thematic waves indicate that the posture does not necessarily originate to stimulate transformation but to meet market objectives.

As a result, many positions do not represent or integrate the organization's overall strategy, which makes the posture about social issues contextual and not structural. Thus, when organizations build narratives to demonstrate to individuals their concerns, there are at least two directions. The first direction is contextual, when they take ownership of a circumstance or situation to generate visibility, choosing the themes that have more meaning for the organization or disseminate positions on certain issues, but which aim to guarantee recall in the market.

One of the variables related to this direction is the cultural issue of both organization and the location in which it is present. The investigation pointed out that the cultural profile has significant weight for addressing themes in the communication and how organizations are conducting the relationship with society. Depending on it, organizations are more or less incisive on certain topics: they avoid controversial themes, so as not to face questions and prefer neutral and global interest themes when there is a need to position themselves.

The second direction is structural, in which purposes, values, causes, and positions are integrated and associated with the organization's global strategy. This attitude is aligned with the organizational identity, it is present in daily practices and all organizational communication actions. The main objective is to assume a purpose to generate impact, which still has an intention according to the organizational interests, but it becomes more authentic and coherent by coordinating organizations' decisions and actions that can contribute to the social sphere.

Even with differences, contextual and structural direction are strategies of influence supported by the communication ability to build scenarios to generate perceptions about organizations. However, to influence into an interactional context, organizations start to interact with the society's interference, listening more and creating solutions for responses. Thus, the two directions are reflections of this scenario: organizations are looking at emerging issues in society, addressing and acting on public interest issues that can influence individuals, who value organizations that demonstrate and declare their social concerns.

The contextual positioning is not ideal for generating transformation, but it impacts when generating a message reach that addresses a problem, providing visibility. On the other

hand, structural positioning has a great potential for impact because it represents a way for an organization to act as a social leader assuming its civic role. So, despite marketing intentions, organizations can impact society by stimulating certain attitudes in the political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental spheres.

Therefore, we recovered the study's guiding question: how can communication impact society? If we want to reflect on the communication's role, we have to consider all these factors from professional's practice and theoretical perspectives. In view of this, looking at the consequences of communication for society due to its impact on the public sphere (Ihlen; Verhoeven, 2017; van Ruler, 2016; van Ruler; Vercic, 2003), these factors indicate the communication's potential to boost social transformation based on what communication strategies for development propose. By the ideas of Wilkins, Tufte, Obregon (2014), and Morris (2003), we can see that organizational communication can establish processes aimed at informing, educating, and building knowledge considering individuals' needs and potential.

Business organizations have the capacity and resources to act by communicating to disseminate and build knowledge considering the interests and needs, so with developing collective competencies (Servaes, 2020a; 2020b), which involve acting with public interests in the social context. Given this, it is possible to structure a base process to guide broader studies to understand better how communication can impact society. Thus, we pointed out five axes that reflect the impacts of organizational communication in society and look at this process (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Organizational Communication impact axes**



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

On the diagram exposed, organizational communication can impact due to its power, the organizational discourse, the communication informational stance, the communication educational stance, and the interactional context in which organizations are inserted. The axes are interrelated and interact, so they can generate impacts together or separately, which will depend on the organizations' intentions, the posture that they want to assume with society, and the impact recognition that they generate with their actions.

The first axis occurs through the Communication Power, due to the interrelationship between organizations and society, which demonstrates the position that organizations occupy in the social structure and their centrality in the individuals' lives, indicating the communication capacity to generate impacts. This capacity is intensified when identifying factors in this interrelationship that provide organizational power, resulting from the financial weight, reach, and influence that they can exert. As organizations are communicative phenomena, it is understood that the communication power belongs to their realities, whether in daily interactions with internal members or in interactions established with external members, generating the impact they want and from the way they act.

The second axis occurs through the Organizational Discourse. The speeches disseminate ideas and principles that generate the individuals' identification with organizations,

stimulating reflections, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions. So, discourses are loaded with symbolic values that produce meaning and interfere with the individuals' and organizations' reality. This is noticeable with intensity in the current context, in which organizational positions on the diverse society's issues are frequent due to the importance of demonstrating purposes and supporting causes to express the organizations' social role.

The third and fourth axes occur due to the communication intention when assuming an Informational Posture or an Educational Posture. The Informational Posture axis refers to the intention to transmit information, be it about the processes, the organization, and its values, identity, beliefs, and opinions. It is believed that, despite having only this intention, because of the power exercised by the organization, the informative messages have reflexes that can stimulate practices, generate awareness, or help in the public interest matters dissemination.

The Educational Posture axis, on the other hand, refers to the communication impact to generate transformation based on the knowledge construction and through listening to individuals. In other words, it is the impact generated by participation, dialogue, and the inclusion of non-organization needs and interests in the communication processes, aiming at changing behaviours. In this axis, the organization proposes to position itself as a social leader and perform its civic role, being the communication impact directly related to the collective society construction.

The fifth axis occurs through the Interactional Context. The relationship between organizations and society is reflected by the cultural and socio-historical context in which interactions occur. In the current context, characterized by intense interactional processes, it is observed that collective issues start to interfere in the organizational posture, and, simultaneously, organizations use these interferences to think about the interacting way, influencing their social legitimation construction. The relationship between interferences and influences has an impact on the social sphere, mainly from the senses' circulation point of view. Therefore, the way that organizations propose interaction with society generates impacts.

Considering each axis references, the study showed that the upper diagram axes – Communication Power, Organizational Discourse, and Interactional Context – are in constant interaction, acting in an interdependent manner and generating impacts on society caused by interaction reflexes. The lower axes – Informational Posture and Educational Posture – are independent of each other and are related to the organization's intention and interest, making the impacts generated depend on the organizational conduct.

Given the study carried out, the results demonstrate the importance between the communication power, the discourse, and the interactional context considering that, based on the societal interference faced by organizations, they adapt and act to exert influence on society. With this, the organizational posture becomes decisive for the impacts that communication will generate in the social sphere.

In this sense, the investigation points out that professionals perceive the communication impact power and the need for organizations to assume responsibilities in the social context, however it is noticeable that there are still practical limitations in these perceptions. Therefore, the impact understanding goes through the discussion about the organizational communication power in the interactional context, in which individuals seek organizations with purpose and are potential influencers of them. At the same time, organizations, in legitimation search, appropriate the social context to generate identification with individuals.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

With this study, our intention is not to generalize the perception of Portuguese professionals but to show the existence of a tendency to be studied to think about the impacts that organizational communication can provide for social changes if business organizations consider the perspectives of communication for development. In this sense, the research with agencies indicates similarity in the communication processes, mainly from the major brands' point of view, concerning the importance of the positioning at a time when organizations are charged about global and uniform issues involving social problems.

The interdependence between organizations and society was evidenced by the importance of establishing relationships to respond to collective needs and problems. Even though the organizations' main objective is their financial sustainability, it is no longer possible to think about the relationship with society only with this interest, as they are inserted in a context that has required transformation and civic role fulfillment.

For this reason, organizational communication represents an important way to influence changes that stimulate and collaborate with society, and its ability to generate positive impacts if organizations want has been observed. At the same time, they are involved in an interactional scenario that stimulates thinking about these impacts due to the individuals' interests, who are potential influencers. These individuals' pressure and question organizations to act on collective interests. Therefore, organizational communication can cause a positive impact, if the organizations have the intention to transform through fostering debates on collective interest issues, raising awareness to encourage new organizational and individual behaviours, and, mainly, acting in a coherent way to generate them.

These factors depend on the organizations' understanding of the organizational communication role in society to take responsibility in the face of their influence, creating conditions for professionals, who produce and propose communication in the organizational context, to reflect on the consequences of the communicational actions for the society. Because of this, we believe that it is necessary to discuss the organizational communication power in the interactional context and the discourse influence in the perceptions and behaviors formation that interfere in the social sphere. This is a way to build, with communication, proposals beyond organizations, assuming a collective conscience for them to play a social role in society.

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