

## **The Trajectory of Organizational Communication in Brazil**

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When organizational communication in Brazil was first spoken of, it all boiled down to the publication and distribution of bulletins, newspapers and magazines for employees. This was the norm for the communicational panorama in the second half of the 1960s, when the field of organizational communication began its process of theoretical and practical organization in addition to a series of affirmative actions aimed at institutionalizing the activity and its philosophy within the realm of businesses and the university, as well as dignifying journalists and public relations agents, who were mostly under the charge of the personnel areas. The most significant reference of this initial affirmative movement of organizational communication in Brazil is the foundation of the Aberje, on October 8, 1967, at the time known as the Brazilian Association of Corporate Industrial Editors and is today a historical benchmark that is called Brazilian Association of Business Communication.

The recognition of Aberje's role as a key player in the foundation and development of the professional and theoretical field of Organizational Communication in Brazil can be found in Kunsch (1997, p.57-61), which, using documented sources and statements, shows Aberje to be the "embryo of Organizational Communication in Brazil." Torquato (1984, 1998, 2002) also highlights Aberje's pioneering role, especially in the area of professionalizing corporate publications.

### **The pioneers in communicating human relations**

Aberje's founding was an initiative by a group of corporate communicators and multinational and Brazilian company employees located mostly in Sao Paulo. At the head of this group was Nilo Luchetti, an Italian journalist and a manager at Pirelli who, at the time, ran the *Notícias Pirelli* magazine, a publication produced within the objectives of human relations, supported by the board of that company and which was a professional periodical model for other organizations. Luchetti, who held a privileged and special position when compared to the situations of other corporate communicators, stimulated other professionals to create an association where they could gather and spread technical and practical information on editorial activity, as well as promoting, among businesspeople who were educated within a rational and conservative vision of work, the role of communication as an integrating process. Talking about the action and vision of Luchetti, Professor Margarida M. Krohling Kunsch (1997, p.61) underscores that "the merits of one Nilo Luchetti, an untiring and passionate defender of this cause, must be recognized, as well as other pioneers that, starting with nothing, envisioned the promising horizon of organizational communication in Brazil."

In Aberje's first two decades, it accomplished its goal of improving the quality of corporate communications and institutionalizing the profession of organizational communicator

in Brazil<sup>1</sup>. As Torquato (1984, 1998, 2002) describes it, corporate publications at the time were produced using little journalistic and public relations theory, were lacking editorial techniques, and were practically without funding. This is due to at least four causes: first, to the traditional administrative models that structured businesses at the time; second, to the political climate which was unfavorable to the development of the field of communications; third, to the ideological disqualification of corporate journalism, labeled as an "instrument of the bosses" by the journalists working at the mass communication vehicles and at universities; and, lastly, to the mastery of marketing communications within the realm of Brazilian companies, geared exclusively towards publicizing products. Kunsch (2007, p. 57) and Torquato (2002, p. 3) qualify this view of organizational communication as the "era of the product."

Concerning the technical aspects of the first tools used by Brazil's organizational communication, Torquato (1984, p. 28-29) relates with preciseness the panorama that the Aberje had the mission of facing and overcoming:

At the time of its inception, complete improvisation was king. Employees at lower levels would meet to make the newspaper or bulletin; they would themselves write the texts, make the drawings, set the graphics for the publication in any which way, type everything and do the work of printing and mimeographing. Many publications had already died at the outset, condemned by their undefined objectives, their amateurism, and the complete lack of technical knowledge on the part of their planners. Very few businesses presented good publications, and these, if they came out regularly, were due more to the passion and zeal of some selfless people rather than to the doctrine of the corporate routine.

Torquato (2002, p. 2) also links the origin of an organizational communication that was aligned in its techniques, values, beliefs, and communities to economic, social and political development, especially starting in the 1960s. For him:

The history of organizational communication in Brazil is the history of economic, social and political development itself in the last few decades Here is a little of this history. In 1967, in Sao Paulo, the Aberje was founded. [...] At the start, there was the word, but there was no funding. Later the words multiplied and the funds were divided. This was more or less how the history of organizational communication in Brazil unfolded in the last 30 years. At the end of the 1960s, in the wake of the industrialization of the Southeast, the concept began to run free and businesses began a process of intercommunication with more diverse audiences. A few businesses had already, at that time, realized that there was a strong bond between themselves and society. The organizations concerned themselves with telling their employees that they should be proud of the place where they work. And in clearly demonstrating to

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<sup>1</sup> Caldas Junior (2005, p. 4) points out that "Nilo Luchetti [...] was concerned with spreading new concepts, making the market grow, and preparing professionals to serve it; he met a professor from the Sorbonne of Paris, Dimitri Weiss, with whom he established a relationship and exchanged information. [...] In 1972, in his work *Contributions a l' Etude de la Presse d'Enteprise et Essai de Bibliografie*, professor Weiss cites the Aberje and Brazil "as a country endowed with a relevant corporate communications, next to the United States and Canada."

consumers that they manufacture good products and provide quality services. For this reason, they considered themselves honest and worthy of trust. [...] A look back reveals the initial steps of a lengthy learning process. First, the small newspaper with the features of a social column appeared, badly done and full of praise and good intents. In 1967, the Aberje held its first convention, with internal communications being the topic of all of the activities.

As its first associative expression indicated, the Aberje was a community of craftspeople, journalists, and public relations workers who worked in the internal areas of the companies, charged with the specific task of producing bulletins, magazines, and corporate newspapers. Craftspeople, because their training and work were exclusively operational. Most of these professionals, with the exception of Luchetti, were far from relating organizational communication with the cultural, technological and political aspects of the organization and of society, with the administrative models used at the companies at the time, and with the psychological dimensions of broadcasters and receivers, among other issues.

Furthermore, concerning the historical period that gave context to these first tools of Organizational Communication in Brazil, Torquato (202, p. 4) underscores that "it is necessary to remember that Brazil was coming out of an authoritarian period. Fear was rampant in the internal environments and Human Resources structures began to control even outsourced workers. Therefore, one lived under the sign of fear and of scrutinized communications."

In addition to the political constraints of the time, these pioneers in Organizational Communication in Brazil worked in organizations that were mostly ruled by organizational structures supported by the traditionalist models of administration. In these organizations, the factory bulletins, newspapers and magazines were part of formal communication processes, "from the top down," generally issued from the top levels and the personnel area. In this context, the messages from the administration, conveyed via print newspapers, had employee integration among their most important objectives. Andrade (1965, p. 163-179), the chief Brazilian theorist in public relations at the time, was the main theoretical reference for these first communicators, organizers, and founders of the Aberje, by conceptualizing the publications within a relational universe, defined by the greater aims of the organizations and not restricted to the technical aims of the journalism practiced within the companies, as notably believed by journalists linked to professional Journalism unions.

Corporate journalism began, with the Aberje's activities, to be thought of and produced within the strategies and techniques of Public Relations and Organizational Communication. Unlike the journalism produced among mass communication vehicles, corporate journalism, for the first members of Aberje, was born of and had the meaning connected to relational demands. This relational positioning was highlighted in part by the corporate publications of the late 1960s. In these cases, in addition to spreading the message among the employees, the administrations produced publications with the purpose of publicizing the companies' accomplishments, especially those that rhetorically highlighted the alignment of these organizations with the progress of the country, which was at the time governed by the military, and the capacity of these companies to create jobs within their communities as well as taxes for the government. This type of communication, which is oftentimes boastful, was the expression of the existing organizational model used in most of the industries in the state of Sao Paulo in the 1960s, where there was an administration that was markedly connected to the ideas of the

Scientific Organization of Work<sup>2</sup>. As a reinforcement, the mass of humble workers, who came from Brazil's rural areas were placed into this type of vertically communicated administration; for these workers, their first urban jobs meant a real social rise.

Analyzing this context based on the elements of the theory of communication, the communicational processes of these companies was characterized by a functionalist approach, based on a conceptual scheme directed at controlling the phases of the communication process: who said what, to what channel, and with what effects, just as designed by Laswell. This functionalist approach to organizational communication adapted perfectly to the administrative models being used at the companies, which were characterized for the emphasis they gave to tasks and the logic of the work at the operational level. In this view of communications control, it is possible to see, through empirical study of corporate texts from this historical period, the presence of asymmetrical communicational processes, produced outside of their political, situational, and cultural contexts, in which the companies stood out as the powerful, active broadcasters and the workers as passive receivers. Torquato (1984) remembers that the production of corporate publications – the bulletin, the newspaper, the magazine – based on functionalist concepts expressed the everyday issues faced by the organizational communicators of the time. In his work, this author presents a description of the types of corporate publications, the journalistic genres (informative, interpretive and opinion) appropriate for each one of these vehicles, the formats of these publications, the frequency with which they were published and the appropriate agendas, among other topics linked to the spread of organizational information.

With the Aberje, Organizational Communication in Brazil began to think about and operate its processes in a denser manner, which meant incorporating a theoretical vision into its day-to-day, especially the vision that was coming out of the University. The proof of this is the participation, in the first Aberje board, of renowned professors and specialists, such as Gaudêncio Torquato, Manoel Carlos Chaparro, Wilson da Costa Bueno, and Waldemar Kunsch.

### **Brazilian redemocratization and organizational communication**

The strictly technical view, divided into strict or politically controlled jobs, concerning the process of organizational communication geared, internally, towards communication with the employees and, at the level of society, towards communication of the product, suffered its first shock with Brazil's redemocratization movement, which imposed new interlocutors for the companies and institutions, among which were the unions and political parties with democratic, centrist and leftist profiles. In 1985, Brazilian parties inspired by social-democracy and the New Republic were born from this movement. Organizational communication in Brazil, at the professional level, turned its eyes to the historical and political environment and aligned its plans and actions, especially those aimed at the press, for the new moment in society. During the period when the military regime was on its way out and democracy was on its way in, it was necessary to communicate beyond the product. It was fundamental to administrate communication using the production of a good image to be perceived by society, the market, and the countless corporate audiences as a reference. Businesses began to concern themselves with aligning their images to a society that looked at attributes that constituted a good organizational

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<sup>2</sup> The Institute of Rational Organization of Work (Idort), founded in 1931 by representatives of the corporate world and conservative Sao Paulo thinking, played an important role in the formation of the administrative thinking of the time.

image in their dialogue and transparency. Organizational communication in Brazil had entered the age of the image. And, with this, it turned its eyes to the environment in which the organization was inserted and to greater articulation of the operations of its divisions, thoughts, and professionals.

At the theoretical level, the work of Gaudêncio (1986, p.13-18) and Kunsch (1986, p.107-129) laid out an organizational communication linked to the Systems Theory and the idea of power and they professed the need for integrated communicational action. Based on this broader vision, Kunsch (1986 p. 108) shows a need to break with the functionalist cubicles in organizational communication:

Integrated communication, most of all in the eighties, has become almost a demand of the organizations, which ask for complete communication services and no longer ask for just a specific job from an Advertising agency, Public Relations and Press agencies, or even from a promotion or merchandising company. This makes it possible, in practice, to transform the agencies into communication companies with specialized departments for each area.

In the professional field, one example of this integrated organizational communication in the 1980s was the Social Communication Plan for Rhodia in Brazil, implemented by Edson Vaz Musa, the president of that company, and part of an "open door" program. In a statement to Damante (2004, pp.6-12), Musa states:

When I took over as President of Rhodia, in early 1984, Brazil was still coming out of that dictatorship phase where society's protests were reduced practically to zero. The companies were constantly looking inwards, especially the multinationals, which were run by foreigners, who had great difficulty in expressing themselves on domestic issues. Coincidentally, it was precisely in this period of political opening and I was the first Brazilian to take over at a Brazilian multinational. [...] opportunity in the media, I began an "open door" policy, asking our people to have contact with society.

In this environment of Brazilian redemocratization, the organizational communicators, in addition to their work geared towards communicating with the employees, worked heavily on the processes and techniques of relating with the press. In this historic moment, the first press relations manuals were produced and the first executive training courses (media trainings) were also held in order to answer the demands for interviews and information, especially in situations of crisis.

### **Productive restructuring and organizational communication**

It is in this environment, in the 1990s, that organizational communication, as formative of image and strategic positioning, before the local and global societies, increasingly had to also adapt to the new administrative focuses that underscored the importance of organizational behavior as a relational and communicative element, the work environment with emphasis on consultation and on participation of the employees and countless stakeholders, the organizational culture as the center of communications and organizational relations, the work processes and projects done in teams or in a matricial manner, and decision making processes fed by information and negotiation. It is in this historical period that organizational communication

works with themes such as Total Quality, Re-engineering, Benchmarking, and Downsizing and the end of employment, among others.

Nassar & Bernardes (1997) highlight the role of productive restructuring in the transformation of Organizational Communication in Brazil, inserted here as a main component of the relationship policies at the companies and institutions used with the society and countless audiences. Organizational communication is associated to the success or failure of the corporate restructurings of mergers and acquisitions, to the technological innovations and innovations in processes and products, to the quality, environmental and risk management processes, to accounting for shareholders, to the rituals of recognitions and organizational changes.

The increased range of organizational communication in Brazil, in its corporate aspect, is pondered by Nassar & Figueiredo (1995, p. 19):

Corporate communication is the sum of all of the communication activities at the company. Elaborated in a multi-disciplinary manner – using methods and techniques from public relations, journalism, lobbying, advertising, promotions, research and market - and directed at society, opinion makers, consumers, and collaborators (workers, suppliers and partners). This elaboration almost always uses the business' strategic planning as a reference.

The multi-disciplinary characteristics of organizational communication brought up by Bernardes & Nassar (1997, p. 31) when describing the role of the communicator point to an even wider range for their thought and activity:

The role of the communicator within the paradigm of Strategic Corporate Communication has been "de-institutionalized" and is no longer centered in the hands of the traditional communication techniques, whether journalistic, publicity or public relations. Discussions on the improved strategies of corporate communications have risen to the company boardroom.

The multi-disciplinary aspects contained in the reflections of Nassar & Figueiredo did not use the expression "organizational communication." The expression "organizational communication" would be used for the first time in the context of corporate publication with the creation, within the *Aberje*, of the Brazilian Association of Organizational Communication, as announced in the *Ação Aberje* bulleting on November 12, 1998.

### **The new producers of contents and organizational communication**

The archive of documentation that makes up the Center of Memory and Reference of *Aberje* highlights the late 1990s as a turning point for the field of Organizational Communication in Brazil. This historic moment – with the strengthening of social protagonists, such as non-governmental organizations, regulatory agencies, the consumers with their strengthened rights, and the materialization of digital technologies in communications and information in everyday social life - present an organization that has diminished its power to administer its non-material dimension. This loss of control over an important part of its symbolic dimension is not something that happened only to companies: other organizations have, today, also seen their controlling rolls diminish, including the School, the Church and political institutions. It can be said that companies and institutions - in the digital environment in which "the operators [are] de-

territorialized, less connected to a definite basis in time and space," as described by Levy (2003, p.21) – lose the ability to impede or regulate who participates in the process of organizational communication. In this context, the business loses its role as a mediator. And everyone is transformed into mediators, making it so that the institutional role of public relations and organizational communication is re-thought. In the digital order, everyone is in public relations, all are communicators. In this new historic situation, it is necessary to share political decisions and planning, such as everyday actions, with everyone who belongs to the network of organizational relationships. The sharing of these decisions and other organizational aspects is the job of organizational communication. By sharing its ideology, its decisions, and its manner of acting, the organization seeks to legitimize its existence before the society and the its networks of relationships. The sharing of its practices leads the organization to learn and to a collective legitimacy, as shown by D. Williams and Tapscott (2007, p.32) and by Alvin and Heidi Toffler (2007, p.142-143).

Remarkably, for technological, political, social, psychological, and economic reasons, the company and the institutions are not territories that are separate from society. The organizational culture and identity, as well as its products, goods, services and markets, and its members, as expressive elements, are structured and gain countless meanings in the environment of the relationship networks. The practices of organizational auto-denomination, produced in the communications area with persuasive or influential objectives, are no longer sustainable. Organizational communication has lost its authoritarian centrality. The company structures itself, configures (or deconfigures) itself, acquires and consolidates (or tears down) its identity when it establishes relationships with its alterities, which are also content producers. This situation falls under what Castells (2003, p. 53) calls "appropriation [by the corporation] of the ability to interconnect through social networks of all kinds." In this context, communication is seen only as a tool, as a technique, and has little use. Organizational communication, as thought and action, does not go beyond an attempt to legitimize or negotiate a certain interpretation among other social interpretations. Organizational communication is meta-organizational. It happens, it is designed in an entangled environment of relationships, wherein the business or institution is no longer the center, but rather the co-participant. The organization no longer has the power to say that it wants to be perceived in one way or another, as dictated by a communications or management area. The organization will be that which the network of relationships perceives, it will be that which is produced via a process of negotiations, supported by a ritual of dialogue.

A large part of the debate concerning Organizational Communication and the role of the corporate communicator in Brazil, from the 1980s to the present day, is registered on the pages of the Business Communication Magazine, on the pioneering internet site, maintained by the organization since 1997, and in the hundreds of events and courses promoted with the presence of renowned international specialists and researchers, such as James Grunig, United States, as well as: Abraham Nosnik, Mexico; Cees van Riel, Netherlands; Derrick de Keerkhove, Canada; Don Stacks, United States; Javier Puig, Spain; Joan Costa, Spain; Paul Thompson, England; Maria Russel, United States; T.J. Larkin, United States; Terry Flynn, Canada, Gianni Vattimo, Italy; Vítor Baltasar, Portugal and others.

Since the early 1990s, the Aberje has been editing books with work from professors such as Margarida Kunsch and Gaudêncio Torquato, among others, and by renowned professionals. Starting in 2001, the Aberje created its research institute, the Databerje, which has been producing research in Brazil with the goal of mapping important aspects of Public Relations and

Organizational Communication. The entire archive of documents described is available for public consultation at the Aberje's Center of Memory and Reference.

### **Corporate Communication in Organizations**

Corporate communication is a sector that is becoming increasingly strategic, even though most corporate communication departments are still rather lean; there is a predominance of women in the area of communication; and the practice of measuring the results in this segment is growing, including for the purposes of obtaining budget increases. These are some of the findings of a study entitled "Corporate Communication in Organizations," organized by DatABERJE, the Research Institute of the Brazilian Association of Business Communication (ABERJE) in partnership with the newspaper *Valor Econômico*.

The data were collected from August 19<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008, using the responses from 282 professionals responsible for the departments of communication at corporations mentioned in the 2007 edition of the "Valor Top 1000" list, and was published in the October 8<sup>th</sup> issue of the newspaper supplement *Valor Sectorial*. There was a wide range of sectors represented in the study, such as sugar and alcohol; metal and steel; agriculture; mining; water and sewerage; pulp and paper; food products; petroleum and natural gas; foreign trade; retail; construction and engineering; information technology; pharmaceuticals and cosmetics; transportation and logistics; and vehicles and auto parts. We believe that the communicator "has become a mediator, a manager of teams, a caretaker of the grand modern ritual that is *relationships*." Today, a company is just one node of a large network and must build its image through dialogue, which has transformed the communicator into an articulator and educator. "In this context, communicators must embrace the flag of culture: they need to be intellectuals, capable of dealing with the process that takes one from identity to otherness—something other, something different."

According to the study women are predominant in Corporate Communication, representing 59.2% of the respondents. Regarding age, nearly 70% of the respondents are between 25 and 44 years of age. Among managers, men and women are divided fairly equally. About 65% of the respondents hold a position of manager, coordinator or supervisor at the company where they work. Although the index is relatively low, it is also worth mentioning the participation of company directors and superintendents. Around 1/3 of these professionals have degrees in Journalism, followed by Business Administration and Public Relations, among several other areas of educational background.

There was a high percentage of respondents who perceive that the area of Communication is seen as strategic at their respective companies, primarily in the services sector, where 67.4% have such an opinion. It is noteworthy that the higher the number of employees, the greater this perception is: at 70.2% of the companies with over 5,000 employees, Communication is seen as a strategic area. The data also reveal growth in the area of Corporate Communications, investments are increasing and, consequently, this area has been gaining prestige and power within the corporation. Furthermore, now there is a concern to measure the performance of Corporate Communications. However, at half of these enterprises, this area still has no representation on the Executive Board, and there are several different names used: Corporate Communications, Organizational Communications, Institutional Communications. Only 5.4% of the companies do not have a department of communication. At others, isolated responses appear, such as Communication and Events; Communication and Sustainability; Marketing and Social Communication.



At most of these companies, the area of Corporate Communications is headed by a director or manager, especially at foreign companies, 73.1% of which use this type of configuration. Almost 80% of the companies have fewer than 10 staff members in this area, and nearly all of the companies with less than 1,000 employees have no more than 10 staffers in the corporate communications department. One point that drew the analysts' attention was the fact that, despite the lean size, these departments are the ones responsible for relevant topics in the everyday business routines and relationships with employees, the community, the government, the press, and organized society. Responses were fairly balanced regarding trends of the area of Communication regarding the company's relationship with its stakeholders: 53.2% say that the trend is to work with all publics in an integrated manner, and 43.3% believe in working with certain publics in a targeted manner. Perhaps this is the reason that for 74.5% of the respondents, Corporate Communication greatly impacts the company's reputation. Brazil has been a good location for experiments in corporate communication, particularly regarding the company's relationship with its workforce. The creativity of the local professionals, together with the receptive profile of the Brazilian people, provides a favorable situation for the implementation of collaborative models of communication, and increases receptivity regarding initiatives in this area.

At 41.6% of the companies, investments made by the company in Marketing are higher than investments in Corporate Communication; the opposite is true at only 19.3% of the companies analyzed. Approximately 30% of enterprises evaluate the performance of their Corporate Communications by monitoring the media and opinions of the workforce, providing means for employees to express themselves (whether through opinion polls or through other channels) as well as the opinions of the external public, including customers, suppliers, and users. It is also mention-worthy that 17.0% of these companies do not measure performance in the area of communication.

#### *Aberje, 40 years*

When reflecting on the complexity of Organizational Communication regarding its time, and in the auspices of the celebration of Aberje's 40 year anniversary, Nassar, Janine Ribeiro, and Gutilla (2007, p. 5 - 8) summed up the evolution, in Brazil, of this field of Applied Social Sciences thus:

Forty years ago, in some Aberje courses, the weight of the paper was discussed. Today, what is in play is the weight of our role of the world. The education of a good professional that knows here methods and techniques was a great success for us. There have never been such high-quality professionals, nor so many technical advances. But the present time has brought us ethical questions that we can not ignore and that challenge us as human beings. In the drama of our time, what role are we, communicators, going to take on, since we are at the same time trained professionals and simple human beings, faced with the great social, economic and environmental challenges that are poverty and global warming?

The path tread by the Aberje in these last 40 years shows that organizational communicators must increasingly face not only technical issues but also the ethical and esthetic dimension of their thinking and activity.

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