

## ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN ANTIOQUIA – COLOMBIA

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### ABSTRACT

Organizational communication is a field of knowledge, a professional practice and also a social process presented in all types of organizations. It is the phenomenon of communication best addressed in under graduate and degree students dissertations, in Antioquia- Colombia. This article presents the issues, theoretical frameworks, the most referenced authors, the research methodologies used in the inquiries, as well as the type of organization required for analysis.

This article is another product by the Observatory of communication, of Politécnico Colombiano Jaime Isaza Cadavid.

**Palabras clave:** organizational communication, communication research, theoretical frameworks, research methods, research in Antioquia, strategic communication.

**Recibido: September 1, 2014 - Aceptado: October 8, 2014**

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## Introduction

Organizational communication is a field of knowledge that studies the exchange of messages inside, outside and among different organizational systems. It is also a social process and professional practice, comprising a set of attitudes, skills, techniques and activities [1]. As a discipline, it was instituted in North America as specialized area of speech communication (public speaking) in 1950 by the Purdue University (Valle, 2005). "Due to its scope, methods, theories, research areas, and philosophical assumptions", it presents multiple perspectives (Krohling, 2015: 193). It is an academic and scientific field with plurality of studies (Jablin & Putnam, 2005).

According to Rebeil and Nosnik (1998) communication functions in the organization is corporative, internal and based on institutional logics. The first oriented to the management of the company or institution image; the second, aims to make the organization more cohesive, and the third is focused to ensure its material survival. [2], "integrated organizational communication" as it is called by Krohling (2003: 149). In the internal sphere, it has as a purpose to integrate personnel, make diagnosis, assess the social climate, and renew the values in the context of organizational culture (Arrieta, 1991).

According to the location of communication area in organizations, and the professional as well, operational functions, tactics and strategies will be used. For Sanchez (1998) strategic communication would provide the main purpose of operating scheme to frame, develop and decide consistently about the tactical and operational fact. The most operative functions would be the development of messages and communication parts in all fields of the organization (Pérez, 1998). The strategist must design and implement concepts, methodologies, plans, media programs and communication actions that support the objectives of the organization (Prieto, 1998).

Various schools of thought have influenced the conceptualization and support studies of organizational communication, including business studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and communication and information technologies. In order to understand how communication is processed into organizations, "Linda Putnam (1982) analyzes under the mechanical, psychological, interpretative and interactive systems perspectives. Tom D. Daniels, Bany Spiker and Michael J. Papa (1997) emphasize the critical perspective under a dialectical function. Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) understand it from five paradigms of information transfer; transnational process, control strategy, and balances in relation to creativity and reaction / coercion / subject; and dialogic effort" (Krohling, 2015: 194).

In spite of various aspects on organizational communication study are contemplated in Brazil, interpretive and critics prevail (Krohling 2015: 196). In general terms, in Latin America there is no a single predominant paradigm.

The analysis of the research in communication in Antioquia-Colombia, is being carried out by Politécnico Colombiano Jaime Isaza Cadavid, a higher education institution, through the Observatory of communication. The first analysis was published in the issue number 12 of Luciernaga comunicacion journal [3], and it was disseminated in the ALAIC congress in Lima-Perú (2014). This study shows that communication research in the Antioquia region is carried out mainly around the area of organizational communication, cultural studies and educommunication. It was further found that entrepreneurship, advertising, audiovisual technique, family, technology and development are emerging themes of research interest [4].



## 1. Methodology

Having as a purpose to develop this analysis, they were systematized theses, both from undergraduate and graduate programs, in which communication as an object of study, in a broad sense was addressed. It was considered graduate theses from different universities in the Antioquia region. These could come not necessarily from communication programs. The study was of exploratory and descriptive type.

The dissertation taken into consideration, corresponded to 2010 and 2011 years, and lie in the library of the University of Antioquia, University of Medellin, Luis Amigo University Foundation, Cooperativa, Pontificia Bolivariana University- Medellín, EAFIT and Politecnico Colombiano Jaime Isaza Cadavid higher education institution. The document collection consisted in 46 dissertations. The information on each of them was recorded in a template, and grouped by categories according to the dissertation subject; the study was concluded with data analysis and interpretation.

## 2. Results

### • Research topics of organizational communication interest

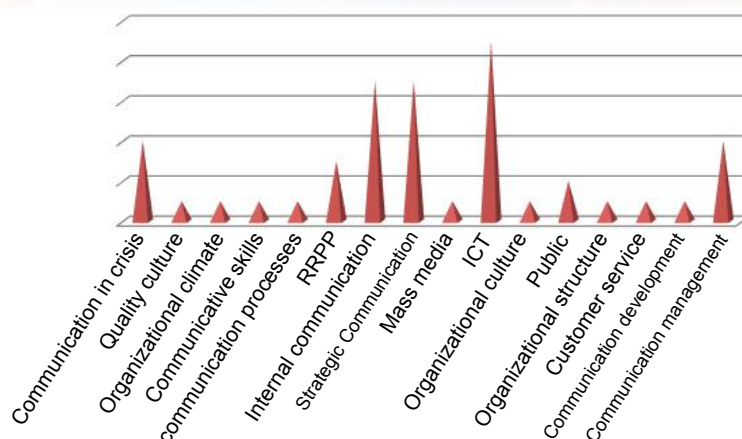
As it was evidenced, in the first report of this research presented in the XII ALAIC Congress in Lima-Peru (2014) [5], organizational communication is placed in the area of the field of communication, which has the largest number of research papers in the region of Antioquia, followed by sociocultural studies and educommunication.

The specific analysis of research in organizational communication shows that the ICT, strategic communication, internal communication, crisis communication, management of communication through information systems, the PR, and the study of public are the most addressed issues in

this area of knowledge, (See graph 1).

Graph 1

Organizational Communication



In relation to ICTs, the most common studies are on the Web 2.0 applied to organizations, social networks, and augmented reality [6]. These especially in private organizations, It is also conducts studies of internal communication, RP and crisis communication.

The slope of public segment analysis through the NTC requires further development, in the same way, digital communication and its impact on organizations. Given the social and organizational demands the new supports of the digital world such as: e.mail, internet, blogs, fotologs, wikis, Wikipedia, pressroom, chat, database, connectivity, interactivity, links, social networks for chats, (Orkut, Facebook, mrs, rss, web 2.0) must be subject of analysis, taking into account that they have active receptors, and produce content and meaning in social networks that are generally stronger than the discourses of the organization (Krohling, 2015; 217).

Strategic communication is mainly focused on public sector projects, with interest in communication policy. Research shows declining issues such as: organizational climate, communication skills, media, organizational structures, customer service and human development, which could be understood as the significance of the American paradigm of organizational communication.

The analysis of organizational culture show signs of transforming the interest in quality culture in organizations, which could be aligned with the technocratic approach whose central axis is communication as a strategy, based on a set of objectives and criteria of action to guide the activity of the company on issues such as re-engineering and total quality.

The brand management inquiry, branding and public relations are not displayed as a trend, although they are recurrent studies in Brazil and Spain. As Krohling indicates, corporate diversity and interest in the evaluation and measurement of PR are innovative research topics in Brazil. He points that the interface between organizational communication and PR is still present (2015: 198).

- **Theoretical Approaches**

The theoretical approaches of these studies are generally based, from the sociology, cultural studies, theory of organizations [7], business sciences and a few from the organizational communication area. The most referenced subjects since the last mentioned are: internal communication, organizational culture, communication management, organizational change and crisis management.

Different approaches have been focused on organizational communication areas in Latin America: The mechanistic that is based on the diligent transmission and reception of the message through the channel, the psychological which is based on the intentions and the human aspects of communication, where it is supposed that there is a linear correlation between cognitions and behavior. The interpretive perspective which understands organizations as cultures; this stream means the organizational communication “inserted in the symbolic processes and centered on the meanings of the agents involved in interpersonal and group relationships, and the

daily communication practices and interactions as well, in their varied forms of expression and social construction” (Krohling, 2015: 191).

Another is the critical approach, in which the organization is assumed as a power field. The analysis focuses, on the oppressed classes (workers, women, minorities and other groups), and feminism and institutional male domination are inserted (Krohling, 2015: 195). The instrumentalist perspective of the technocratic approach is overcome with the matrix organization as a system with a human structure with meanings, facts and ambiguous events that may cause communicative distortion; this means that organizations require much more than optimizing or measure the communication. The theory and practice of organizational communication in Antioquia- Colombia, has been influenced in a great part by Joan Costa’s approach, in which it is assumed that the axes of action of any organization must be located in communication, culture and identity.

Comparing the theoretical approaches about organizational communication in North America in relation to those conducted in Antioquia, it is found the latter is detached from disciplines such as industrial psychology, political science or philosophy. Also, it is seen that there are few approaches from linguistics view, worthy of note that they tend to be adhered to researchers of history, such is the case of the author who conducted the study “Metaphorical cluster analysis” (Valle, 2011). In general linguistics is a focus of considerable interest by the Anglo-Saxon researchers (Villegas, 2009) and Brazilians, who are interested in the discourse and institutional rhetoric (Krohling, 2015: 198).

In Antioquia, the conceptual evolution of organizational communication has gone through the theory of organizations, moving from conceptions of The Classical School for Human Relations and until the Systemic. The NTE is not evident in theoretical concepts presented



in the graduate theses analyzed in this study. This emerging proposal, includes the relational, discursive / narrative human view under the paradigm of complexity (Villegas, 2009). Probably, some empirical studies supported from NTE allow a deeper understanding of this discussion.

The New Strategic Theory (NTE) thought from the communication, in a multidisciplinary way and from the paradigm of complexity, has reflected about the communication in organizations. This theory was driven by professor Rafael Alberto Pérez in the Complutense University of Madrid, where the strategy is assumed as a human ability rather than a theory (Pérez, 2005: 15); it transcends the rational subject and allows the relational. It conceives the systemic organization, co-evolutionary, innovative, connective, meaningful and socially responsible. It also suggests incorporating to the strategies design of methods and methodologies that address the complexity, intersections, flows, network relationships and movements of nonlinear systems [8]. In other words, it indicates that communication is a key factor to think strategy as a human capacity to be coordinated with other human beings (Villegas, 2009).

The New Strategic Theory is developed from (FISEC), the "Latin American Forum on Communication Strategies, that has several study groups, in which it is included the Corporate communication strategy group [9].

The paradigm shift of corporate strategic thinking has been promoted by the management gurus, Gary Hamel and C.K. Prahalad, both from the University of Michigan, who in 1990 urged companies to make low-cost products, accessible to the poorest. According to them, the problem of the entrepreneurs was not the poor people did not have enough money, but they manufactured products out of their reach [10].

Krohling, based on the matrix proposed by Stanley to locate studies on organizational communication, indicates the analyses that aim at breaking with the dominant view can be characterized as dialogic, postmodernist, deconstructionist critics and reformers. And those of hegemonic orientations, which reproduce the dominant discourse of the organization, must be assumed as interpretive, traditional, normative, progressive modernist (2015: 196).

- **Theoretical frame dispersion**

Dispersion is found in the analyzed theoretical frameworks, which is evident in graduate theses that intend to connect issues of culture and quality processes regarding organizational communication. It is also presented in projects that aim at substantiating about the climate and motivation in organizations from social and cultural relations of anthropology and sociology. The same occurs once the foundation of strategic communication is driven in relation to ICT, especially for papers done by different programs to those of organizational communication.

It is found a great number of theoretical frameworks about organizational communication, that instead of matching the objective of the thesis, benefits the peripheral area of emphasis, that is the case of a thesis that has as a main objective to design a "Communication Plan for a therapeutic community" and whose theoretical framework refers to drugs, addiction and culture, etc.

Another study aims to "raise funds for a foundation through communication strategies on web 2.0" and the theoretical framework is supported by fundraising definitions in Colombia. There are some projects whose theoretical frameworks are focused on the contextualization of the organization where the study is being carried out, which might be relevant, but, it is not definitely the theoretical framework concern.

In regards to the approach of communication in organizations of public sector, it is used to appeal to sociocultural concepts and approaches of political science, very little concerning to public administration and organizational communication. Another similar situation occurs in the study of communication in non-governmental organizations, where it is involved symbolic interaction, and other social theories. Mediation and development of communication knowledge in these organizations is needed.

•The products

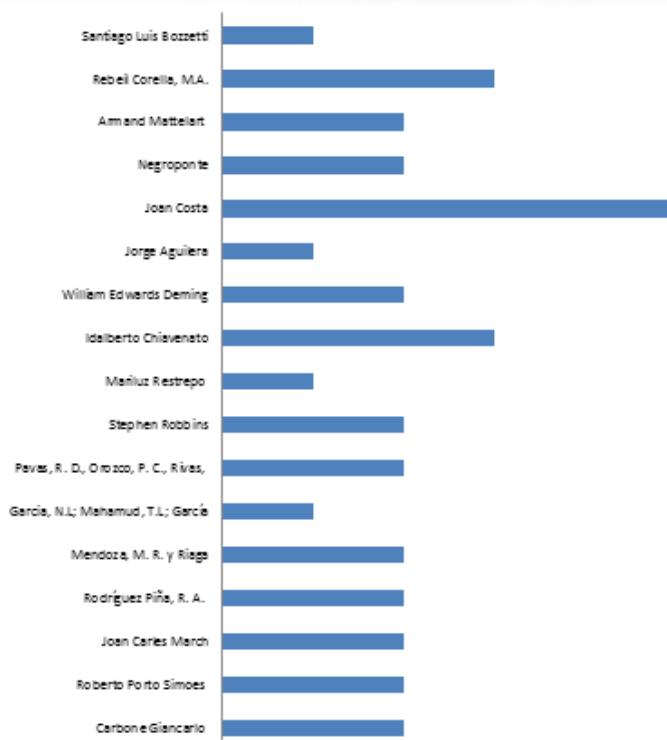
The study findings shows it is supposed, the knowledge acquired from the graduate theses has been used. However, there are few who have the advertised product. The titles of the dissertations are: communication plans, diagnostics, analysis of organizational climate, internal means; which are not finally determined as a product. It is estimated that, behind the theoretical frameworks there is much spent time and effort; so the development of the proposed products could not be reached. In addition, the states of art or states of matter are not considered in the vast majority of the analyzed projects, except for those from Universidad de Medellín.

• Cited authors

The most cited author is the Spanish Joan Costa. From Colombia Mariluz Restrepo of the Javeriana University and Jorge Aguilera [11], also it is relevant reference to the administration theorist Idalberto Chiavenato from Brazil, as well as the book *El Poder de la Comunicación en las Organizaciones* (the Power of communication in Organizations), coordinated by MA Rebel Corella (1998) (see Figure N2).

Graph 2

Theoretical references in organizational communication in Antioquia-Colombia



Certainly, the theoretical framework of business sciences supplies widely the field of organizational communication; these are apparently more relevant and consistent in relation to the proposed in the works analyzed in this area. However, it is essential to update the literature. There are no records about the new strategic theory –NTE.

There is little exploration about literature in English; database use is evidenced, preferably in Spanish, being articles more referenced than books.

• Type of approached organizations

Dissertations in organizational communication are in a greater number directed to the private sector, followed by the third one, being the public sector at a lower level. SMEs are unrepresentative in these studies (see graph N3).



**Graph 3**

Target sectors of graduate theses in organizational communication, in Antioquia - Colombia



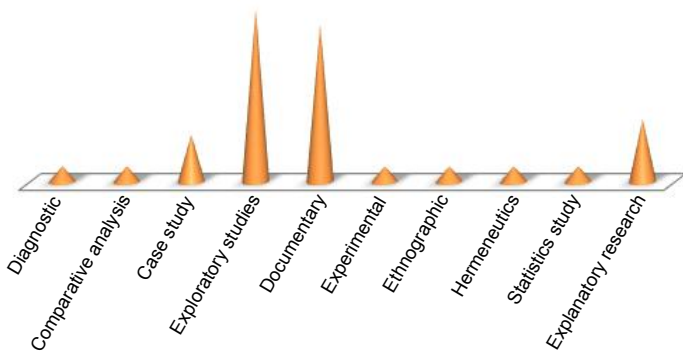
It should be noted that in Brazil theses on organizational communication are especially target to the third sector. Social responsibility is the issue that represents the main interest (Krohling, 2015: 196).

• **Research methodology in organizational communication**

Applied research is chosen for studies of organizational communication in Antioquia, Colombia, and the methodology is the qualitative type. The most referenced research methodology is exploratory - descriptive [12], followed by documentary research [13], explanatory [14] and the case study (see graph).

**Graph 4**

Type of research conducted in organizational communication in Antioquia- Colombia

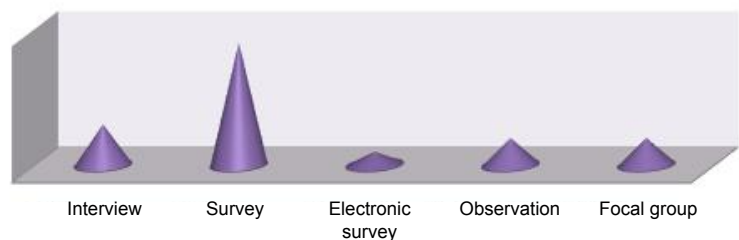


This finding goes along with the statement of Albarran (2002), who states that research in organizational communication, has favored exploratory-descriptive type and exploratory-predictive studies, neglecting quasi-experimental studies, those that according to his point of

view are most congruent with the reality of organizations. Also, it is noted that ethnography and hermeneutics, which had been used in a great number of studies, are not as frequent as before. The survey and the interview peak as the most common instruments used for data collection (See graph N5).

**Graph 5**

Instruments used for data collection in organizational communication research in Antioquia-Colombia



It is found, that a variety of theses appeal to “Creativity Techniques” to collect data, it consists in brainstorming, and mind mapping. It should be noted that the methodological approaches merely enumerate the methodology but lack of development.

• **By way of conclusion**

It is evident that the subject of main interest for carrying out degree theses is focused on Communication technologies, and their management. Internal, strategic communication and crisis communication are held as topics of interest for students, as well as PR. Public research is presented as a trend, which was perceived closer to market research. However the engagement, understood as the affective organizational commitment (Salanova & Schaufeli 2009), has driven these type of studies extended to all public organization.

Ethics and social responsibility are notably absent in these studies.

Business sciences provide the theoretical basis for most studies of organizational communication. It is evident, the need of theoretical developments that connect the organization theory, the ICTs and communication in organizations. Also, theoretical connections that allow support strategic and organizational communication in relation to the environment, and the culture of quality.

The American paradigm of organizational communication conceived from the media, has transcended Antioquia region, showing a trend of a sociocultural paradigm in communication, as is the example of Joan Costa, who proposes identity and culture as the core of the actions in organizations. The systemic view of organizations is preserved.

The new strategic theory inspired by Edgar Morin's theory of complexity, it is not yet visible on the basis of organizational communication, it would be relevant, in the region of Antioquia were carried out empirical studies, that determine their scope and methodological operability.

In the theoretical framework of the conducted studies, it is seen the trend to develop peripheral concepts, in order to study dispersion in their formulation, disconnection among objectives of the study and replacement of the theoretical framework for the description / contextualization of the organization; in other words, inconsistencies of form and substance in the approach presented in the studies, its development and results.

Frequently, the title of the research projects refer to specific products such as plans,

strategies, cultural studies or climate into the organizations, although these products do not appear as concrete facts.

The research topics of organizational communication must be consistent with their theoretical framework, identifying issues, state of the art as well as methodological designs with the objectives of the study. In this way, it would be contributing more effectively to the area of study, the organizations, and the research in organizational communication.

Several paradigms are presented for the study of organizational communication and, it is presumed these patterns will be broadened as a result of the challenges and impacts of global society and the digital age. As Krohling (2015) points, it is necessary to keep the interest in how to produce and surf messages in the world of work as well as the relational aspects of the members of the organizations.

Hay un mayor desarrollo de trabajo de grados en comunicación organizacional dirigidos al sector privado, podría ser interesante promover trabajos de grado para el sector público, las Pymes y las organizaciones no gubernamentales, ello especialmente desde las universidades de carácter público.

A great part of graduate theses development in organizational communication aim to the private sector, it might be interesting to promote dissertations for the public sector, the SMEs and non-governmental organizations, especially from public universities.

In relation to undergraduate program, it seems to be enough documentation focused on experiences, case studies, strategy development; but there is a need propose projects with higher scope for degree studies.

The most cited author about organizational communication is the Spanish Joan Costa, it would be interesting to extend the literature in this area of communication with referents from



the own region, from other zones of the country and at Latin American level as well.

The qualitative methodology is the most used in communication studies; the approach to quantitative methodologies could mean a plus for organizational communication professionals in Antioquia.

On the understanding that organizational communication is a discipline, as a greater emphasis on the application of its knowledge, research training is required, in terms of methodological approaches that allow designing sustainable solutions to real problems of organizational systems, in each specific case. Studies, as KROHLING says, could lead to new and better institutional behavior and social transformations. It has to be taken into consideration that the world of work impacts on human life and there communication plays an important role.

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[10] The initiative of these professors is evidenced in projects as One Laptop Per Child, which had as a purpose to manufacture laptop priced at \$ 100, also established differentiation in price implemented by Microsoft and the “small packages” of Unilever cleaning products. <http://glosariofinanciero-mafifesc.blogspot.com.co/2012/05/c-k-prahalad-biografia.html> Prahalad and Hamel, in 1990 published the article “Las competencias esenciales de las corporaciones” and later it would become in a best seller titled “Competiendo para el futuro” <http://www.mercado.com.ar/notas/google-organic/366020/noticias-desde-google?id=366020> , <http://glosariofinanciero-mafifesc.blogspot.com.co/2012/05/c-k-prahalad-biografia.html>

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[12] Exploratory studies allow approaching unknown phenomena, in order to increase the degree of familiarity and contribute with ideas about the proper way to address a particular research. In order to show positive results and appropriate use of resources, it is essential to review literature accurately ] Exploratory studies do not have a purpose themselves, but set the tone for further research and are characterized by being more flexible in their methodology, they are broader and tend to dispersion, involve more risk, and require patience, serenity and receptivity by the researcher. The exploratory study is focused on discover research types. Tevni G. Available in: <http://tgrajales.net/investigaciones.pdf>

[13] Documentary research is carried out through consultation of documents (books, magazines, newspapers, reports, yearbooks, records, codices, constitutions, etc.). The field or direct research is done at the place and time in which the phenomena under study occur. The joint research is one that participates of the nature of documentary research and field research. (Zorrilla, 1993: 43).

[14] Explanatory studies aim to lead to a sense of comprehension or understanding of a phenomenon. They aim to the causes of physical or social events. They have as a purpose to answer questions about the facts like: why do they occur? Under what conditions do they occur? Exploratory studies are more structured and in most cases require control and manipulation of variables in a greater or lesser degree.

#### To cite this article:

Valle, F. Mónica (2015). **LA INVESTIGACIÓN EN COMUNICACIÓN EN ANTIOQUIA-COLOMBIA**. Luciérnaga/communication journal, year 7, N13. Communication research group, Audiovisual Communication Faculty, Politécnico Colombiano Jaime Isaza Cadavid. Medellín-Colombia. Communication sciences school, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí- México. ISSN 2027-1557. Pages. 66-76.