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INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: A DRIVER OF MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANISATION

Mamadou Aliou Diallo [1, 2, *]

[1] Laboratory for Socio-Anthropological Analysis of Guinea (LASAG). General Lansana Conté University of Sonfonia–Conakry (UGLC-SC), Republic of Guinea.
[2] Laboratory for Interculturality, Learning, Margins, and Experience (LAIgE). University of Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis.
* Corresponding Author

ORCID Details
Mamadou Aliou Diallo: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5070-530X

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ABSTRACT

Internal communication is a strategic tool for nonprofit organizations. It fosters the mobilization and engagement of volunteers and staff, while helping to energize the organization's mission. In the context of nonprofit engagement, it is important for each member to find their place and feel fully integrated into the organization. Internal communication also makes it possible to report on activities carried out over a given period, take stock of progress, and present the results achieved.

This study examines the link between internal communication and the organizational commitment of volunteers and staff. It focuses in particular on how communication practices can support the motivation of stakeholders and on the effects that inadequate communication is likely to have on their commitment.

Keywords: Internal Communication; Associative Commitment; Volunteering; Employees; Associations.

1 INTRODUCTION

Décaudin and Igalens (2007) define internal communication as "all communication activities directed at the employees of a company or organization." It utilizes various media, such as the company newsletter, bulletin boards, letters to staff, teleconferences, websites, blogs, and social media. It also serves as a tool for fostering commitment to the organization's values and philosophy, as well as a means of strengthening solidarity and engagement among its members. Furthermore, Kiesler (1971) defines commitment as the bond that unites the individual to their actions (see also Kiesler and Sakumura, 1966). Joule and Beauvois (1998, p. 60) propose a broader definition, which places particular emphasis on the context and its objective characteristics. These characteristics refer, in particular, to the properties of the action

(its public and explicit nature, its irrevocability, its repetition, its consequences, and its cost), as well as to the reasons motivating it (internal or external reasons, a context of freedom or constraint).

In a nonprofit organization, internal communication plays a strategic role: it serves as a tool for mobilizing and engaging volunteers and staff, and helps energize the organization's mission. In the context of nonprofit involvement, it is therefore essential that all members find their place within the organization and feel valued. Volunteers and staff members of a nonprofit can become true communication ambassadors; conversely, they can also become its main critics. To avoid misalignments and enhance its visibility, the nonprofit must ensure consistency between its public image, the internal experience, and the messages conveyed by its various stakeholders.

Organizations rely on the participation of people whose statuses, responsibilities, and motivations may differ. The coexistence of volunteers and staff members, the diversity of expectations, operational constraints, and the need to make collective decisions make the flow of information particularly important. When information is not shared sufficiently, is delayed, or is difficult to access, stakeholders may have difficulty understanding the organization's objectives, identifying their role, and participating in decision-making. Conversely, regular, transparent, and participatory internal communication can strengthen a sense of belonging, foster recognition, and improve the coordination of activities. This study aims to understand the link between internal communication and the organizational commitment of stakeholders (volunteers and staff). More specifically, it seeks to determine to what extent inadequate communication within organizations is likely to influence the commitment of their members.

The central question of this study is therefore as follows: To what extent is internal communication linked to the motivation and engagement of volunteers and staff within nonprofit organizations? This question also leads us to examine whether volunteers and staff perceive the effects of inadequate internal communication in the same way. Based on this research question and the studies included in the literature review, three hypotheses guide the analysis. Internal communication perceived as consistent, clear, and accessible is positively associated with the level of organizational commitment reported by volunteers and employees. The perception of insufficient internal communication is associated with a higher risk of demotivation and a decline in organizational commitment. Volunteers and employees do not necessarily perceive the effects of a lack of internal communication in the same way; volunteers may report or be perceived as particularly vulnerable to this lack. These hypotheses are examined based on the questionnaire responses. Given the cross-sectional and self-reported nature of the survey, they allow for the study of organizations and perceptions but do not, on their own, establish a causal relationship.

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As a volunteer with AJMSS, I conducted this survey within an organization founded in 2012 and governed by the law of July 1, 1901. To preserve the anonymity of the organization under study, it is referred to by the acronym AJMSS. It is located in a priority neighborhood under the city's urban policy (QPV).

The anonymous questionnaire I developed was distributed through my network, particularly among friends and acquaintances who work as volunteers or employees at organizations active in the same sector as AJMSS. It was also shared on my social media accounts (LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Instagram), through the area's local development team (EDL), and with people visiting the borough town hall. My status as a volunteer with the organization allowed me to conduct participant observation and facilitated access to certain respondents, as well as obtaining their consent to participate in the survey.

The sample consists of volunteers and employees working for nonprofit organizations. It includes individuals with ties to the nonprofit sector who are 16 years of age or older. This age threshold was adopted for the purposes of the survey. The target population encompasses a variety of profiles in order to provide an overview of the civic engagement of those involved in these organizations on a daily basis. This approach made it possible to collect responses from a diverse range of participants.

In order to gather as much information as possible, we designed and distributed an online questionnaire. This method seemed more practical, given the availability of certain respondents and the preferences expressed by some of the participants. The questionnaire was anonymous. We primarily used Google Forms, a tool that facilitated the collection of responses and their transfer to Excel for data processing.

After it was designed and formatted, the questionnaire was distributed to the target population. However, conducting the study presented certain challenges. My status as a volunteer facilitated data collection, but it may also have influenced, to some extent, my neutrality as a researcher. Furthermore, certain actors within civil society organizations can be analyzed using rational choice theory, particularly that developed by Mancur Olson. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

3 RÉSULTS AND ANALYZE

The online survey was distributed within my network and on social media. It garnered 77 responses from a diverse range of participants. Respondents included members of the AJMSS and other organizations working in the same sector. This broader scope allowed for a more diverse sample and provided insight into the various realities of internal communication within these organizations.

3.1 Internal Communication and Employee and Volunteer Engagement

The goal was to reach as many volunteers and employees as possible within nonprofit organizations who might be affected, directly or indirectly, by communication within their organization. To present the characteristics of the respondents, we have compiled the table below

Table 1: Profile of questionnaire respondents

Category	Breakdown	Count
Gender	Women	42
	Men	34
	Prefer not to say	1
Average age (in years)		42 years
Highest level of education	Not specified	1
	Baccalaureate (high school diploma)	2
	Bac +1 (1 year of higher education)	0
	Bac +2 (2 years of higher education)	4
	Bac +3 (Bachelor's degree)	9
	Bac +4 (Bachelor's + 1 year / first-year Master's)	9
	Bac +5 (Master's degree)	39
	Above Bac +5 (Doctorate or equivalent)	13
Socio-professional status	Students	11
	Employees	24
	Volunteers	20
	Interns	3
	Work-study students (apprentices)	2
	Directors	13
	Association presidents	4
Total respondents		77

In total, 42 women and 34 men responded to the questionnaire. One person did not wish to specify their gender. The average age of respondents was 42, which corresponds to a predominantly adult population. The wording of the gender question allowed participants not to specify their answer. Women outnumber men among the respondents. This distribution could be linked to the characteristics of the surveyed population and to the practical conditions of participation in associational life. However, the data collected do not, on their own, make it possible to assert that women have more time than men to take part in association activities. Moreover, respondents generally have a high level of education: 39 people report holding a bac + 5 level degree and 13 report a higher level. The hypothesis of a link between level of education and involvement in associations deserves further investigation. The argument relating to tax deductions must also be supported by a source and cannot be generalized from this sample.

The table indicates that 39 respondents have a bac + 5 level and that 13 have a level above bac + 5. Among the people surveyed, 24 report being employees, 20 volunteers, 11 students, 3 interns and 2 work-study students. The table also

lists 13 directors and 4 association presidents. These categories, however, seem to reflect statuses or functions that may overlap with the previous categories. Some respondents also held a salaried job outside the nonprofit sector. The engagement of employees at work, whose importance has been emphasized for several decades by numerous authors (Kahn, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Schaufeli, 2013; Saks and Gruman, 2014), is generally regarded as an important factor in organizational success and competitive advantage (Macey et al., 2009; Kompaso and Sridevi, 2010).

Since Kahn's (1990) seminal article, which defines engagement as employees' willingness to invest themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally in their role, much of the research has focused on the individual, without always examining the processes and practices through which organizations foster engagement at work. There is thus a research field that remains little explored at the organizational level. With the notable exception of the work of Barrick et al. (2015), studies devoted to this question sometimes tend to oversimplify the conceptualization and operationalization of organizational engagement. While Barrick et al. (2015) study the antecedents and consequences of this engagement from a performance perspective, the role of internal communication practices in the management of employee engagement remains to be explored in greater depth.

Some recent research has looked at human resource management practices, among which internal communication. The latter is often presented as a factor likely to foster employee engagement: by feeling valued and involved in the organization, employees are thought to be more inclined to invest themselves (Welch, 2011; Iyer and Israel, 2012; Reissner and Pagan, 2013; Mishra et al., 2014). However, as Welch (2011) points out, internal communication remains insufficiently taken into account in work on engagement. When the literature does address it, it does not always focus precisely on practices of information dissemination, consultation and participation.

3.2 Internal communication: a source of motivation and demotivation

Maintaining the associational engagement of volunteers and employees is a concern frequently expressed by respondents. In their view, the existence of internal communication within associations helps to motivate the people involved. Several respondents stress this importance: “It is very important and central for the project and for engagement within associations to work”; “[it is] an act of sharing information [...] [which makes it possible to] stimulate members' engagement”; “[it makes it possible to] motivate, inform and share our commitment to our association's goal”; or again “[to] exchange on the association's strategy [...] and [to foster] the personal engagement of volunteers and employees”. These statements illustrate the perceptions gathered about internal communication.

In total, 63 respondents out of 77 (81.8%) believe that the absence of internal communication in their association would influence their associational engagement. These results suggest the existence of a perceived link between internal communication and the associational engagement of volunteers and employees. All respondents consider that internal communication holds an important place within associations. Overall, respondents believe that their association attaches importance to internal communication. The majority of respondents consider that the absence of internal communication in their association would influence their associational engagement.

Sixty-three respondents out of 77, or approximately 81.8%, believe that the absence of internal communication in their association influences their associational engagement. The data collected show that respondents have a generally positive perception of the associational engagement of volunteers and employees. Thus, 74% of respondents consider associational engagement “very important” and 26% consider it “fairly important”. Of the 77 respondents, 72 say they have already heard of associational engagement, while 5 indicate that they are not familiar with the notion. The notion of associational engagement is therefore known to the great majority of respondents, approximately 93.5% of them.

For the people surveyed, associational engagement is particularly important in structures where both volunteers and employees are involved. Respondents say they are generally satisfied with the place given to internal communication in their associations. They also consider that the engagement of volunteers and employees is essential to the functioning of these structures.Despite this positive perception, the results suggest that insufficient internal communication may contribute to the demotivation of volunteers and employees. Are volunteers and employees, however, affected in the same way and to the same extent by a lack of internal communication in associations?

It would be unwise to answer this question without taking into account the views of the people concerned, whether they are volunteers or employees in associations. On the one hand, volunteers give their time without pay. On the other hand, employees in the nonprofit sector may accept certain professional constraints because of their motivation to work in structures that serve the public interest. In the associations studied, 39 respondents out of 77 (50.6%) say they are volunteers and 38 (49.4%) say they are employees. In addition, 66.2% of the people surveyed believe that a lack of internal communication demotivates volunteers more, while 33.8% consider that employees are the most affected.

These results indicate that, according to respondents, the absence of internal communication can demotivate both volunteers and employees. Volunteers nevertheless appear as the group perceived to be the most affected. Almost all respondents have a positive perception of associational engagement and regard it as essential for volunteers and employees. Overall, respondents believe that the absence of internal communication is likely to weaken the engagement of volunteers and employees. Fifty-one respondents out of 77 believe that a lack of internal communication demotivates volunteers more than employees.

4 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the role that internal communication can play in the motivation and associational engagement of volunteers and employees. Respondents have a positive perception of internal communication: according to the reported results, 100% of them consider it “very important” or “fairly important”. In addition, approximately 60% say they are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their association's internal communication, while 6.5% say they are “very dissatisfied”. These results must be interpreted in light of the characteristics of the sample and the limitations of the survey design.

The responses also show that insufficient internal communication is perceived as likely to affect associational engagement: 81.8% of respondents believe that its absence would influence their engagement. In addition, 66.2% consider that volunteers are more demotivated than employees by this lack of communication, compared with 33.8% who think the opposite. This research has several limitations. I would have liked to complement the questionnaire with face-to-face interviews with volunteers and employees in charge of internal communication in associations. However, the health situation at the time of the survey led me to favor a quantitative method. Moreover, some people were reluctant to answer the questionnaire, fearing that they would not be able to answer the questions on associational engagement correctly.

Despite these limitations, the data collected provide some elements of an answer to the question under study. Future research could deepen the analysis of associations' external communication, as well as the drivers of and barriers to the associational engagement of volunteers and employees. These dimensions deserve specific investigation.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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