

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BETWEEN COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS: THE GALICIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

The study of communication as a professional activity is often conducted in the context of large organizations with multiple resources, mainly in companies. This investigation contradicts this trend and compares communication departments of public and private organizations, which are located in a geographical area far from Spain's socio-economic and political centres: the Autonomous Community of Galicia. In Europe, some important works have been carried out on the practice of organizational communication (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020), as well as in Spain (Dircom, 2015), which have become relevant references to the knowledge of trends applied to communication management. Even so, analysis that focuses on small-scale organizations or those away from decision-making centres are scarce. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on organizations with different profiles and dimensions, based in the Autonomous Community of Galicia. The applied methodology, of a quantitative character, consisted mainly on surveys of communication officers from Galician public and private organizations. The results obtained showed that the public sector is the one that most communicates as a strategy and this is a conclusion capable of raising interest for future works.

KEYWORDS

organizational communication; business communication; institutional communication; communication management; quantitative methodology

ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA DA GESTÃO DA COMUNICAÇÃO CORPORATIVA EM EMPRESAS E INSTITUIÇÕES: O CASO DA GALIZA

RESUMO

O estudo da comunicação enquanto atividade profissional é frequentemente conduzido no contexto de grandes organizações com múltiplos recursos, principalmente em empresas. Esta investigação vem contrariar essa tendência e compara departamentos de comunicação de organizações públicas e privadas, que se situam numa área geográfica afastada dos núcleos socioeconómicos e políticos de Espanha: a Comunidade Autónoma da Galiza. Na Europa, têm vindo a realizar-se alguns trabalhos importantes sobre a prática da comunicação organizacional (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020), tal como em Espanha (Dircom, 2015), os quais se converteram em referências relevantes para o conhecimento das tendências aplicadas à gestão da comunicação. Ainda assim, as análises que se debruçam sobre organizações de pequena dimensão ou afastadas dos centros de decisão são escassas. A presente investigação pretende preencher esta lacuna ao incidir sobre organizações com diferentes perfis e dimensões, sediadas na Comunidade Autónoma da Galiza. A metodologia aplicada, de carácter quantitativo, privilegiou a realização de inquéritos a responsáveis de comunicação de organizações públicas e privadas galegas. Os resultados obtidos mostraram que o setor público é aquele que mais usa a comunicação enquanto estratégia e esta é uma conclusão capaz de suscitar o interesse para trabalhos futuros.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunicação organizacional; comunicação empresarial; comunicação institucional; gerenciamento de comunicação; metodologia quantitativa

INTRODUCTION

The study of Organizational Communication trends, whether from the point of view of the evolution of the discipline, or through the analysis of professional characteristics, is of interest to help to understand the dynamics that describe the advancement of communication as a professional activity.

For this reason, some reference works that deal with this subject stand out. At the European level, it is important to refer the *European communication monitor*, an annual report that focuses on communication in Europe and whose last edition is from 2020 (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020). It is, therefore, a reference publication for any research that deals with the analysis of communication trends. In Spain, the work of Dircom stands out, either through the situation reports published every five years (Dircom, 2015), or through the *El estado de la comunicación en españa* (Dircom, 2018).

Despite these contributions, there are few studies that have as their object of study small or medium-sized organizations (Blay Arráez, 2010; Dueñas, 2016; Gómez, 2011; Iurcovich, 2012), or that are located outside business centres (Míguez -González, Costa-Sánchez & Tüñez-López, 2019).

This investigation seeks to broaden the knowledge in this field, by conducting an exploratory study that assumes that the diagnosis and the consequent knowledge of a closer reality can facilitate other research, as well as assist teaching in some disciplines. In this way, it is possible to contribute to the development of the productive fabric, promoting collaboration between the professional and academic context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PREVIOUS STUDIES AT SPAIN AND GALICIA

The following literature review focuses on the state of business and institutional communication in Spain, with reference to recent empirical work. Since this work focuses on smaller organizations, based in less central regions, it starts out as a general analysis, later focusing in the specific context studied.

According to the most recent publication of the report *Estudio de la comunicación en España* (Dircom, 2018), which studies the figure and role of the communication professional in public and private environments – with data collected in 2017 –, the profile of the director of communication in Spain is a woman (56%), young (49% are between 30 and 45 years old), with experience (68% has more than ten years of professional experience in the field) and with a master's or postgraduate degree in Communication (47.5%), with the majority having a degree in Journalism (55.6%).

With regard to the work developed in the communication departments, the Dircom report (Dircom, 2018) describes differences in the perception of communication due to different organizational profiles, which is especially appropriate for this work. Thus, publicly traded companies and governmental organizations believe in the relevance of the media for their near future. Non-governmental Organizations (NGO), private entities, as well as the consultancy sector do not attach any importance to them.

Regarding the main functions of the communication departments, companies registered on the stock exchange favor financial communication and investor relations. Private organizations, for their part, highlight sponsorship, patronage, graphic design and photography. The communication agencies report, as usual tasks, the consultancy, counseling, training and account management of the main clients (47,1%), as well as the monitoring, measurement and evaluation activities. For government organizations, the communication department should be responsible for facilitating contacts with the media (15,8%) and for promoting relations with the community (15,8%), and NGO and associations also highlight the relationships with the community (36,8%).

Even so, online communication through social media is the function that is expected to further develop in the near future (62,5%). The topics that the Dircom (2018) report describes as important for this sector are: (1) the use of big data and algorithms for communication; (2) the integration of the organization's strategies with communication; and (3) the creation and management of quality content that is attractive to audiences. In a recent analysis of the communication departments of the main Spanish companies (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestalt, 2019), it was concluded that the average number of workers in these departments is higher when compared to smaller

organizations. The prevailing training is that of journalism. Regarding the main concerns of these professionals, intangible values of transparency, honesty or credibility in issues related to technological evolution (big data, mobile applications or information technologies) stand out.

The reality portrayed in that study stands very far from small or medium-sized companies, whose difficulties and problems were pointed out by some previous works (Blay Arráez, 2010; Carretón Ballester, 2010; Carrillo, Castillo & Gómez, 2005; Dueñas, 2016; Gómez, 2011; Iurcovich, 2012; Mayorga Escalada, 2014), namely:

- the absence of a communication department and the respective lack of professionalization of the activity;
- the lack of awareness about the importance of communication to achieve organizational goals;
- the lack of culture and experience in communication, which leads to the identification of communication as advertising, as commercial communication or as marketing;
- the absence of specialized professionals dedicated exclusively to the management of communication, likewise, that lack resources and budget to plan, implement and evaluate communication needs;
- little experience in communication issues, as well as ignorance of communication strategies and tools;
- the difficulty in creating news and, consequently, the low coverage and low impact on traditional media;
- the lack of vision about the activity itself and the difficulty in creating relationships with the public;
- the prioritization of external communication, linked to advertising or the organization's graphic identity, ignoring the weight of internal communication or social responsibility.

At the institutional level, existing research is less global and more adapted to unique institutional profiles, which makes comparison difficult. In this regard, several studies were carried out on the communication function, namely in the provincial and regional councils (Puentes-Rivera, 2017), in the City Councils (Ríos Martín, 2015; Rochera, Fernández Beltrán, Durán Mañes & Marín, 2013), in public bodies (Martínez-Solana, 2014), in public hospitals (Costa-Sánchez, 2012), in universities (García-Rivas, 2003); political leaders (Almansa-Martínez & Castillo-Esparcia 2014), in public television entities (Costa-Sánchez & Tüñez-López, 2017) and in institutions in general (Baamonde, Puentes-Rivera & Rúas, 2016; Tüñez-López, Costa-Sánchez & Míguez-González, 2018). Given the lack of an investigation that focuses on the institutional reality as a whole, it becomes more complex to find common denominators in this sector.

The analysis of the composition of public relations offices, as well as the academic profile of those responsible, is a constant in studies on communication in organizations. Designed to work independently from other management functions in organizations, public relations departments contribute, in the words of E-Grunig, A-Grunig and Aparecida Ferrari (2015), "to organizational effectiveness because they support organizations in building relational processes and in resolving conflicts with its audiences" (p. 4). As Van Ruller and Vercic (2003) pointed out, "public relations has a special interest in the major issues of society and addresses any problem from the perspective of the implications of organizational behavior in the public sphere and vice versa" (p. 167).

The proposal by E-Grunig et al. (2015) is that public relations should, therefore, be managed by a strategist and not by a technician, because:

the public relations sectors must have professionals trained in communication and with specializations that allow them to plan, coordinate, execute and evaluate public relations programs. Otherwise, the “dominant coalition” will not be able to achieve the strategic value of public relations for the organization’s business. (p. 5)

The data collected in Galicia, with regard to the business sector, showed that although Galician entrepreneurs rate the importance of communication as eight (on a scale of zero to 10), the reality is that only 52% of these companies have a communications director. The percentage of entities that resort to contracting external services is 58%, but communication budgets have been considerably reduced due to the economic crisis (Mundinova, 2013). Within Galician institutions (Baamonde et al., 2016), a greater importance of the communication function was observed, through the existence of own departments made up of one, two or three professionals, as well as the relevance attributed to the construction of communication models based on dialogue with the institutions audiences.

METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this study, a quantitative methodology was used, by means of online questionnaires, which were sent by email to the communication officers of companies and public institutions based in the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

To select the sample of companies to be contacted, the Ardán report, produced annually by the consortium of the Free Zone of Vigo (ZFV), was consulted. In this case, data from the 2016 Ardán report (ZFV, 2016) were collected, which includes a guide of more than 9.000 companies registered in Galicia, grouped into large, medium and small, according to the number of workers. Then, a sample of 200 responses was obtained in an exploratory study that covered the four areas of economic activity established by the Galician Institute of Statistics (primary, secondary sector, construction and services), as well as companies of different sizes, which varied from micro (with less than 10 employees) to large companies (with more than 250 employees).

To determine the institutions to be studied, the communication guide¹ issued by the regional government of the Xunta de Galicia was used, as well as the legislative rules on autonomous institutions and on the representation of the State Administration in Galicia (Organic Law No 1/1981). In a total of 426 organizations, a convenience sample was selected and 87 responses were validated to ensure that the institutions analyzed would cover at least 50% of the population.

The questionnaire was sent by email to the organizations that constituted the sample, from November 2016 to February 2017. It was a semi-structured survey, composed

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.xunta.gal/guia-da-comunicacion>

of multiple choice questions, divided into four sections, with a design similar to the survey implemented by Dircom's five-year reports (2015) (which allow the comparison of results between the context of Spain and Galicia), which was slightly modified to be applied at the institutional level (Table 1).

SECTIONS	DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES
Contact details and identification	It was collected data related to the contact details of the person who answered the questionnaire and the most important information about the company/institution
Communication function (R.Q.1)	It was intended to verify the existence of a specific department of communication, its denomination and that of its responsible
Communication awareness (R.Q.2)	It was asked about the importance of communication in the organization to know the corporate philosophy in this regard
Communication planning (R.Q.3)	As a key document of the communication department, it was sought to verify the existence of communication and crisis plans
Impact of the crisis (R.Q.4)	Attention was paid to the impact of the economic crisis on the communication function.

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

The sending of the questionnaire by email was complemented with telephone calls, with the aim of verifying the reception and ensuring its completion. The participation achieved was similar to that achieved in previous studies of similar themes (Dircom, 2015; Gómez, 2011; Dueñas, 2016), which sought to explore the situation of business and institutional communication in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, but focused on larger organizations (Mundinova, 2013), in a more limited way.

RESULTS

COMMUNICATION FUNCTION

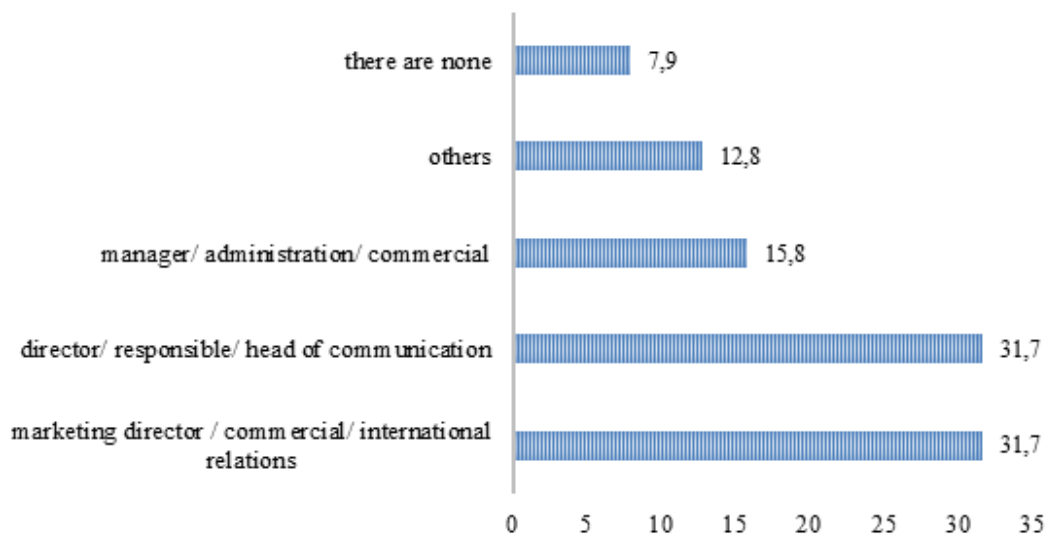
Regarding the existence of a communication department in Galicia's business structure, different scenarios were found according to the size of the organization (number of employees). While a large company or institution has a specific communication department (55%), medium-sized organizations have a department that brings together several functions, including that of communication (38%). Most micro or small entities, on the other hand, stated that they did not carry out communication actions (31.8%) or that they subcontracted these services (9%).

The degree in Journalism continues to be the dominant training of communication officers in Galicia. It follows, however, the profile of Economic Sciences, Business Sciences, Administration and Business Management. Thus, after Journalism, the most

important areas are Advertising and Public Relations, followed by Audiovisual Communication. Marketing/Commerce training also has an important presence among the leaders of the communication departments.

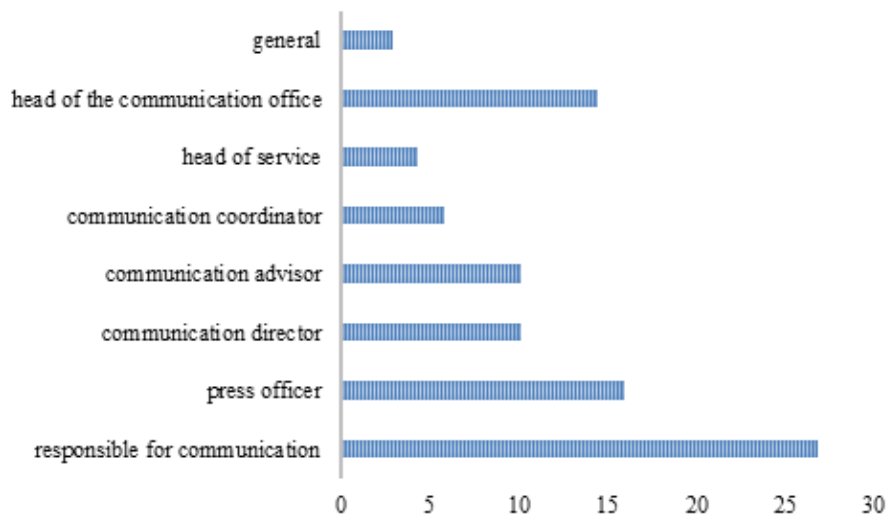
The communication departments of Galician organizations tend to be composed of one or two people (more are rare) and the feminization of the profession is evident in the multiple forms of configuration of the work teams.

In both large and small and medium-sized companies, the names of those responsible for communication are multiple and have been regrouped (Graph 1). However, a trend was detected: the formula “communication director” coexists as a mixed management figure, which combines, in its name, the terms marketing/commercial/international relations.



Graphic 1: Names of the person responsible for communication in companies

In institutions, “responsible for communication” is the predominant denomination, followed by “press officer” and “head of the communication office”. “Press officer” continues to be one of the most frequent titles in the designation of the heads of the communication department of Galician institutions (Graph 2).



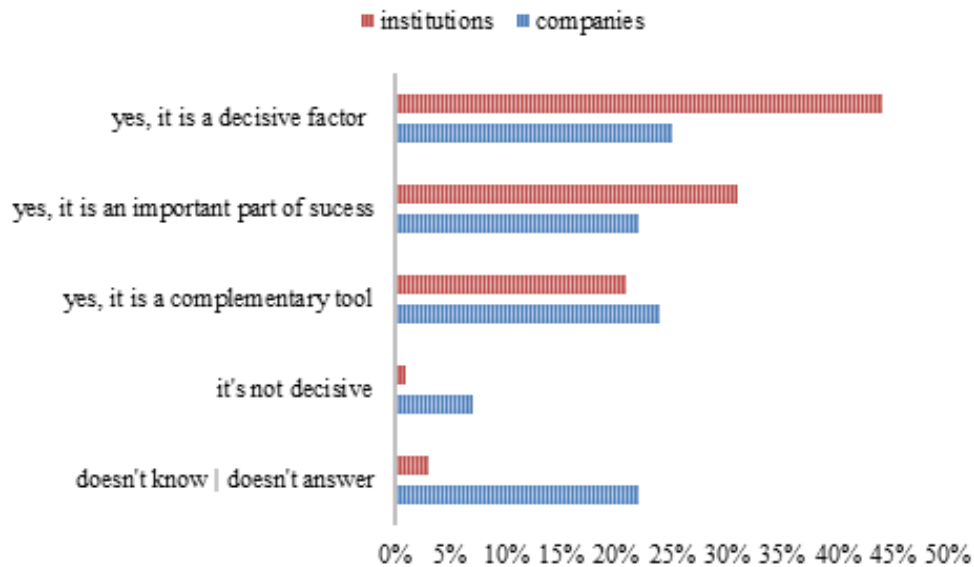
Graphic 2: Denominations for the responsible for communication in institutions

PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

The growing relevance of communication in the last five years is, for both companies and institutions, a consensual aspect (Graph 3).

About 96% of the institutions' communication officers consider that communication is important for the success of the organization's management, either because they consider it a decisive factor (44%), an important part of success (31%) or a complementary tool (21%). This percentage reduces to 71% in the case of companies, as 25% of their communication leaders consider communication to be a decisive tool, 22% say it is a fundamental part of success, but for 24% it is a complementary tool.

These data are consistent with those obtained in other studies (Baamonde et al., 2016; Dircom, 2015). As can be seen in Graph 3, in companies, the different positive notions of the communication function coexist in similar percentages, which suggests that the bet on communication is not yet strategic, as it is not considered decisive to achieve organizational objectives.



Graphic 3: Level of importance of communication for institutions and companies

DEGREE OF COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Despite the global importance attributed to communication, only 24% of institutions and 18% of companies had a communication plan formally written and linked to the organizational strategy. In a slightly higher percentage of cases (35% of institutions and 28% of companies), the plan would be under development and some organizations (16% and 15%, respectively), were considering its preparation.

The data draws attention to the low percentage of companies and institutions that plan communication, regardless of their size. This means that, also in large companies and institutions, work is being carried out without communication planning that contributes to the achievement of the strategic objectives of these organizations.

Considering the country's data, these numbers are lower than those of medium and large companies, in which 51% of organizations claim to have a communication plan (Dircom, 2015).

In the case of communication plans for crisis situations, the percentages are clearly lower, with only 8% of companies and institutions having a defined crisis plan (in writing), which shows absolute unpredictability in view of possible risks (Table 2).

	COMMUNICATION PLAN LINKED TO THE ORGANIZACIONAL STRATEGY		PLAN OF CRISIS	
	Companies	Institutions	Companies	Institutions
Yes, formally written	17,7%	24%	7,6%	8%
Not written yet, but in development	28,5%	35%	15,3%	20%
Not yet, but it is being considered	15,4%	16%	9,2%	18%
Doesn't exist	33,8%	18%	60,7%	45%
Doesn't know / doesn't answer	4,6%	7%	7,1%	9%

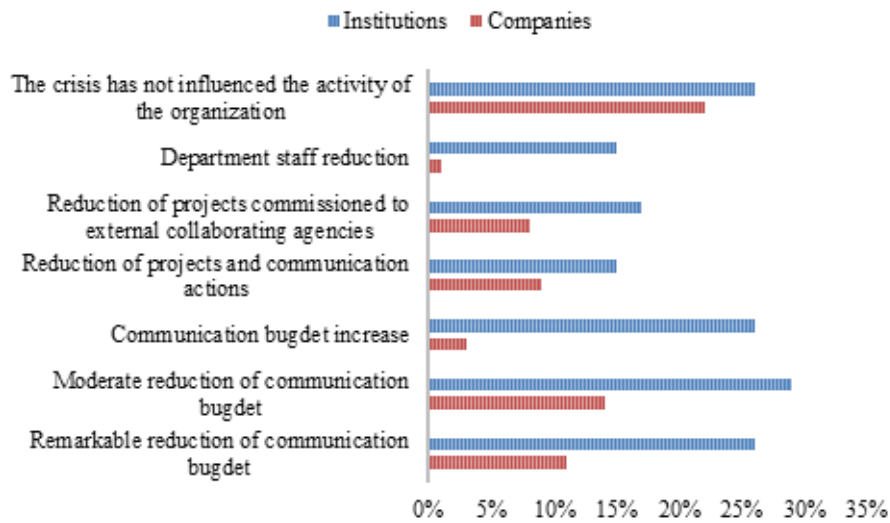
Table 2: Communication planning in companies and institutions

EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

When analyzing the direct consequences of the economic crisis on the communicative activity of organizations (Graph 4), it was found that about 26% of the institutions' communication officers and 22% of companies believe that the crisis did not influence their communicative activity.

However, in the case of institutions, 55% of respondents point to a moderate or notable reduction in the communication budget (compared to 26% who speak of an increase). Even so, the decrease in communication projects and actions, in the projects entrusted to the agencies, as well as the reduction in the personnel of the communication department, occurs in less than 20% of the cases.

The results obtained show that the companies felt less consequences from the economic crises, although the most notable difference seems to be in the reduction of the personnel of the communication department, only pointed out by 1% of the companies' communication officers. The moderate reduction in the communication budget seems to be the main negative consequence that the business communication sector suffered in Galicia, as a result of the crisis.



Graphic 4: Effects of the crisis for companies and institutions

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Communication management is an important function for all types of companies and institutions, regardless of their size or location. It is through communication that organizations establish relationships with their internal and external publics and, therefore, this becomes a strategic issue for the present and for the future of all companies and institutions.

However, even though all the professionals surveyed in this study attributed it importance, significant differences were found in the assessment, understanding and execution of the strategic function of communication.

First, and starting with the common points, the name of the maximum communication officer in Galician entities is multiple and diverse, which indicates that the terminology “communication director” has not yet entered the organizational fabric and may mean the absence management value in positions associated with communication in organizations. “Communication officer” is the most common option for companies and institutions.

In companies, communication is closely linked to marketing, both in the name of the department and in the name of its responsible. However, in the institutional field, the terminological variety has not left behind the “press officer” label, which prioritizes and at the same time expressly limits the activities of the communication department leader to relations with the media.

Second, with regard to the existence of the communication department, the reality is diverse, depending on the size of the organization and that of its sector of activity. However, there is still a need to reinforce the importance of communication as a specialized function, with effective weight in making organizational decisions. In regard to small and medium-sized companies, since they occupy a good part of the business structure in Galicia, it was expected that there would be an approximation between training centers,

professionals and organizations from different sectors to raise awareness about the role that the communication specialist can occupy in the service of business strategy.

Thirdly, it was noticed that both companies and institutions favor external communication. Companies are more concerned with relations with the consumer, with suppliers and with other companies (commercial sphere), while institutions favor relations with journalists (impact on the media).

Fourthly, attention is drawn to the low degree of strategic awareness of communication, detected in both types of organization. The percentages of strategic communication planning and crisis communication are very low, especially in companies. In the understanding of strategic communication as an indispensable factor for success, the institutional sector is more advanced than the business sector.

In the case of Galicia, this investigation showed that institutional communication is more developed at the strategic level than that of companies. The explanation can be found in the proximity between the areas of institutional communication and political communication, in Spain, where the majority of institutional communication positions depend on the political mandate, which clearly links the political strategy to the institutional one (García-Orosa & Vázquez-Sande, 2012; Rodríguez Virgili, 2015). Thus, it is recommended that future studies address the following questions: does political communication promote the strategic development of institutional communication? Are relations with the media still the main concern of institutional communication?

But, on the other hand, this form of return on investment, tested in the political sphere, is foreign to the dynamics of business communication, where it seems that it is in commerce that Galician companies appreciate the importance of communication and, therefore, in the service sector, where the degree of strategic development of communication is greatest.

Finally, regarding the impact of the economic crisis, a more negative perception was expected. "The crisis did not influence the organization's activity" was a common response in companies and institutions. The negative impact, however, seems to be more pronounced at the institutional level. Such an aspect may be due to the citizen demand that falls on the public sector, in a situation of cuts and economic difficulties, where the image of public entities is more evident, since of these public accountability is expected, according to a transparent management of resources that belong to everyone.

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