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## **The influence of internal communication satisfaction on employees' organisational identification: Effect of perceived organisational support**

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### **Abstract**

**Aim/purpose** – This paper bases on the social exchange and social identification theories with the purpose of understanding if the internal communication helps to improve organisational identification, supplemented by the effect of perceived organisational support. The exact aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the internal communication process from the employees' perspective, and to explore how the satisfaction with internal communication influences employees' attitudinal and behavioural responses. Specifically, this study tends to examine the effect of the satisfaction with internal communication on organisational identification. Subsequently, it also aims to investigate the mediating role of perceived organisational support.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study is operationalised through quantitative approach. The hypotheses were tested in a cross-sectional survey which was completed by 132 employees working in a variety of jobs and organisations in Portugal, mostly in the sector of transportations and storage. The research focused on employee satisfaction with the internal communication of the organisation for which they are working, measured with the Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire. The research model was analysed using SmartPLS, a structural equation modelling tool.

**Findings** – The results suggest that the importance of how an organisation communicates internally is important to encourage the employees' organisational identification. The results indicate also that there is a significant relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and perceived organisational support which mediates the relationship of internal communication and organisational identification.

**Research implications/limitations** – This research is cross-sectional, which limits the causality of its findings. Additionally, the use of filter-question caused a significant reduction in the reached sample size.

**Originality/value/contribution** – This paper addresses the internal communication to investigate the employee-based perceptions. It proposes a conceptual model and supports it with empirical findings. As a result, this study addresses concerns that are the current management fads and addresses the research gap, as only a few empirical studies have previously examined the internal communication as an antecedent of organisational identification.

**Keywords:** internal communication; internal communication satisfaction; perceived organisational support; organisational identification.

**JEL Classification:** M3; M5; M540.

## 1. Introduction

Although previously neglected in organisational identification literature, the interest in internal (or employee) communication has been growing in the last years. Internal communication is important tool in the corporate strategies' formulation and it is recognised by many authors as a key factor in increasing employees' organisational identification and building a culture of transparency that can involve employees in the organisation's goals (e.g. Smidts, Pruyn, & Van Riel, 2001; Verčič, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Managers and researchers have long agreed that communication processes influence the organisational success (Neves & Eisenberger, 2012; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974). Researchers investigating the work environment and organisational climate normally focus on individual employee perceptions of fairness, stress, leadership or job commitment (Allen, 1995; Chen, Silverthorne, & Hung, 2006; Falcione, Sussman, & Herden, 1987; Trombetta & Rogers, 1988). However, as employees constantly filter information and unconsciously seek for benefits at their workplace, Allen (1992; 1995) linked the communication and organisational commitment with a perceived organisational support as a mediating factor. To support those postulates, Allen (1992) operationalised the employee perceptions regarding the top management-employee communication relationship, the quality of top management's communication and superior-subordinate communication in a cross-sectional study of university employees. The findings of this primary research indicated that perceived organisational support was influenced by the top management-employee communication relationship and the quality of co-worker's and top management's communication, while perceived

support mediated the co-worker communication-commitment relationships. Later (Allen, 1995) empirically tested the relationship between communication concepts and perceived organisational support to also include the role of organisation-wide messages on employee perceptions anchored in organisational climate (shared perceptions of the psychologically important aspects of a work environment). Those postulates were grounded on previous study by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa (1986) who introduced the perceived organisational support concept focusing on an employee's perceptions of the supportiveness existing within the employee-organisation relationship. These employee perceptions include the extent to which organisation values their contributions, cares about their well-being, and is fair in rewarding efforts and loyalty. Also, Smidts et al. (2001) in their study on the impact of employee communication and perceived external prestige on organisational identification, claimed that "how an organization communicates internally is even more vital than the question what is being communicated" (p. 2) and examined the consequences of internal and external communication in relation with organisational identification. More recently, Neves & Eisenberger (2012) used a cross-lagged panel design to examine the relationship between management communication and perceived organisational support, as well as its consequences for performance and found that perceived organisational support fully mediates the relationship between management communication and both in-role and extra-role performance. Accordingly, there is strong evidence that different aspects of organisational communication are positively related to employees' organisational identification and performance.

Despite the growing interest, research to understand the individual employee perspective of internal communication and employee organisational identification, is still scant. Consequently, the aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the internal communication process from the employees' perspective, and to explore how the satisfaction with internal communication influences employees' attitudinal and behavioural responses. Specifically, this study tends to examine the effect of the satisfaction with internal communication on organisational identification. Subsequently, it also aims to investigate the mediating role of perceived organisational support.

As for the structure, this paper: first, provides the theoretical background presenting the underlying theories; second, it defines the internal communication and highlights the importance of internal communication satisfaction for organisational identification and introduces the concept of perceived organisational

support; third, it describes the methodology applied in the empirical study; finally, it tests the relationship that internal communication has with the perceived organisational support and organisational identification, as well as the mediating role of perceived organisational support.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Theoretical background**

There are a few dominant theories underlying this research. First, this study is supported by social exchange theory, which is considered to be one of the central theoretical paradigms used to understand and explain workplace relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory explores social exchange relationships through values of perceived support between individuals or groups and serves to understand workplace relationships and employee attitudes (DeConinck, 2010). More importantly, research highlights the perceptions of exchange quality as a predecessor of employee's willingness to return effort (Sluss, Klimchak, & Holmes, 2008). Nonetheless, research on social exchange relationships has not contemplated another essential feature of an employee's professional life, namely their sense of belonging and identity (Sluss et al., 2008). To overcome these limitations, we additionally employ the social identity theory and, perceived as its complementary, self-categorisation theory.

The tendency of individuals to associate themselves with groups that share common qualities has been referred in the literature as social identification (Mael & Tetrick, 1992; De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012). Social identification theory has its roots in social psychological theory and studies the role of self-conception and associated cognitive processes and social beliefs in group processes and intergroup relations (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Formulated in the early 1970s (Tajfel, 1970), its core belief is that group behaviour follows a shared sense of social membership. From the employee perspective, the social identity can also affect their satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment (and as a result – a firm performance) (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Social identity theory explains the individual engagements in social settings – such as organisations or workgroups (Korte, 2007; Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

Organisational identification theory resembles to a specific form of social identification where individuals develop a feeling of belongingness to an organisation and may induce employees to act in harmony with the company's identity

and overall strategy (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identification has been also widely recognised as important to create employee satisfaction, loyalty and effectiveness (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Strong employees' organisational identification may lead to superior performance and can positively contribute to a company's success (Smidts et al., 2001).

Social identification theory can follow two mechanisms: 1) self-enhancement (based on the distinctive image that serves to boost self-esteem); and 2) self-categorisation, which assumes that individuals differ in their opening to join a group as it depends on their readiness, fit and the group's accessibility (De Roeck & Delobbe, 2012). In the process of categorisation, individuals estimate the accessibility of a group and the potential of adopting to the standards of a specific group (Korte, 2007). In adopting the identity of the group, the individual personality withdraws to the background, seceded by the group identity. While embracing the beliefs, values, and norms of the group, individuals react to organisational circumstances from a particular group-centred position. The above theoretical background creates solid foundations for this study.

## **2.2. Internal communication**

The survival of organisations depends on their ability to communicate (Buckley, Monks & Sinnott, 1998; Chirtao, 2014). Effective internal communication is crucial for successful organisations, as it affects their ability to engage employees and achieve objectives (Welch & Jackson, 2007). There are several authors (Allen, 1992; Hargie, Tourish, & Wilson, 2002; Welch, 2011; Verčič, Vokić, & Ćorić, 2017), who have previously explored the concept of internal communication and focused on its relevance to the academic and business fields. However, despite its importance to research and practice, there are still some considerable gaps in internal communication investigation which can be explained by the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomena.

The concept finds many alternative terminologies in the literature. Some studies consider the following terms: 'internal relations' (Kennan & Hazleton, 2006), 'internal communications' (Cornelissen, 2004; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012), 'corporate communication' (Cornelissen, 2004), 'employee relations' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), 'internal public relations' (Wright, 1995), 'strategic communication' (Botan & Soto, 1998), or 'staff communication' (Van Wezel Stone, 1996). This study opts to use the term 'internal communication' throughout this paper, which is closer to corporate communication theorists (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Internal communication is generally seen as a multidimensional construct. Indeed, it perceives interdisciplinary functions, integrating elements of human resource management, communication and marketing (Verčič et al., 2012). Many authors approach internal communication as a significant and independent function of public relations which plays two fundamental roles within organisations: 1) covering the provision of information – the dissemination of information; and 2) creating a sense of community in organisations (e.g. Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015; Verčič et al., 2007). Internal communication is often analysed from the stakeholder's perspective, as the communication between strategic managers of an organisation and its internal stakeholders, which is designed to promote the employees' commitment to the organisation and greater understanding of the company's objectives (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Since its inception, the concept of internal communication has undergone numerous changes. In 1984, Daft & Weick (1984) defined it as a complex and interpretive process through which employees coordinate the work processes essential for the functioning of any organisation. Since then, several other definitions have emerged. Internal employee communication is defined by Frank & Brownell (1989, pp. 5-6) as: "the communication transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization that are intended to design and redesign organizations, to implement designs and to coordinate day-to-day activities".

Welch & Jackson (2007) defined internal communication as the communication between the strategic managers of an organisation and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote the employees' commitment to the organisation, to awaken in them a sense of belonging, the awareness of the permanent changes in the environment, and understanding of the company's objectives. In a more recent study, Welch (2012) indicated that internal communication can also pose a threat to organisational relationships, as poor communication can be counter-productive. The author claimed that "beneficial internal communication relies on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them" (Welch, 2012, p. 248). Therefore, the new research interest lies at discovering the employee preferences for amount, channels and types of information.

In order to further explain internal communication, we shall also look at the overall organisational communication which recognises the implications of both 'external' and 'internal' communications as communication activities often involve both external and internal functions beyond their traditional boundaries. Cheney & Christensen (2001, p. 231) argued that "internal and external commu-

nication no longer exist as separate fields since they have been superseded by the notion of fuzzy organizational boundaries”. Nevertheless, in their study on organisational identity linkages between internal and external communication, the authors used the term ‘external organisational communication’ and defined it as “public relations, marketing and issues management” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 231). Subsequently, the internal communication was defined as “employee relations, statements of mission and organizational development” (Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 231).

The importance given to concept of internal communication has been increasing and the way it is exercised in organisations has also undergone some significant changes. There is a clear awareness that effective internal communication is central to business success (Hargie et al., 2002) by promoting employee engagement (Welch, 2012). It can constitute a pillar of organisational effectiveness, contributing to positive internal relationships and allowing better communication between employees and managers (Welch, 2012). Internal communication is thus a key factor for organisational effectiveness (Welch, 2012). Relatedly, Rego (2007) considered organisational communication to be critical to the success and effectiveness of organisations, contributing to increased productivity, promoting the quality of the service provided, reducing absenteeism and labour conflicts, and improving levels of satisfaction, as well as the commitment and performance of employees. Similarly, Kunsch (2003) argued that organisations need a clear internal communication policy established in accordance to outlined strategies, as well as detailed action programs for all employees. Accordingly, it is essential that companies have channels and instruments that allow all departments to act in synergy (Kunsch, 2003).

Since employees are the foundation of any organisation, this study focuses on their individual satisfaction with internal communication.

### **2.3. Satisfaction with internal communication**

Welch (2012) claimed that employee satisfaction with internal communication (ICS – Internal Communication Satisfaction) can promote awareness of the existing market opportunities and threats and develop employees’ understanding of changes in the organisation’s priorities. When an organisation is able to transmit a clear understanding of its policies, the employees can focus on the same mission as their organisation (Welch, 2012). In accordance with Hume & Leonard (2014), an effective internal communication ensures that all employees are aligned to achieve a common goal, with a sense of effective mutual assistance.

Similarly, Dawkins (2005) indicated that employees are an extremely valuable external communication channel which remains somehow underestimated by organisations. Employees interfere with public and are a credible and reliable source of information, since employees are viewed as particularly credible sources by external stakeholders, mostly in the area of services (Dawkins, 2005). Moreover, Dawkins (2005) also suggested that an effective internal communication can improve the organisational reputation and credibility, as employees are seen as active voices in their organisations. Indeed, creating an internal culture of union, commitment and pride among employees enhances competitive advantage difficult to be copied by the competition (Rego, 2007). In this sense, internal communication is vital for the success of organisations and, when well executed, can bring strategic advantages through aligning the efforts of employees and sharing knowledge, which must be aligned with the company's strategy (Quirke, 2012).

For the purpose of this study we applied the concept of internal communication satisfaction which was primary operationalised by Downs & Hazen (1977) and served later as a foundation for an audit instrument developed by Verčič, Vokić, & Ćorić (2009). According to Downs & Hazen (1977), internal communication satisfaction stands for the individual level of employee satisfaction with the communication practiced within the organisation. The communication satisfaction operationalised by Downs & Hazen (1977) has become widely applied in studies of intra-organisational (or internal) communication (Verčič et al., 2009; Verčič & Vokić, 2017). In their study on communication satisfaction, they identified nine dimensions according to which employees govern their level of satisfaction with the internal communication practiced by the organisations in which they operate: 'organisational climate'; 'communication with superiors'; 'organisational integration'; 'media quality'; 'horizontal communication'; 'informal communication'; 'organisational perspective'; 'personal feedback'; 'communication with subordinates' (Downs & Hazen, 1977). Those propositioned dimensions served as a base for many studies ahead and are also enhanced in the present research. Following Verčič et al. (2009), this study applies the following dimensions of internal communication satisfaction: satisfaction with feedback, satisfaction with communication with superiors, satisfaction with horizontal communication, satisfaction with informal communication, satisfaction with corporate information, satisfaction with communication climate, satisfaction with communication media, and satisfaction with communication during meetings.



## 2.4. Organisational identification

For the last decades, the dominant approach has appeared to be to conceptualise the strength of the relationship between the individual and the organisation in terms of individuals' commitment to the organisation (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). Inspired by reconceptualisation of organisational identification based on social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), more recent studies have shown an increase of interest in an alternative approach that conceptualises the relationship between individual and organisation in terms of social identification processes (Smidts et al., 2001; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

In recognition of the apparent overlap between the concepts of identification and commitment, Ashforth & Mael (1989) asserted that the core difference between the concepts lies in the fact that identification reflects individuals' self-definition, whereas commitment does not reflect the self-definition. Based on that, while identification is a cognitive construct reflecting the degree to which the organisation is incorporated into the self-concept, commitment is viewed as an attitude toward the organisation (Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

Organisational identification occurs when, when evaluating the alternatives of choice in their organisational role, the employee considers the organisation's values and interests to be relevant (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). OI defines the employee's perception of whether or not they belong to the organisation, as well as the emotional meaning associated with that connection (Tajfel, 1978).

According to this definition, two elements can be distinguished: a 'cognitive component' and an 'affective component' of identification. The cognitive component reflects the perceived amount of interests shared between the employee and the organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This component is especially important when employees define the boundaries between the internal group and the external group, in order to achieve self-categorisation. The affective component concerns feelings of pride in belonging to the organisation or the fact that they feel recognised by the organisation, which creates a positive image of the organisation itself (Tajfel, 1982).

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## **2.5. The influence of internal communication satisfaction on employees' organisational identification**

Organisational identification derives from messages sent by the organisation, which link the values and objectives of employees to the values and objectives of the organisation, reducing the uncertainty of employees in relation to their organisational roles. Cheney & Dickson (1982) emphasised the role of internal communication as a reason why employees understand organisational goals, values and objectives. Similarly, Simon (1976) advocated that when employees adopt the values and objectives of their organisations, they develop their own decision-making processes that complement the decision-making processes performed by the organisation. In accordance with Smidts et al. (2001, p. 5), "employee communication may help organizational members to identify with their company by transmitting messages conveying the goals, values and achievements of the organization".

Undeniably, internal communication plays a fundamental role in organisations in developing positive attitudes among employees (Gray & Laidlaw, 2004) and in building a strong sense of commitment (Jo & Shim, 2005) and identification (Smidts et al., 2001). Similarly, this study considers internal communication to be a crucial and feasible management instrument that can affect organisational identification. Based on that, it is proposed:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between Internal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) and Organisational Identification (OI).*

## **2.6. Perceived organisational support**

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) is an employee's belief that his organisation values their efforts and cares about his well-being (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008). POS is manifested when an employee believes that their organisation provides the necessary resources, or even additional resources, in order so they are able to perform their functions in an efficient and effective way (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) assumes that, in order to determine the organisation's willingness to reward efforts at work and meet the socio-emotional needs, employees develop a global belief about how far organisation is willing to value their contributions and is concerned with their well-being, meeting socio-economic needs (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to this theory, employees tend to attribute human qualities and characteristics to their organisations (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

On its side, the social exchange theory developed by Blau (1964) and used to explain relationships in the workplace, consists of the exchange of value and co-creation between employees and the organisation, involving a set of interactions between the two parts that result in favourable behaviours and attitudes (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Gouldner (1960) argued that social relations define the act of ‘giving back something received’ as an obligation. In this sense, Gouldner (1960) came up with the ‘reciprocity standard’, based on two basic social requirements: ‘we help those who help us’ and ‘we do not harm those who benefit us.’ This norm is invoked in different social situations and normalises behaviour, establishing the return of a benefit received as a moral obligation (Gouldner, 1960).

Based on the ‘reciprocity standard’ (Gouldner, 1960) and the social exchange theory, POS contributes to the development and efficiency of the organisation itself (Blau, 1964). Employees who feel supported by their organisations will feel obliged to return the positive treatment they received (Gouldner, 1960). The POS is also influenced by several aspects related to the employees’ interpretation of the organisation’s motivations (Eisenberg et al., 1986). Regarding the benefits of POS in organisations, Eisenberger & Stinglhamber (2011) showed that there are positive consequences triggered by high levels of POS, both for organisations (e.g. increased effective commitment, trust and performance) and for their employees (e.g. increased job satisfaction, decreased stress).

## **2.7. Internal communication and perceived organisational support**

As perceived organisational support encompasses employee perceptions regarding the extent to which an organisation values the employees’ contributions, it also assesses the relationship that the employees have with their organisations (Allen, 1992). In accordance with Allen (1992), those relationships and the overall perception of organisational support given to an employee, are potentially influenced by messages communicated implicitly and explicitly by top management, immediate supervisors, and co-workers. Indeed, employees who have easiness of communication with managers are prone to build effective work relationships and increase their organisational identification (Carrière & Bourque, 2009; Neves & Eisenberger, 2012). This effective communication serves to increase the perceived organisational support. In accordance with Neves & Eisenberger (2012), communication can increase POS by “allowing managers to designate general goals and strategies and to provide needed information on

a timely basis that helps employees carry out their jobs” (p. 454). Similarly, Allen (1992) agreed that communication influences perceptions of support.

Based on this it is affirmed:

*H2: There is a positive relationship between Internal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS).*

## **2.8. Perceived organisational support and organisational identification**

Grounding on social identity and social exchange paradigms, He, Pham, Baruch, & Zhu (2014, p. 7) state that “the feeling of being valued and appreciated by an organization (POS) makes employees appreciate and trust their organization more and have more confidence in their organization’s fulfilment of its exchange obligations”. Accordingly, supportive organisational constituents increase the employees’ feeling of belonging, which in turn leads to a stronger belief that organisational involvement is self-enhancing and attractive, which gives employees a stronger motivation for identification with the organisation. Accordingly, it is proposed:

*H3: There is a positive relationship between Perceived Organisational Support (POS) and Organisational Identification (OI).*

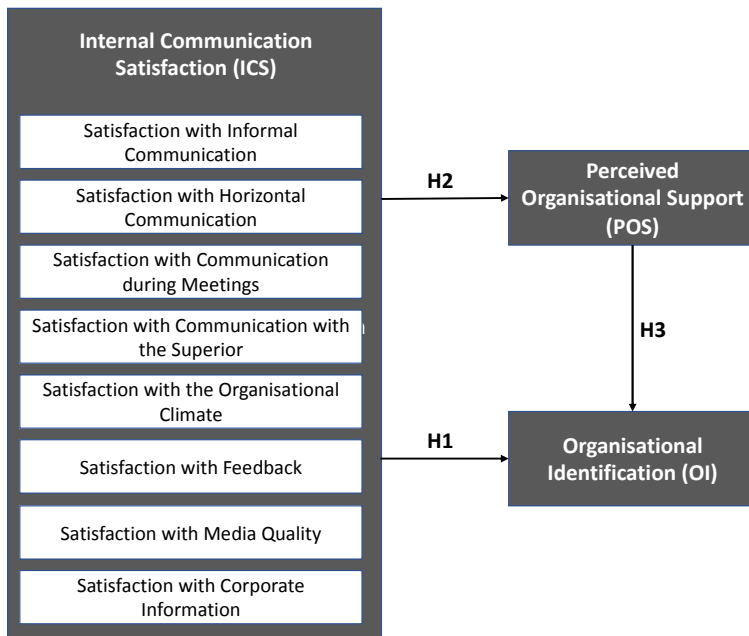
In accordance with Nakra (2006), employee communication facilitates the organisational identification, as it unveils the goals, values and achievements of the organisation. As for Allen (1992), perceived support intervenes in the relationship between perceptions of communication and organisational commitment. As stated in Allen (1992), communication with co-workers may have less weight on the commitment of employees who feel supported by an organisation, as they identify more with their organisation and less with their co-workers. Similarly, the communication with management can be more impactful on the commitment of employees who perceive more organisational support. In the same way, POS will enhance the relationship between internal communication and organisational identification. Additionally, Neves, & Eisenberger (2012) indicated that POS is a key social exchange mechanism, as employees try to reciprocate the positive valuation received from the organisation through internal communication. Accordingly, to test the linkages between communication satisfaction, perceived organisational support, and organisational identification the following hypotheses is proposed:

*H4: Perceived Organisational Support (POS) mediates the relationship between Internal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) and Organisational Identification (OI).*

### 3. Research model

Addressing the main purpose of this study, the proposed conceptual model relates the Internal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) with employees' Organisational Identification (OI) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS). The proposed model partially intersects previous studies: 1) Allen's (1992) study on communication and organisational commitment with a mediating role of POS conducted among university employees; 2) Nakra's (2006) study on the relationship between communication satisfaction and organisational identification tested through a sample consisting of employees from government organisations, public sector undertakings and the private sector; 3) the two similar studies by Verčič et al. (2009) and Verčič et al. (2017) on engaging employees through internal communication, which used the Nakra's (2006) and Downs & Hazen (1977) conceptualisation of satisfaction with internal communication (Table 1 defines the dimensions of ICS considered in the present study). The proposed model is exposed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The proposed conceptual model



Source: Author's own study.

**Table 1.** ICS dimensions defined

<b>ICS Dimensions</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>References</b>
Satisfaction with Feedback	Employee satisfaction with the availability of information on individual objectives – “the degree to which employees feel that their efforts are recognized, their superiors understand their problems, and the criteria by which they are being judged are fair” (Nakra, 2006, p.43)	Nakra (2006), Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)
Satisfaction with Communication with Superiors	Covers both the upward and downward aspects of communicating with superiors (openness to new ideas, listening and paying attention, guidance).	Nakra (2006)
Satisfaction with Horizontal Communication	Also called ‘co-worker’ communication – concerns the extent to which horizontal and informal communication is accurate and free flowing. It concerns the ease of communication between co-workers and the employee’s ease in accepting criticism from peers.	Nakra (2006)
Satisfaction with Informal Communication	All communication that is not done through the formal means of communication of the organization. It refers to satisfaction with the existing level of informal communication, with the number of decisions made based on informal communication.	Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)
Satisfaction with Corporate Information	Satisfaction about work-related information, information on turnover, profit, financial success of the organisation, familiarity with the work, rules and work procedures.	Nakra (2006), Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)
Satisfaction with Communication Climate	Employee satisfaction about how the organisation promotes its values and goals – “the extent to which communication in the organisation motivates and stimulates employees to meet organisation goals and makes them identify with the organisation” (Nakra, 2006, p. 42).	Nakra (2006), Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)
Satisfaction with Communication Media	Helpfulness, clarity and quantity of information associated with channels (publications and meetings).	Nakra (2006), Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)
Satisfaction with Communication During Meetings	Satisfaction in the communication exercised during the meetings, satisfaction about the information obtained and about the duration of the meetings.	Verčič, Vokić & Čorić (2009)

Source: Author’s own study based on: Nakra (2006) and Verčič et al. (2009).

As it was mentioned before, this study aims at testing the effect of internal communication on employees perceived organisational support and identification. Additionally, it intends to test the possible the mediating effects of perceived organisational support between the internal communication satisfaction and organisational identification.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Data collection**

Seeking to meet the objectives of the present study and to test the hypotheses, the primary data were collected through a survey by questionnaire with non-probabilistic convenience sampling using the snowballing effect. Since the use of a non-probabilistic convenience sample limits the possibility to generalise the results to the entire population, this study uses a subset of the target population (a sampling frame) from which the sample is selected for the possibility of statistical generalisation. According to Polit & Beck (2010), first the population to which we can extrapolate the findings shall be identified. As this study is cross-sectional, it is possible to indicate what was true to the chosen population at given time. In accordance with the rules of statistical generalisation (Polit & Beck, 2010), the population under study constitutes a representative sample that reflects common characteristics of the larger group. In the case of the present study all participants originated from the metropolitan areas of Portugal and were professionally active at the time of the survey, most of the respondents are employed by the same sector of activity (more detail about the sample characteristics is provided in Section 5.1). Additionally, we enhanced the generalisation with the integration of conceptual evidence as suggested by Polit & Beck (2010). In the last section of analyses, where the findings are discussed, in order to contribute to more generalised understandings, the achieved results are compared against the existing literature.

The survey by questionnaire was conducted online, assisted by Qualtrics and distributed through social media. As it comes to the questionnaire structure, it was divided into blocks and had an opening filter-question: “Have you been working more than 1 year for your organisation?”, and all inquiries that answered ‘no’ were automatically directed to the end of the questionnaire. This filter-question was used to ensure that all respondents had some knowledge about the internal communication at their organisations.

### **4.2. Measurement scales**

Basing on the Downs & Hazen’s (1977) conceptualisation of communication satisfaction, Verčič et al. (2009) developed the Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (UPZIK) which was applied in this study. The eight dimensions according to which employees govern their level of satisfaction with the internal communication practiced by the organisations in which they operate

are: 'satisfaction with informal communication' (ICS\_Info); 'satisfaction with horizontal communication' (ICS\_Horiz); 'satisfaction with communication during meetings' (ICS\_Meet), 'satisfaction with communication with the superior' (ICS\_Sup); 'satisfaction with the organisational climate' (ICS\_Clima); 'satisfaction with feedback' (ICS\_Feed); 'satisfaction with media quality' (ICS\_Media); 'satisfaction with corporate information' (ICS\_Corp).

The outcomes of perceived organisational support and organisational identification were measured by Likert-type agreement scales applied before by Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Tompkins & Cheney (1983), respectively. Table 2 summarises the scales used in this study.

**Table 2.** Measurement scales

Construct	Reference	Number of Items	Scale
Internal Communication Satisfaction (ICS)	Verčič, Vokić & Ćorić (2009)	32	Likert -7 points (1 – completely unsatisfied, 7 – completely satisfied)
Perceived Organisational Support (POS)	Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa (1986)	8	Likert -7 points (1 – completely disagree, 7 – completely agree)
Organisational Identification (OI)	Tompkins & Cheney (1983)	8	Likert -7 points (1 – completely disagree, 7 – completely agree)

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: Verčič et al. (2009), Eisenberger et al. (1986), Tompkins & Cheney (1983).

## 5. Analysis and discussion of results

### 5.1. Sample characteristics

As previously mentioned, the sample of the present study consists of 132 respondents originating from metropolitan areas of Portugal and portraying some common characteristics as it comes to their education, work experience, position at the company and sector of analysis. With regard to educational qualifications, 43.5% of the respondents have a university degree and 30.3% have the secondary education. With regard to the position held in the organisation, 'employee' was the option with the highest rate of respondents 26.5% and only 2,3% of the respondents represented 'executives.' Regarding the years working at the company, most respondents claim to be in the organisation for around 1-5 years



(11.4% of respondents). Interestingly, as it comes to the gender distribution the balance between sexes is maintained: 41.2% of respondents are male and 58.8% are female. Regarding the sector of activity, 'transport and storage' was the sector with the highest representation, indicated by 56.1% of the respondents. Consequently, this sector becomes of the greatest significance for the present study.

## **5.2. Measurement model assessment**

To understand how the satisfaction with internal communication influences perceived organisational support and organisational identification this study uses the partial least squares method of structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using the SmartPLS 3.3.2 software. There are some advantages of using PLS methodology, namely: it works well with small sample size and does not need the normality of data (Davari & Rezazadeh, 2013).

PLS is a robust method that uses latent variables and cause-and-effect relationships. The objective of PLS-SEM is to maximise the explained variance of the dependent constructs, through the connection of multi-item scales into constructs and defining relationships between constructs. It handles complex relationships and is able to grasp multiple dependent constructs within a single model (in difference to linear regression that is able to hold only one dependent construct). PLS-SEM has become a popular technique among researchers in the past years (Amaro & Duarte, 2016).

The PLS path model after PLS Algorithm calculation with independent variable (Internal Communication Satisfaction), dependent variable (Organisational Identification – OI) and moderator variable (Perceived Organisational Support – POS) is shown in Figure 2.

### **5.2.1. Reliability and validity**

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of indicator reliability (reflective indicator loadings > 0.5), the reliability of items (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7), convergent reliability (assessed using average variance extracted, AVE > 0.5), internal consistency (assessed using composite reliability, CR > 0.7) and discriminant validity (cross loading criterion; Chin, 2010).

Table 3 presents the Cronbach's alpha, consistent reliability (Rho\_A), the composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE) of each latent variable.

**Table 3.** Measurement model table

Specification	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
ICS	0.970	0.972	0.972	0.558
OI	0.949	0.956	0.956	0.687
POS	0.893	0.901	0.918	0.653

The results support the reliability of the measurement indicators. The following items were dropped: POS\_3, POS\_8, ICS\_Horiz3, ICS\_Info3, ICS\_Info4 and ICS\_Corp2, as they were near the cut-off point (0.5). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each indicator is greater than the expected minimum consistency (0.5) what ensures convergent validity (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The composite reliability (CR) values are also higher than the recommended minimum of 0.7 (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000), indicating that all constructs have adequate internal consistency. The consistent reliability coefficient represents also the desired values (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015).

To assess the extent to which each and every latent variable was distinct from other constructs, Fornell & Larcker (1981) criterion was used to verify and confirm discriminant validity (Table 4). In accordance with data, the cross-loadings are lower than outer loadings in all the metrics and the square root of AVE is greater than the absolute value of all correlations with other constructs. That confirms the discriminant validity of the scales. All the loadings are significant, what assures the strength and reliability of the measurement model (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). Outer model loadings indicate the latent variable reliability as they are above .70.

**Table 4.** Discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker Criterion)

Specification	ICS	OI	POS
ICS	0.747		
OI	0.723	0.829	
POS	0.739	0.787	0.808

### 5.2.2. Collinearity assessment

The values of inner VIF and outer VIF were verified to check the issue of multicollinearity in the model. The inner and outer VIF values show that there is no indication of multicollinearity (as in a well-fitting model the structural VIF coefficients should not be higher than 4.0). Therefore, it is concluded that the problem of multicollinearity is not present among the variables. Table 5 shows the inner VIF values.

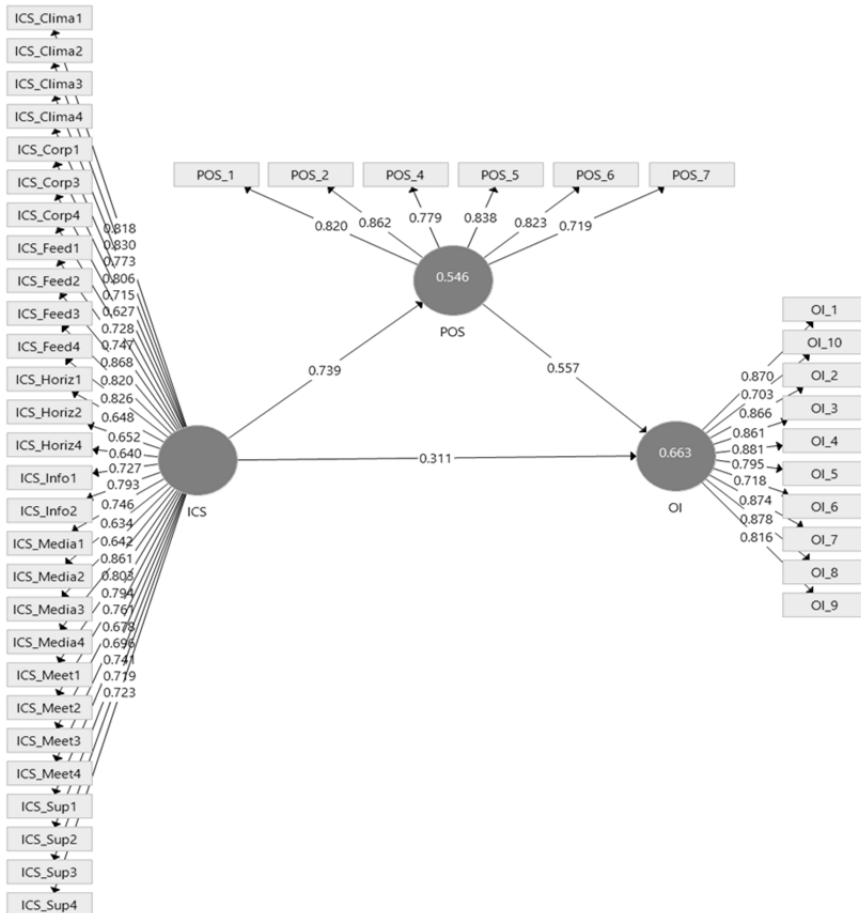
**Table 5.** Inner VIF values

Specification	ICS	OI	POS
ICS		2.203	1
OI			
POS		2.203	

### 5.3. The structural model

Figure 2 exhibits the structural model that shows the beta values of all co-efficients, the outer model loadings and the R2 adjusted for the dependent variables. Accordingly, Table 6 presents the estimated model fit.

**Figure 2.** PLS algorithm model



The standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) is a measure of the approximate model fit and reflects the average magnitude of a difference between the observed correlation matrix and the model-implied correlation matrix. As the SRMR is lower than .10, it can be assumed that the model has a good fit. Table 6 exhibits the algorithm model fit.

**Table 6.** The algorithm model fit

Specification	R Square	R Square Adjusted
OI	0.663	0.657
POS	0.546	0.543
SRMR	0.091	
d_U LS	8.246	
d_G	6.017	
Chi-Square	3303.544	
NFI	0.559	
rms_Theta	0.189	

#### 5.4. Hypotheses testing

PLS-SEM uses a nonparametric bootstrap procedure to test the significance of estimated path coefficients with two-tails significant level of 5 per cent (Hair et al., 2014). Bootstrap estimates the spread, shape and bias of the sampling distribution of the population from which the sample under study is drawn from, creating a large, pre-specified number of samples (Chin, 1998). This study used the bootstrapping analysis with a resample of 5,000 iterations to calculate the t-values in order to evaluate the direct effects of all the hypothesised relationships. It is assumed that if t-value is greater than the critical value (t-value > 1.96) and p-value is smaller than 0.05, the statistical significance of hypothesis is accepted.

Table 7 presents the means, standard deviations, t statistics and p-values of the loadings after running the bootstrapping (with the confidence of 95%). For the tested model all of the outer model loadings are also significant.

**Table 7.** The measurement model quality (path coefficients)

Specification	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	p-values	Confidence Intervals	
						2.50%	97.50%
ICS->OI	0.311	0.304	0.099	3.144	0.002	0.119	0.497
ICS->POS	0.739	0.741	0.050	14.891	0.000	0.635	0.825
POS->OI	0.557	0.561	0.080	6.944	0.000	0.399	0.706

The mediation analysis was conducted by analysing the indirect effects present in the model (Table 8).

**Table 8.** Specific indirect effect

Specification	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	p-values
ICS->POS->OI	0.411	0.412	0.069	6.001	0.000

According to the results and considering the indirect effects, the influence of ICS (independent variable) on OI (dependent variable) through POS (mediator) is significant and strong ( $\beta = 0.411$ ,  $t = 6.001$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, there is a mediation effect, which validates H4.

However, in accordance with the direct effects (path coefficients), the direct influence of ICS on OI is also significant ( $\beta = 0.557$ ,  $t = 6.944$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, POS plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between ICS and OI.

Conclusively, Table 9 exhibits the summary of hypothesis testing. The path co-efficients, t-values and p-values allow validation of all of the hypotheses. The 'decision' column indicated whether the hypothesis was supported or not supported.

**Table 9.** Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	ICS->OI	0.311	3.144	0.002	<i>Supported</i>
H2	ICS->POS	0.739	14.891	0.000	<i>Supported</i>
H3	POS->OI	0.557	6.944	0.000	<i>Supported</i>
H4	ICS->POS->OI	0.411	6.001	0.000	<i>Supported</i>
** $p < 0.01$ , * $p < 0.05$					

## 6. Discussion of results

In this study, the central proposition examined was whether employees' satisfaction with their organisation's communication has any correlation with their organisational identification and what is the effect of perceived support that the organisation gives to its employees. The results provide support for the hypothesis that satisfaction with internal communication helps to strengthen organisational identification ( $\beta = 0.311$ ,  $t = 3.144$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). According to those results, increase in ICS leads to an increase in the organisational identification of employees towards their organisations, meeting the postulates of Cheney & Dickson (1982) who affirmed that the OI derives from messages sent by the organisation, and which link the organisational goals and employees' values and objectives.

For enhancing the practical utility of this study, the relationships between the ICS and POS, as well as between POS and OI were also examined. The ICS showed to be strong and significant in the relationship with POS ( $\beta = 0.739$ ,  $t = 14.891$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), which goes in agreement with both Allen (1992), as well as with Neves & Eisenberger (2012), who claimed that the POS of employees is influenced by the internal communication. Similarly, the relation of POS and OI is also significant ( $\beta = 0.557$ ,  $t = 6.944$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) as in the study of Nakra (2006).

As it comes for the mediation effects, and there is a direct effect of ICS on OI, there is a partial mediation of POS between ICS and OI. Results show that employee satisfaction with internal communication affects OI more strongly through POS than directly.

## **7. Conclusions**

This study provides a portrayal of the internal communication effects organisational identification and brings interesting findings as it comes to the role of perceived organisational support.

Considering the effect of internal communication on perceived organisational support, it was possible to observe that internal communication has a prominent influence on the employee's global belief about the extent to which their organisation is willing to value their contributions and is concerned with their well-being. As it concerns the studied sample, communication seemed to be essential so that employees feel supported in their work and perceive an effective appreciation of their contributions to the organisation.

Similarly, as it comes to the effect that the employees' satisfaction with communication has on employees' identification with their organisations, it was possible to observe that the organisational identification of employees is enhanced by their satisfaction with the way their organisations communicate with them and an effective internal communication can stimulate employees to perceive the values and interests of their organisations. However, the influence of internal employee communication has a stronger effect on organisational identification through the support that the organisation gives to its employees. The study confirmed the partial mediation of perceived organisational support between the internal communication and organisational identification. Those findings confirm the postulates of social identification theory. Accordingly, internal communication should be able to promote social and work skills, such as in-

volvement in tasks, interactions between parties or the availability of employees to actively intervene in their organisations' daily lives. Employees who feel that their ideas, opinions and suggestions are considered and truly applied in the organisational strategies, will feel responsible for obtaining positive results. Thus, it is essential to look more and more at the management of human resources from a strategic perspective, particularly with regard to internal communication strategies. Ultimately, an organisation should seek to state a clear position as it comes to the support that it gives to its employees.

This study has some limitations, which should be considered, when interpreting the results obtained. Primary, similarly with many other studies, this research is cross-sectional, which limits the causality of its findings. Then, the use of a non-probabilistic convenience sample made it impossible to generalise the results to the entire population and it is only possible to consider the selected frame. Additionally, the fact that the filter-question eliminates respondents who have been working for an organisation for less than one year, meant that there was a significant reduction in the attained sample size. On the positive side, the sample did not vary greatly from the population with respect to gender. Future research could consider additional individual differences that might predict employee engagement.

While concerning the methodological issues, future studies should address the constructs studied with alternative methodologies, such as field and experimental studies, that could enhance the deeper understanding of the subject. It would also be interesting to study this relationship from a longitudinal perspective, trying to understand and justify possible fluctuations of the internal communication strategies over time. In order to guarantee a coherent generalisation of the findings, future replication in sampling, including random samples, and replication of the study is advised.

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