Objectives and difficulties in the evaluation of internal communication in Spanish companies

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Abstract

Recent studies confirm that business leaders are increasingly interested in internal communication (IC). However, in order for IC to continue evolving, the ability to demonstrate its impact on the income statement through the measurement and the evaluation of its actions is essential. This work analyses the objectives evaluated by the IC departments, the evaluation procedures and the barriers to measuring effectiveness in a study carried out with 118 IC leaders in Spain. The results show that evaluation focuses on the employees and their reactions, and that the main obstacle in measuring is the lack of appropriate tools. In addition, evaluation largely depends on the type of company and how the department is organized.

Keywords

Internal communication; Organizational communication; Corporate communication; Professional profile; Skills; Abilities; Evaluation; Companies; Firms; Tools; Metrics; Measurement.

1. Introduction

Professionals and academics of internal communication (IC) increasingly see IC as a key strategic value for organisations (*Adecec*, 2019). Numerous investigations reveal the advantages and potential of IC and, among others, affirm that it helps employees to share information, establish relationships and generate meanings (**Berger**, 2008); to promote interactivity (**Capriotti**, 1998); reaffirm one´s own identity and organisational values (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011; **Berger**, 2008); and create a positive organisational climate (**Charry-Condor**, 2018). In addition, they indicate that IC helps to make decisions, resolve problems, and manage the processes of change (**Men**, 2014; **Men**; **Stacks**, 2014; **Capriotti**, 1998). In fact, in a society as dynamic as the current one, IC is seen as a vital aspect of addressing the changes that occur in any organisation (**Elving**, 2005; **Daly**; **Teague**; **Kitchen**, 2003). However, authors like **Álvarez-Nobell** & **Lesta** point out that

> "to say that internal communication contributes to increasing the value of the organisations is without a doubt a very attractive, but also insufficient, statement" (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011, p. 12).

IC has to be flexible and tailored to the needs of the business if it wants to be really effective (**Sedej**; **Justinek**, 2013; **Ruck** y **Welch**, 2012), but it also has to provide relevant data that will allow the organisation to take decisions that are not solely based on intuition (**Castillo-Esparcia**; **Villabona-Beltrán**, 2018; **Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011). Therefore, the IC needs to perform periodical planned measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of the messages and means it uses and, above all, the contributions it realises to reach a company's strategic goals (**Zerfass**; **Verčič**; **Volk**, 2017; **Watson**; **Noble**, 2014) and its contribution to the profit and loss account (**Cuenca**; **Verazzi**, 2018, **Martínez-Martínez: Fernández-Hurtado**, 2018; **Slijepčević**; **Bovan**; **Radojević**, 2018; *IC Kollectif*, 2018; **Berceruelo**, 2014). In addition, the evaluation of IC reinforces its strategic value since
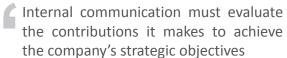
> "knowing both the positive and negative results makes it possible to set priorities, make decisions, and carry out planning previsions" (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011, p. 12).

On the other hand, **Marca** *et al.* (2017) & **Gómez-De-la-Fuente** & **Túñez-López** (2012) assert that the evaluation of communication is essential when the time comes to be accountable, demonstrate efficacy and know the impact that IC has in the corporate and business strategy of the organisation, because

> "without measurement it is not possible to manage communication" (*Adecec*, 2016, p. 7).

Therefore, evaluation has become one of the main challenges faced by professionals in the field, as various studies suggest (*IC Kollectif*, 2019; **Nelli**, 2018; *VMAGroup*, 2018; **Zerfass** *et al.*, 2018).

In this context, the figure of the director of communication is fundamental. One of their challenges, highlighted in the *European communication monitor* reports from 2010, analysed in **Castillo-Esparcia** and **Villabona-Beltrán** (2018), is to convert the challenges and strategies

> ❝ Internal communication must evaluate the contributions it makes to achieve the company's strategic objectives ❞

of the management of the company's objectives into communication policies at the service of its intangible assets (**Carrillo-Durán**; **Nuño-Moral**, 2010). For that reason, it is currently demanded

> "integrating communication to achieve the company's general strategy" (**Carrillo-Durán**, 2016, p. 273),

and this requires the professional (dircom)

> "to know, understand and achieve the mastery of the managerial logic adopted by the organisation and its conception of results/value" (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011, p. 25).

However, the current situation does not reflect any improvement in this aspect. Recent research (*Gatehouse*, 2019; *IC Kollectif*, 2019; **O'Neil** *et al.*, 2018) shows the low impact the evaluation and measurement of the management of communication in organisations has had. European companies rarely measure the results of internal communication, and when they do, they do not analyse what really matters (*IC Kollectif*, 2019). Furthermore, in a study conducted by **Castillo-Esparcia** and **Villabona-Beltrán** (2018) which analyses the ten versions of the reports of the *European communication monitor* (2010-2017), it can be seen that the majority of European enterprises use evaluation results solely

> "to measure the success of the communication activities (66%), to do the planning of forthcoming activities (62.9%), to explain the value of communication to senior managers and internal clients (59.5%), and analyse the goals and the direction of the communication strategies (58%)" (**Zerfass** *et al.*, 2015, in **Castillo-Esparcia** y **Villabona-Beltrán**, 2018, p. 150),

leaving aside the influence this has on the organisational strategic outcomes.

In the specific field of IC the data is similar. Few organisations evaluate the results of IC and even less measure its activities drawing from the objectives set by the organisation (**Castillo-Esparcia**; **Villabona-Beltrán**, 2018; **Simancas-González**; **García-López**, 2017; **Castillo-Esparcia**; **Álvarez-Nobell**, 2014; **Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011). Thus, measurement continues to be one of the most important neglected duties in IC, despite its relevance in the corporate sphere (*Gatehouse*, 2019; **Cuenca**; **Verazzi**, 2018).

> ❝ Despite its importance in corporations, the measurement of internal communication is scarce ❞

In conclusion, it is convenient to carry out an analysis of how companies conduct IC evaluations. The overall objective of this research focuses on knowing how companies in Spain evaluate the effectiveness of the IC strategies that are carried out to determine what the priorities facing these departments in the medium term are. In particular, it aims to:

- Identify the IC objectives companies currently evaluate by and the evaluation procedures employed.
- Define the main barriers professionals encounter in measuring the effectiveness of IC.

The intention is also to carry out a prospective analysis to reach the following objectives:

- Describe the role of IC in the company.
- Detect the priorities that company IC teams have over the next three years and ascertain whether the measurement of IC is amongst them.

Specifically, this research analyses these variables according to the structural characteristics of the departments and the companies the professionals who participated in the research belong to.

2. Method

2.1. Samples

The sample is made up of 118 professionals who are responsible for the management of IC. Some 60.2% of participants are women and 39.8% men. In terms of age,

- 1.7% are less than 25 years of age,
- 4.2% from 26 to 30,
- 17% from 31 to 40,
- 68.7% from 41 to 50,
- 0.8% from 51 to 60, and
- 7.6% over 60.

All participants have a university degree; the most common are journalism (52.5%), advertising and public relations (22.9%), economics (10.2%) and law (6.8%). The academic formation of 84.7% of them is completed with post-graduate studies in corporate communication (47.4%), marketing and sales management (15.3%), social networking (8.5%), MBA (6.8%) and HR (6.8%).

Some 45.8% of the companies to which participants belong are multinational and 54.2% of them national. In terms of size,

- 72% are large companies (more than 250 employees),
- 9.3% medium (51 to 250 employees),
- 10.2% small (11 to 50 employees), and
- 8.5% micro-enterprises (of 1 to 10 employees).

The main sectors of activity of the companies which the participants are from are

- consulting (11.9%),
- education (11%),
- health (8.5%),
- food (7.6%),
- public government (7.6%),
- financial services (6.8%),
- technology (5.9%),
- infrastructure, transport and logistics (5.1%),
- automotive (5.1%),
- NGOs (4.2%),
- ICT (4.2%), and
- other sectors (22%).

2.2. Procedure

The research has been conducted on the basis of the data from the *Study on the state of internal communication* in Spain carried out by the *Association of Directors of Communication* (*Dircom*) during the first quarter of 2018 with the aim of knowing the current state of the discipline, and to highlight and maximise IC as a strategic role and company policy.

The design of the online questionnaire is based on research previously carried out by the *Associazione per lo Sviluppo delle Comunicazioni Aziendali in Italia* (*Ascai*) and the *European Association of Internal Communication* (*Feiea*) (**Nelli**, 2018). The questionnaire, consisting of 37 questions, is structured in five sections:

- positioning of the IC team;
- strategies, objectives and activities;
- assessment processes;
- business context;
- and priorities, problems and challenges faced.

Data collection was carried out between February 22, 2018 and March 22 of the same year. The time required for completion was 20 minutes. Confidential and anonymous treatment of information was guaranteed in accordance with *Organic Law 15/1999 on the Protection of Personal Data*. Sampling of the study has been non-probabilistic by self-selection (**Couper**, 2000; **Rodríguez-Jaume**; **González-Río**, 2014). The link to the questionnaire has been sent online to the members of the *Association of Directors of Communication* (*Dircom*) (approximately 1,022) to be completed by those professionals who have responsibilities in the management of IC teams in their company (Trust level: 95%; sampling error 8.5%; p=q=0.5).

2.3. Data analysis

In the first phase there has been a descriptive analysis of the type of evaluations carried out, the quality, effectiveness and the role they have and the priorities that are imposed on the IC teams in the companies in the study. Then, to study the differences between companies according to their structural characteristics and after checking the assumption of homogeneity of variance, since the items are in interval scale the Student t test for independent samples and anovas of a factor of the study´s variables have been applied.

Following that, to analyse whether there are differences in the evaluation of the IC teams the enterprises carry out, and the quality and the purpose they have, according to their level of effectiveness the Student t test for independent samples has been applied after checking the assumption of the homogeneity of variance. Finally, in order to know whether the effectiveness that the IC team has in the company is related to the priorities they have highlighted, the chi-square test has been applied.

The value of significance is set to < 0.05.

The analysis of the data was performed with the *SPSS* statistical package, version 21.0.

3. Results

Firstly, a description of the profiles and the structures of the IC departments analysed in the present study has been performed. The results show that 85.6 per cent of the participating enterprises have a department that is dedicated to IC. However, the size of the departments is very small. In 35.6% the IC departments are composed of a single person, in 42.4% there are two to three people and in 22% there are four or more. Furthermore, in 39% of companies the IC department has the support of agencies and external consultants.

When one analyses the structure of their own departments the data indicates that 62.7% of the companies manage IC with what the Dircom association defines as a centralised scheme. In this type of structure there is a central IC team that defines the strategies as well as corporate content and the local departments which, in each case, adapt them. On the contrary, coordinated management, in which the central team only acts as a reference, only occurs in 25.4% of the organisations analysed. Finally, only 11.9% of the companies undertake decentralised management where each local team has its own IC director that defines strategies and content.

3.1. Evaluation of the internal communication: objectives, instruments and barriers

The participants valued a series of IC objectives that were evaluated to measure their effectiveness in the company. It was found that among the objectives that companies use to set out to measure the effectiveness of the strategies developed (Figure 1); the satisfaction/involvement of employees is preferred. Secondly, other aspects such as the use of the intranet and the employees´ understanding of the key messages of the company are analysed. These variables evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes and actions of IC in themselves. On the contrary, as-
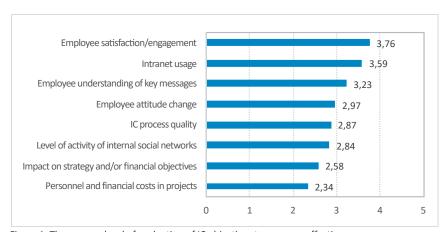

Figure 1. The average level of evaluation of IC objectives to measure effectiveness
From 1 = low to 5 = high.

pects related to business objectives such as the financial and personnel costs invested for the undertakings of projects are the least analysed.

On analysing the results according to the land-based locations of the organisations, statistically significant differences are detected:

- multinational enterprises measure worker satisfaction more than national companies (4.13 versus 3.45) (t (115) = -2.99; p = 0.003; (d = 0.56),
- intranet usage (3.92 versus 3.31) (t (114.802) = -2.39; p = 0.018; d = 0.43), and
- employee understanding of key messages (3.58 versus 2.94) (t (114) = -2,61; p = 0.010; (d = 0.48).

It is also noted that the evaluation carried out by companies on the financial and personnel costs vary depending on the size of the entity (F (2;113) = 7.927; p = 0.001; η^2 = 0.12). In particular, there are differences between small and large companies, 3.23 versus 2.12; (p < 0.001).

The data also reveals that companies that resort to external consultants mainly contract them to evaluate employee at-

titude change (3.29 versus 2.77) (t (114) = 2.03; p = 0.045; d = 0.39). On the other hand, companies with specific IC departments, or at least with a person dedicated to this function, include the evaluation of tactical aspects such as intranet usage among their objectives (3.83 versus 2.18) (t (115) = 4.796; p < 0.001; d = 1.26) and employee understanding of key messages (3.39 versus 2.29) (t (114) = 3.185; p = 0.002; d = 0.84).

On the other hand, the instruments and procedures companies most frequently use to assess the effectiveness of the IC have been the feedback on events and employee surveys. As shown in Figure 2, the cost/benefit analyses are the indicators that are least frequently used.
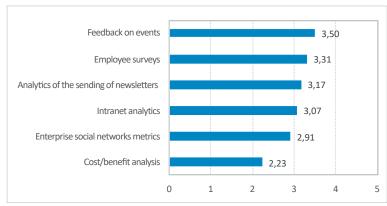

Figure 2. Average frequency of the use of the procedures to evaluate IC effectiveness
From 1 = none to 5 = very often.

The data reflects that multinationals rely more on the use of employee surveys than companies of national scope (3.69 versus 2.98) (t (115) = -2.807; p = 0.006; d = 0.53). In addition, it is noted that the use of the cost/benefit analysis varies according to the size of the work centres (F(2;113) = 4.012; p = 0.021; η^2 = 0.07); differences in this use are recorded between small and medium-sized enterprises (2.86 compared to 1.60; p = 0.031).

With regards to the measuring instruments most used by the consultants are those that allow the evaluation of the intranet analytics (3.60 versus 2.74) (t (115) = 3.296; p = 0.001; d = 0.62). Companies that have IC departments rely more on employee surveys (3.48 versus 2.29) (t (115) = 3.407; p = 0.001; (d = 0.90), intranet analytics (3.26 versus 1.94) (t (115) = 3.684; p < 0,001; d = 0.97), feedback on events (3.66 versus 2.59) (t (114) = 3.039; p = 0.003; (d = 0.80) and the analytics of the sending of newsletters (3.33 versus 2.24) (t (116) = 2.743; p = 0.007; d = 0.72).

Finally, the results reflect that the key barriers that companies have against performing an effective assessment of IC are a lack of adequate tools to do so and not understanding exactly what ought to be measured. However, the costs in themselves that an evaluation generates are not listed as a priority problem (Figure 3).

The data also show that national firms encounter more obstacles than international ones. The main reasons are the following:

- not understanding what to measure (3.41 versus 2.78)(t (116) = 2.666; p = 0.009; d = 0.50),
- because the evaluation takes a lot of time (2.92 versus 2.44) (t (116) = 2.041; p = 0.044; d = 0.38),
- because the reports required for the evaluations cannot be carried out (2.84 versus 1.96) (t (112.144) = 3.874; p < 0,001; d = 0.69) and,
- because of the costs generated by the evaluation of IC (2.63 versus 2.00) (t (115.920) = 2.784; p = 0.006; d = 0.51).

On the other hand, it can be observed that the companies that do not assign IC to a specific body have more difficulties in knowing what they have to evaluate (3.76 versus 3.01) (t (116) = -2.238; p = 0.027; d = 0.58) and point out the impossibility of carrying out the reports needed for the evaluation as an obstacle (3.24 versus 2.31) (t (19.003) = -2,184; p = 0.042; d = 0.72).

Another peculiarity detected is that multinational companies value their IC teams more than the nationals (3.56 versus 3.05) (t (112.760) = -2,523; p = 0.013; d = 0.45).

The valuation of their IC teams also varies according to company size (F(2;115) = 3.288; p = 0.041; η^2 = 0.05); in particular the differences are between large and medium-sized enterprises, values being higher for IC teams in larger companies than for the appraisal by medium-sized ones (3.28 compared to 2.45; p = 0.031).

3.2. The role of IC

Participants feel that the effectiveness of IC strategies to support the business objectives is remarkable (3.44 on average about 5
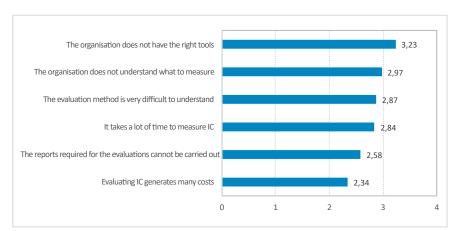

Figure 3. Average rating of the barriers affecting the effective evaluation of IC
From 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = fully agree.

(SD = 0.92). In this regard, the main role given to IC is the one of supporting a company´s strategic objectives (M = 3.88); they also point to the importance of IC as a relevant aspect in supporting and influencing the senior management team (M = 3.73/3.64) (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluating the role of IC in the companies of the study

	Mean	SD
IC supports the company´s strategic objectives	3.88	1.13
IC allows senior managers to recognize the inherent communication aspect in all decisions and activities.	3.73	1.16
IC supports senior managers by providing them with information to take decisions or act	3.65	1.15
IC advises managers on how to act in certain communicative challenges	3.64	1.23
IC is a key piece in the digitalization of the company	3.59	1.35
IC plays a very important role in the overall running of the company	3.58	1.27
The person responsible for IC is involved from the onset in the strategic plans	3.25	1.33
Senior managers take the IC recommendations very seriously	3.24	1.17
Senior managers view the IC team as trusted advisers	3.23	1.34
The head of IC is always invited to senior level meetings of senior officials dealing with strategic planning issues	3.03	1.36
The IC team acts only when problems occur	2.56	1.44

From 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = fully agree.
SD = Standard deviation

It should be noted that, in the face of the opinion of the international companies (2.22), national enterprises (2.84) consider IC is not viewed as a strategic factor. At the same time, Spanish companies consider IC is to be used only when crisis situations or problems arise (t (116) = 2.380; p = 0.019; d = 0.44). On the other hand, research participants have valued the quality and ability of the IC team in a positive way (3.28 (SD = 1.15), the valuation of companies that work with external consultants being superior to those that do not count on them (3.54 versus 3.11) (t (116) = 2.024; p = 0.045; d = 0.38).

3.3. Priorities for internal communication

The analysis shows that 95% of the circumstances raised (Table 2) are priority issues[1] for, at least, more than half of the companies. The main objectives that arise in the IC departments in their companies are "aligning IC to the business strategy" (82.2% of the entities) and "strengthening the role of communication to support the senior managers´ decision making" (80.5%).

Table 2. Priority objectives for IC departments in the next three years (%)

	Relevance in companies*		
	High priority	Medium	Secondary
1. Aligning IC to the business strategy	82.2	11.9	5.9
2. Strengthening the role of communication to support the senior managers´ decision making	80.5	16.1	3.4
3. Managing digital-evolution and the media	79.7	14.4	5.9
4. Adapting to the speed and volume of information flow	77.1	13.6	9.3
5. Establishing new methods to evaluate and demonstrate the value of communication	74.6	18.6	6.8
6. Getting to the employees by using mobile technology	74.6	11.9	13.6
7. Taking measures that inspire employees to create and share valuable content	72.9	16.9	10.2
8. Helping senior managers and team leaders to build their communicative abilities	72.1	20.3	7.6
9. Aligning IC to the communication and external business actions	71.2	18.6	10.2
10. Integrating employee generated employee content into corporate communication	67.8	24.6	7.6
11. Explaining the value of IC to the directors	65.3	17.8	16.9
12. Implementing advanced monitoring and active listening strategies	63.6	27.1	9.3
13. Meeting the demand for more transparency and active audiences	63.5	29.7	6.8
14. Teaching employees to use social networks to generate content of value	61.0	21.2	17.8
15. Combining the need to address more audiences and channels with limited resources	56.8	32.2	11.0
16. Replacing written media with digital media	56.8	26.3	16.9
17. Managing the inclusion of "digital natives"	53.4	30.5	16.1
18. Supporting the integration of multicultural people in the company	51.7	28.8	19.5
19. Implementing an ethical code for the processes and actions of IC	50.8	24.6	24.6
20. Identifying the sustainability policies of the IC process	48.3	33.9	17.8

From 1 = not important to 5 = very important.
*Note: Priority objectives are evaluated with 4 and 5, medium importance evaluated with 3 and secondary importance with 1 and 2.

In addition, 74.0% of respondents considered "establishing new methods to evaluate and demonstrate the value of communication" as priority objectives and a major challenge in coming years

Finally, in order for the study to look deeper, items have been re-coded that assess the self-perceived effectiveness of the IC teams as a dichotomous variable distinguishing between highly effective IC teams (with values of 4 or 5) and those IC teams with a medium-low effectiveness (with values from 1 to 3).
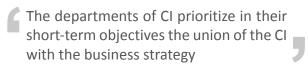
The data reflects that firms with higher rates of effectiveness coincide in a series of characteristics (Table 3): tending to assess IC objectives with greater frequency, using a wider range of evaluation procedures and, at the same time, encountering fewer barriers to carrying them out.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and t-tests of the analysed variables

	High effectiveness**		Medium-low effectiveness		t	p
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)		
IC objectives evaluated						
Employee satisfaction/engagement	59	4.24 (0.99)	58	3.28 (1.34)	4.421	**0.000***
Intranet usage	59	4.24 (1.01)	58	2.93 (1.51)	5.501	**0.000***
Employee understanding of key messages	58	3.69 (1.14)	58	2.78 (1.43)	3.807	**0.000***
Employee attitude change	58	3.31 (1.20)	58	2.64 (1.41)	2.763	0.007*
IC process quality	58	3.14 (1.30)	58	2.60 (1.35)	2.169	**0.032***
Enterprise social networks metrics	59	3.22 (1.43)	57	2.44 (1.39)	2.988	**0.003***
Impact on strategy and/or financial objectives	58	3.05 (1.13)	58	2.10 (1.18)	4.419	**0.000***
Personnel and financial costs in projects	58	2.47 (1.17)	58	2.22 (1.29)	1.057	0.293
Average	*58*	*3.42 (0.73)*	*57*	*2.61 (0.90)*	*5.318*	***0.000****
Frequency of use of IC evaluation procedures						
Feedback on events	58	3.93 (1.23)	58	3.07 (1.41)	3.510	**0.001***
Employee surveys	58	3.83 (1.11)	59	2.80 (1.45)	4.327	**0.000***
Analytics of the sending of newsletters	59	3.83 (1.30)	59	2.51 (1.52)	5.066	**0.000***
Intranet analytics	58	3.74 (1.18)	59	2.41 (1.37)	5.655	**0.000***
Enterprise social networks metrics	58	3.43 (1.35)	59	2.39 (1.53)	3.896	**0.000***
Cost/benefit analysis	58	2.55 (1.34)	58	1.91 (1.25)	2.655	**0.009***
Average	*57*	*3.56 (0.78)*	*58*	*2.51 (0.79)*	*7.247*	***0.000****
Barriers to evaluation						
Not having the right tools	59	2.85 (1.38)	59	3.58 (1.35)	-2,901	**0.004***
Not understanding what to measure	59	2.75 (1.21)	59	3.49 (1.31)	-3,217	**0.002***
The evaluation method is difficult to understand	59	2.85 (1.16)	59	2.75 (1.18)	0.472	0.638
It takes a lot of time	59	2.69 (1.18)	59	2.71 (1.39)	-0.071	0.943
Reports cannot be carried out	59	2.19 (1.17)	59	2.69 (1.45)	-2.096	**0.038***
Evaluating IC generates many costs	59	2.19 (1.12)	59	2.49 (1.39)	-1.310	0.193
Average	*59*	*2.58 (0.89)*	*59*	*2.95 (0.87)*	*-2.263*	***0.025****
Quality and ability of the IC team	59	3.83 (0.85)	59	2.73 (1.14)	5.934	**0.000***
Role of IC in the company						
Supports the strategic objectives	59	4.27 (0.89)	59	3.49 (1.21)	3.994	**0.000***
Allows the recognition of communicative aspects	59	3.98 (1.03)	59	3.47 (1.24)	2.431	0.017*
Supports managers with information	59	3.86 (1.04)	59	3.44 (1.22)	2.028	**0.045***
Advises managers on how to act	59	3.92 (1.01)	59	3.36 (1.37)	2.524	**0.013***
Key in the digitalization of the company	59	3.93 (1.17)	59	3.25 (1.43)	2.812	**0.006***
Important role in the company´s overall running	59	4.05 (0.96)	59	3.12 (1.38)	4.271	**0.000***
Involved in the strategic plans	59	3.81 (1.09)	59	2.68 (1.31)	5.128	**0.000***
Giving managers important recommendations	59	3.63 (0.98)	59	2.85 (1.23)	3.808	**0.000***
Being trusted advisors to senior managers	59	3.59 (1.21)	59	2.86 (1.38)	3.052	**0.003***
IC manager is one of the senior mangers	59	3.41 (1.23)	59	2.64 (1.37)	3.173	**0.002***
Acts only when problems occur	59	2.37 (1.41)	59	2.75 (1.46)	-1.411	0.161
Average	*59*	*3.71 (0.72)*	*59*	*3.08 (0.93)*	*4.117*	***0.000****

*p < 0.05
**High effectiveness: companies whose assessment of the effectiveness of its IC strategy is between 4 and 5. Medium-low effectiveness: companies whose assessment of the effectiveness of its strategy of IC is between 1 and 3.

On the other hand, it should be noted that highly effective companies value the quality and skills of the IC teams more, considering IC to be of great relevance to the company.

> The departments of CI prioritize in their short-term objectives the union of the CI with the business strategy

The results of the study also reflect that companies with the most effective teams prioritize three prominent objectives:

- managing digital evolution and the media (89.8%);
- strengthening the role of communication to support senior managers´ decision-making (88.1%);
- integrating employee generated content into corporate communication (76.3%).

4. Conclusions

The results of this study show that IC is an area that is becoming increasingly important in business as a strategic management tool. With this in mind, knowing how to perform the evaluation of its effectiveness can contribute to consolidating its influence. In fact, evaluating results is the only way for communication professionals to demonstrate the value that their work brings to the organisation and to the profit and loss account (**Castillo-Esparcia**; **Álvarez-Nobell**, 2014; **Castillo-Esparcia**; **Villabona-Beltrán**, 2018; **Marca** *et al.*, 2017).

Only what is measured can be valued, managed, and, therefore, improved, as reminded by the *Association of Consulting Companies in Public Relations and Communication* (*Adecec*, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, measuring and evaluating the results of communication is fundamental to achieving efficiency (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011).

Taking the degree of effectiveness in IC teams into consideration, the results of this research highlight that the companies in which IC has a higher effectiveness are those that evaluate more, that value the teams highly and are those in which IC plays a more significant role. This data contrasts with the lack of interest in measurement demonstrated by European communication professionals, where only 16.8% considered implementing routines for measurement and evaluation relevant (**Zerfass**; **Verčič**; **Volk**, 2017). As **Castillo-Esparcia** & **Villabona-Beltrán** (2018) caution, understanding how communicators do their work will be far from simple if only such a small part of them measures the impact of their activities.

To evaluate the effectiveness of IC strategies, companies mainly evaluate the use of a channel, such as the intranet, and their own employees, a fact that coincides with previous research (**Zerfass** *et al.*, 2015). In this last point they take particular note of employee satisfaction, the understanding of key messages and employee changes in attitude, which are some of the key results IC pursues. In this sense, it has been observed that multinationals and companies that have an IC department carry out a wider assessment of some of these aspects.

In addition, the companies that have participated in this study make their employees central to the evaluation through such instruments as participatory feedback and surveys. In this case, the utilisation of these assessment tools tends to be higher in multinationals and in companies with IC departments, as well as those in which IC is centralised.

> Without measurement and evaluation of the results it is impossible to manage the communication in a strategic way

The fact that Spanish companies focus on measuring the satisfaction of the internal audiences is good news because, as **Álvarez-Nobell** & **Lesta** (2011) point out, any effective evaluation of communication should include this element, along with the use of resources and outputs.

This study shows the main barrier faced by companies to carry out the evaluation of IC, in line with previous research (**Castillo-Esparcia**; **Villabona-Beltrán**, 2018), is not having adequate tools to measure effectiveness and not being clear what it is they have to measure. Not knowing exactly what to assess is one of the greatest difficulties firms face when it comes to realising an effective internal communication evaluation.

Also, lack of time appears as a limitation in assessing results, while the costs which the evaluation in itself generates are not listed as a priority problem by professionals in the field. It is noted that the companies that experience greater barriers in evaluating are those that are national in scope and those which do not have an IC department.

On the other hand, this research has shown that the most common priorities in IC departments in the medium term, as the editions of the previous years of the *European communication monitor* (**Zerfass** *et al.*, 2018) elaborate, are those related to consolidating its strategic role (in particular, closer alignment with the business strategy and a strengthened role in decision making) and, the least common, issues related to ethics (implementing ethical codes and sustainability policies). It is surprising that "establishing new methods to evaluate and demonstrate the value of communication" and "explaining the value of IC to the directors" does not top the list of priorities, when these are essential for adding value to IC and facilitating improved management, although 74.0% of respondents considered this to be an important challenge in coming years.

In short, this study reflects that the evaluation of the results of IC is a subject that is receiving a growing interest in Spanish companies, but it is still not considered a priority in the immediate agenda of IC departments. In addition, companies

find barriers to conducting effective IC assessments, and when the results are measured and evaluated, evaluation is on concrete actions or plans and it is only on rare occasions the contribution to the business strategy is measured. In the face of this reality, the academic field ought to promote the study of evaluation procedures that the companies are applying in internal communication, to assess their effectiveness and to be able to develop measurement models that are already applied in other strategic areas of the company, such as the balanced scorecard (**Álvarez-Nobell**; **Lesta**, 2011) that allows standardised assessments and demonstrates IC´s contribution to the company results. Conducting investigations such as this, with larger samples and in other countries, as well as studying specific cases present future lines of research to develop in order to deepen the knowledge of this area and move forward in ways of assessing internal communication.

The main limitations of this research are in the choice of the sample. There is no a record of communication managers in Spain. The study is limited to professionals who are part of the *Dircom* association, and therefore the sample is bounded and cannot be considered probabilistic.

5. Note

1. The participants have qualified the relevance of the objectives for the next three years, identifying those which are priority issues (evaluated with a score of 4 or 5, in an order of importance from 1 to 5), those which have medium importance (evaluated with a score of 3) and those that are secondary (evaluated with a score of 1 or 2).

6. References

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