

Interpersonal Communication in the workplace in the perspective of People with Disability co-workers

Marta Nogueira

Department of Social Sciences, School of Education and Social Sciences - Polytechnic of Leiria, Portugal.

Email: marta.nogueira@ipleiria.pt

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9503-4451>

Received: 22 April 2022; Received in revised form: 17 May 2022; Accepted: 23 May 2022; Available online: 28 May 2022

©2022 The Author(s). Published by AI Publications. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract— *This study aimed to analyze how Interpersonal Communication (IC) is processed in an organization that works with People with Disability (PwD) from the point of view of co-workers. A total of 314 PwD co-workers, employees of Auchan Portugal Group, participated in this study. The quantitative methodology was used, with recourse to a semi-structured questionnaire. Data analysis was carried out through descriptive and inferential statistics, using SPSS-24.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The results showed that of all the items in the IC dimension, those that presented a higher degree of agreement were: "In general there is good communication with the PwD" and "The PwD has contact/interaction with the different workers/departments". Those with a lower level of agreement were: "PwD usually have problems in relating to colleagues" and "PwD may adopt inadequate behavior and attitudes in organizations". From the correlation analysis, a statistically significant correlation was verified between the academic qualifications of the PwD's colleagues and the item "The PwD is more communicative than the others". From the analysis of the differences according to professional position, statistically significant differences were found between the groups "Supervisor/Responsible" and "Worker" in three items of the IC. This study aims to contribute to a greater knowledge about the reality of PwD experienced in the workplace and to the increase of good practices by organizations.*

Keywords—*Interpersonal Communication; Organizations; Work; People with Disabilities.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Clear, objective, transparent and, above all, adapted communication is quite relevant for people to feel comfortable at work, so that they can perform their duties well; and, when this does not exist, it can bring negative consequences both in the work environment and in other sectors. In the case of People with Disabilities (PwD), and taking into account the type of disability above all, it is crucial that colleagues and superiors know how to carry out this communication properly [1].

Successfully integrating PwD into the workforce has become an increasingly important issue for organizations around the world [2]. (Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2022). Presently, this population represents one of the largest minorities in the world, with about 1.1 billion individuals with some type of disability [3]. Due to the expected

decline in the working-age population, especially in European countries, PwD are now more recognized as a valuable resource in the workforce and research on disability and employment is more important than ever [4].

However, PwD still face quite a few obstacles when it comes to getting and keeping a job, as shown in the literature. Several authors report difficulties such as: workplace stigma [5]; negative attitudes from colleagues and supervisors [6]; discrimination and exclusion with negative consequences for their mental well-being [7] inflexible workplace and higher unemployment rates [8] and communication problems with other employees [9].

Interpersonal Communication (IC) is a major factor in organizational success, contributing greatly to inclusion and integration in companies [10].

So this study aimed to analyze how IC is processed in an organization that works with PwD from the perspectives of co-workers. Thus, the main objective of this study was to analyze how IC is processed in an organization that works with PwD from the point of view of co-workers. The specific objectives outlined were as the following: i) to verify differences between groups regarding sociodemographic and socioprofessional variables and IC colleagues' perception; ii) to verify whether there are correlations between the sociodemographic and socio-professional variables and IC colleagues' perception. Understanding how IC is performed in organizations that work with PwD is quite pertinent and studies on this topic are scarce.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal Communication

Communication is one of the basic needs in our lives. People communicate to satisfy their needs: physical, identity, and social well-being. Those who cannot communicate report negative satisfaction with life, lack of identity, and low relationship development [11]. Interpersonal communication (IC) is commonly defined as the dyadic interaction between at least two human humans who exchange verbal and nonverbal messages and thus mutually create meaning [12]. IC is essential to an individual's well-being. Without communication, almost all people tend to feel lost and lonely [13]. In the case of PwD, IC can be more difficult and, if not secured, can have a negative impact on quality of life [14].

Interpersonal Communication at Work

Work-related interpersonal communication skills are defined as learned, goal-oriented behaviors that enable the worker to interact and function effectively with groups and other individuals within the social context of a particular workplace [15]. Communication and interpersonal relationships were found to impact workplace stress experienced by female workers with disabilities [16].

The degree of competence in IC skills of a person is directly related to positive work outcomes, such as job performance ratings, job satisfaction on the job, and organizational commitment [17; 18]. The lack of competence is associated with negative work outcomes, such as loneliness and social isolation.

Effective IC in an organization refers to well-defined lines of communication, smooth transfer of information between departments and employees, analysis of information linked to decision making, internal communication within the organization, and more [20].

Employers who include favorable strategies-such as open communication-for individuals with disabilities in the workplace enrich and enhance organizational benefits [20]. Such benefits include leadership indiversity, innovation, increased overall morale, and the ability to create a wider recruitment network [21].

Disabled workers should be empowered to be involved in the process where communication engages and embraces them, even those who are not functional speech or writing [22].

III. METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study is classified as a case study, belonging to the quantitative methodology and was carried out at the Auchan Portugal Group, a hypermarket chain, wich takes an example of good practices in the area of recruitment and integration of PwD.

Sample

A total of 314 PwD co-workers, participated in this study, 74,5% were woman and 25,5% were man, aged between 30 and 39 years (38.2%) and between 40 and 49 years (37.9%). Most of participants (85%) worked in the FMCG sector, had a High School Education (67,2%), 15% were Supervisors and 85% were Workers.

Data collect

Data were collected between February 2018 and March 2020, with visits to the various stores in the country. A semi-structured questionnaire was used, created from the beginning according to the objectives of the study, which was filled by employees via *Googleforms*. The questionnaire contained questions about sociodemographic variables (*gender, age, academic qualifications, marital status, professional position, area and place of work*). The questions were closed-ended and were formulated on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 (1=*strongly disagree*; 2=*disagree*; 3=*neither agree nor disagree*; 4=*agree*; 5=*strongly agree*).

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed through descriptive and inferential statistics, using *SPSS-24.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)* software. The descriptive analysis included frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Inferential analysis included the Mann-Whitney test to compare differences in means between different groups and the Spearman's correlation coefficient to verify correlations between variables.

IV. RESULTS

The determination of fidelity was tested using the internal consistency method. The consistency of the “Interpersonal Communication” dimension showed a Cronbach’s alpha of 0,608, considered weak ($\alpha=0.608$), but is close to acceptable value.

The results showed that of all the items in the IC dimension, the ones that presented a higher degree of agreement were: *"In general there is good communication with PwD"* and *"The PwD has contact/interaction with the different workers/departments"*.

From the correlation analysis, a statistically significant correlation was found between *Academic Qualifications* of the PwD colleagues and the item *"The PwD is more communicative than others"* (Table 1). This suggests that the higher the educational qualifications, the more the person will consider PwD to be more communicative than others.

Table 1. Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient

<i>Interpersonal communication</i>	<i>Academic Qualifications</i>
<i>The (PwD) is more communicative than the others</i>	-,183**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (bilateral)

** .Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral)

From the analysis of the differences according to professional position, statistically significant differences were found between the groups *"Supervisor/Responsible"* and *"Worker"* in three items of the IC, whose average was higher in the *"Worker"* group: *"The (PwD) is more communicative than the others"*; *"A (PwD) usually has relationship problems with colleagues"*; and *"The (PwD) may adopt inappropriate attitudes/behavior in the company"*. This suggests that the *"Worker"* group tends to agree in a greater degree on all three dimensions of CI compared to the *"Supervisor/Responsible"* group.

V. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to analyze how IC is processed in an organization that works with PwD from the point of view of co-workers. The specific objectives outlined were as the following: i) to verify differences between groups regarding sociodemographic and socio-professional variables and IC colleagues’ perception; ii) to verify whether there are correlations between the sociodemographic and socio-professional variables and IC colleagues’ perception.

In general, the results allowed to gauge that the perception of PwD coworkers is that there is a good communication with PwD in the workplace, since a large percentage agreed that PwD has contact with the different workers and departments of the organization and, to a lesser extent, agreed that PwD usually have relationship problems with colleagues and may adopt inappropriate behaviors in the organization. Most studies reported that PwD’s interpersonal communication in companies is marked by difficulties, which causes them not to integrate properly [23; 24; 25]. However, these results can be explained by the fact that the study was conducted in a company known for its good practices in relation to PwD inclusion, and are therefore expected. The results also showed the existence of a significant correlation between the academic qualifications of the PwD’s colleagues and the item *"The PwD is more communicative than others"*, which suggests that the higher the academic qualifications, the more colleagues tend to consider the PwD more communicative. From the literature review, no studies were found to corroborate these results, making it difficult to discuss them. However, this can be explained by the fact that people with higher educational qualifications may have a greater knowledge of disability, which would lead them to consider them as more communicative people. However, the relationship between academic qualifications and perception of disability is not so linear, and studies are needed to corroborate the data found here.

From the analysis of the differences according to professional position, statistically significant differences were found between the *"Supervisor/Responsible"* and *"Worker"* groups in three items of the IC, whose average was higher in the *"Worker"* group. This suggests that the *"Worker"* group tends to agree in a greater degree on all three dimensions of CI compared to the *"Supervisor/Responsible"* group. Again, no studies were found to discuss these results, but perhaps they can be explained by the fact that supervisors, because of the position they hold, have greater knowledge about disability, which leads them to agree less on the fact that PwD have relationship problems with colleagues and may adopt inappropriate behaviors in the organization.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aims to contribute to a greater knowledge about the reality of PwD experienced in the work context and to the increase of good practices by the organizations. This study also contributed to a better understanding of the communication process in the company, which is very important in the inclusion process of PwD. Good interpersonal communication is important, so that workers

can perform their functions well; and, when this does not exist, it may bring negative consequences.

Further studies should be done with a larger sample size, involving other work contexts and other variables.

One of the limitations of this study is related to the time factor, since a limit was imposed for the study, which may have conditioned the results. Another limitation is associated with the difficulty in obtaining a more significant sample, which would allow a greater generalization of the results. Finally, the high face validity of the instruments is also a limitation. A high face validity means that the interviewees easily understand what is being studied and, due to this fact, may give more favorable or "politically correct" answers out of fear of what these answers may have as a consequence in their workplace, even if data are administered anonymously.

Despite the limitations presented, we believe that the results obtained in this work were satisfactory from the scientific point of view and that the exposed problematic proved to be fruitful. We suggest the expansion of this study to other contexts and variables, as well as with a more representative sample. Furthermore, it would be important to examine the influence of socio-demographic and socio-professional variables such as academic qualifications, gender, and professional position.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An acknowledgement section may be presented after the conclusion, if desired.

REFERENCES

- [1] Nogueira, M. (2021). *Inteligencia emocional y comunicación interpersonal en personas con deficiencia incorporadas al mercado laboral* [Tesis doctoral, Universidad de Extremadura]. IC-Online. <https://dehesa.unex.es/handle/10662/13034>
- [2] Schloemer-Jarvis, A., Bader, B., & Bohm, S. (2022). The role of human resource practices for including persons with disabilities in the workforce: a systematic literature review. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(1), 45-98. doi:10.1080/09585192.2021.1996433
- [3] World Health Organization. (2018). *Disability and health website*. <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>
- [4] Vornholt, K., Villotti, P., Muschalla, B., Bauer, J., Colella, A., Zijlstra, F., Van Ruitenbeek, G., Uitdewilligen, S., & Corbière, M. (2018). Disability and employment – overview and highlights. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(1), 40–55. doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2017.1387536
- [5] Iwanaga, K., Chen, X., Wu, J.-R., Lee, B., Chan, F., Bezyak, J., Grenawalt, T., & Tansey, T. (2018). Assessing disability inclusion climate in the workplace: A brief report. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 49 (2018) 265–271. doi:10.3233/JVR-180972
- [6] Sundar, V., O'Neill, J., Houtenville, A., Phillips, K., Keirns, T., Smith, A., & Katz, E. (2018). Striving to work and overcoming barriers: Employment strategies and successes of people with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 48,93–109. doi:10.3233/JVR-170918
- [7] Hackett, R., Steptoe, A., Lang, R., & Jackson, S. (2020). Disability discrimination and well being in the United Kingdom: a prospective cohort study. *BMJ Open*, 10. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2019-035714
- [8] Holland, P. (2021). Workers Be Winners or Losers in the Post-COVID-19 Labour Market? *Disabilities*, 1, 161–173. doi:10.3390/disabilities1030013
- [9] Scott, M., Jacob, A., Hendrie, D., Parsons, R., Girdler, S., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2017). Employers' perception of the costs and the benefits of hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorder in open employment in Australia. *Plos One*, 12(5), 1-16.
- [10] Wolfgruber, D., Stürmer, L., & Einwiller, S. (2021). Talking inclusion into being: communication as a facilitator and obstructor of an inclusive work environment. *Personnel Review*. doi:10.1108/PR-01-2021-0013
- [11] Matin, Hassan & Jandaghi, Gholamreza & Karimi, F.H. & Hamidzadeh, A.. (2010). Relationship between Interpersonal Communication Skills and Organizational Commitment (Case Study: Jahad Keshavarzi and University of Qom, Iran). *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 13, 387-398.
- [12] Erozkan, A. (2013). The Effect of Communication Skills and Interpersonal Problem-Solving Skills on Social Self-Efficacy. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 13, 739-745.
- [13] Vercic, A. Vercic, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2012). Internal communication: definition, parameters and the future. *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2), 223–230.
- [14] Garcia, J., Díez, E., Wojcik, D., & Santamaría, M. (2020). Communication Support Needs in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and Its Relation to Quality of Life. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 17, 7370. doi:10.3390/ijerph17207370
- [15] Johansson, C., Miller, V. D., & Hamrin, S. (2014). Conceptualizing communicative leadership – A framework for analysing and developing leaders' communication competence. *Corporate Communication: An International Journal* 19(2), 147-165.
- [16] Kim, E.J., Kim, I., & Kim, M.J. (2020). The Impact of Workplace Disability Facilities on Job Retention Wishes among People with Physical Disabilities in South Korea. *Sustainability*, 12, 2-13.
- [17] Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2014). Developing internal crisis communication: New roles and practices of communication professionals. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 19(2), 128-146.

- [18] Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2011). Putting coworkers in the limelight: New challenges for communication professionals. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5 (4), 201-220.
- [19] Johansen, W., Aggerholm, H. K., & Frandsen, F. (2012). Entering new territory: A study of internal crisis management and crisis communication in organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 270–279
- [20] Erickson, W. A., von Schrader, S., Bruyère, S. M., & VanLooy, S. A. (2014). The employment environment: employer perspectives, policies, and practices regarding the employment of persons with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 57(4), 195–208.
- [21] Hemphill, E., & Kulik, C. T. (2016). Which employers offer hope for mainstream job opportunities for disabled people? *Social Policy and Society*, 15(4), 537–554.
- [22] Dudas, T. L. (2013). A Comunicação Alternativa como potencializadora da inclusão social? In Passerino, L. M; Bez, M. R.; Cypriano, A. C. & Peres, P. A. *Comunicar para Incluir*. Porto Alegre: CRBF. Pp. 83-97.
- [23] Sartika, D., & Devita, A. (2020). Employing people with disabilities: are they competent and performed? *Jurnal Bisnis dan Manajemen*, 21(1), 43-56.
- [24] Barbra, M., & Mutswanga, P. (2014). The Attitudes of Employers and Co-Workers towards the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe. *International Journal on Managerial Studies and Research*, 2(3), 7-19. <https://www.arcjournals.org/ijmsr/volume-2-issue-3/2>.
- [25] Ribeiro, P. (2015). Dificuldades de comunicação entre profissionais com deficiência auditiva e profissionais sem deficiência em um ambiente fabril. *Revista Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales*, 27.