

Features of an Internal Communication Platform for Corporate Employees. Meeting the Needs of Employees in a Hybrid Era

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Abstract. *More and more corporations are adopting a hybrid work style in which employees can work both at the office and at home. The popularity of the hybrid workplace is a result of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and one of the components of the hybrid work mode is the internal organizational communication platform without which the hybrid work mode could not exist. However, internal platforms for corporate online organizational communication are not tailored to the needs of employees. Thus, this study outlines the characteristics that an internal communication platform between employees of a corporation must have to meet their needs. To find out which characteristics are important for the employees of a corporation, adequate data has been collected using a Kano questionnaire distributed online and analysed with the Kano quantitative method. The main result of the research is that the characteristics of the communication platform between employees must focus on meeting their psychological needs (e.g., the need for socialization, for recognition, to be motivated, etc.). The present paper provides a new perspective on how to communicate in organizations, focusing on the psychological needs of corporate employees since in the new hybrid era, meeting these needs with the help of online organizational communication is more important than technical attributes.*

Keywords: hybrid work, online platform, employee needs, corporate communication, internal communication

Introduction

The continuous technological developments are felt in all areas worldwide. Some authors argue that the digitalization of various tasks in the workplace is a result of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis [Sokolic, 2022]. Moreover, in the corporate field, digitalization is an important factor considering the choice of hybrid mode of work by corporations to the detriment of the traditional way of working [Naqshbandi et. al, 2023].

However, Lee [2023] argues that current digital tools used by organizations do not meet the needs of employees. And not adapting technology to employee needs can lead to various mental health problems (e.g., burnout, anxiety, stress) affecting employee performance and motivation [Morris, 2022]. From the wide range of digital tools, this study focuses on the corporate internal communication platform, since it envisages the most used tool in hybrid work.

Prastitasari et al. [2022] explains that employees have problems in the process of adapting the hybrid work mode after "the convenience offered by work from home" and asserts that the

hybrid work mode involves new strategies and employee motivation models to prevent employee fluctuation and guarantee workplace performance.

Since, hybrid work is increasingly preferred by employees, it must develop an adequate platform for internal communication to meet their needs to grow the chances of corporate success because "employees are the most important resource of a company" [Gabčanová, 2011], and internal corporate communication can be the "failure or success of a business" [Jiang et al., 2023].

In line with the presented scholars, the research question for our paper is: which features of an international communication platform meet the needs of employees? And the goals of the research are what needs are important for employees and what is the degree of employee satisfaction when these needs are met.

Both to answer the research question and to outline the objectives of the research, the article contains five parts. The first part is the introduction in which the context of the research is presented, the second part presents the concepts used, the third part describes the applied methodology, and the results are found in the fourth part. The last part of the article gives the conclusion of the study.

Literature review

For an accurate description of the main concepts in this study, specialized literature was consulted. The conceptual definitions for the main terms of interest (hybrid workplace, internal organizational communication platform, employee needs, motivation) were outlined. Also, the characteristics of the internal organizational communication platform found in the Kano questionnaire were extracted from the literature to determine their necessity and importance for the subjects.

Hybrid workplace

Hybrid work mode or hybrid workplace it is defined in the literature as "mixes in-office and remote work to offer flexibility and support to employees" [Babapour et al. 2021]. Several authors [Dubey et al., Weritz et al, 2023] argue that the digitalization of the workplace and the increased popularity of the hybrid mode of work is due to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis that brought major changes in the business field, but also on the relationship between employees.

According to the literature, the hybrid mode of work is preferred by employees due to the flexibility of the work schedule. Moreover, hybrid workplace allows employees to have a better balance between personal life and work. Also, it diminishes the importance of the place where the employee works because "technologies allow work to be done anytime, anyplace, anywhere [Halford, 2005]. According to Gratton [2021], the main elements of hybrid work are time, place, and task. Thus, if the traditional way of working imposes a space and time determined for the fulfilment of tasks, the hybrid mode of work requires only the fulfilment of the tasks at the workplace without counting the time interval or the place where they were performed. Also, the hybrid mode of work is based, mostly on internal communication platforms between employees through which they have access to an uninterrupted and continuous communication mode.

Internal Organizational Communication Platform

Internal organizational communication is described as "managing interdependence and building mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its employees while internal virtual organizational communication is defined as "the process of incorporating new digital technologies into organizational communication" [Chewing et al., 2013]. It has also been demonstrated that international organizational communication influences the motivation of employees and

understanding between them. To communicate effectively in a corporation, most companies have certain platforms to ensure employee networking even remotely [Moncarz, 1997].

The virtual communication platform must be useful to employees, focusing on meeting their needs. Moncarz defines the platform useful to employees as “is not just a piece of software nor just a tool; it is a methodology and a unified system. An Effective Communication Platform integrates a number of presentation resources into a single entity” [1997]. Also, the internal communication platform must have the following fixed characteristics: a lifetime and a life cycle that is dependent on the project needs, value added must be greater than the cost of development, includes the presenter, can only be as good as the information used to design it, a permanent platform production director coordinates organizational resources to pull the pieces together. In addition to the fixed characteristics of an organizational communication platform, it can have countless context-varying characteristics to meet the needs of employees that they consider important. [Moncarz, 1997]

Table 1 presents the literature characteristics for a well-designed internal communication platform. Thus, the terms that are described in column one represents the items in the Kano questionnaire, meaning those elements of the internal communication platform about which we want to find out the opinion of the subjects.

Table 1. Characteristics of an organizational communication platform

Elements	Definition	Author
1.Dictionary of the terms used in the workplace	“The dictionary should be concise and clear, and the use and operation are convenient and easy to understand”	Fayard et. al (2021)
2.Information about the employee (number of days off, number of hours overtime, bonuses)	the employee must have quick access to all the details about the activity he performs	Zaumane et al. (2023)
3.Search function	quick search allows reduction of working time	Zaumane et al. (2023)
4.Frequently asked questions and answers about how to use the platform	information about all platform functionalities	Fayard et. al (2021)
5.Alerts about work (deadlines, important projects, teambuilding)	constant reminder of the priorities in the tasks that he has to do	Fayard et. al (2021)
6.Recordings of meetings	if he could not attend the meeting or does not remember certain details	Ellis et al. (2022)
7.Templates for documents	all models of documents that employees work with are available on the platform	Ellis et al. (2022)
8.The maximum duration of the sessions supported by the platform is 3 hours	limiting meetings to a certain number of hours to avoid overwork of employees	Ellis et al. (2022)
9.The platform is adapted to people with disabilities	sustainable platform for people with disabilities	Fayard et. al (2021)
10.Login with telephone number	possibility of editing	Fayard et. al (2021)
11.Remove sounds/images	possibility to use the phone number to log in	Fayard et. al (2021)
12. Feedback	possibility to access all received feedback	Fayard et. al (2021)
13.Live poll for voting for team activities (sessions, projects presentation, teambuilding, various social activities)	real-time voting of the various activities in which the employee is involved	Fayard et. al (2021)
14. Gamification	a system through which employees receive different points for the tasks performed	Torres et al. (2024)

15. Information about cyber security	tips on how to protect your account	Fayard et. al (2021)
16. Colour code	each task that must accomplish to match a color according to the time allocated. (green-1h, yellow-1-3h, red - over 3 hours)	Fayard et. al (2021)
17. Delogation	after not using the platform for more than 30 minutes, the user will be logged out	Fayard et. al (2021)
18. Data about colleagues	hobby, graduate faculty, experience in the labour market	Fayard et. al (2021)
19. Place for virtual breaks	a virtual place where employees can take a break to socialize	Fayard et. al (2021)
20. Information and advice for mental health	notifications about mental health such as meditation practice, contact with a psychologist	Fayard et. al (2021)

Source: Authors own research.

Employee needs and motivation

According to scientific literature, motivation is the impulse to participate or not to participate in certain activities. Also, motivation is the employees' desire to work representing the foundation of their actions [Nguyen 2017]. A study by Zuckerman et al. [2020] shows that motivation based on the person's psychological and intrinsic needs has a higher success rate than motivation based on material benefits.

According to Diener et al. [2017], among the most popular motivational theories is self-determination theory (STD). This theory aims to prevent mental health problems by focusing on employee motivation and outlining the reasons why people invest time and effort in activities.

Self-determination theory postulates that all people have three primary psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the need for control, competence refers to how prepared the person is for certain activities and relatedness refers to the social framework of the person.

Thus, the importance of meeting the psychological needs of employees in the workplace is a determinable factor for the proper functioning of a corporation. Also, as the results of the current study show, the subjects gave more importance to the characteristics of the internal platform that refer to the need for relatedness as described by the self-determination theory.

Methodology

Research design and sample size

The methodological steps undertaken can be seen in Figure 1. To answer the research questions, a Kano questionnaire was conducted containing 43 questions, the first three questions refer to general data about subjects (age, field of activity and seniority on the labour market). The other 40 questions refer to the proposed features of the online communication platform. For each characteristic two questions (a functional question and a dysfunctional question) have been addressed, according to the example in Table 2. The questionnaire was distributed online using the Google platform (Google Forms). The number of respondents to the questionnaire is 72. All subjects meet the following characteristics: their age is between 23-40 years; they work in the corporate field and have a seniority in work of at least 3 years.

The subjects were chosen only from a certain area (town of Timisoara) because this study is part of the doctoral work of the first author. Thus, all subjects who answered the Kano questionnaire will be part of future research in which we will need them to be physically present.

Also, the minimum three years' experience on the labour market is required to ensure that subjects are familiar with the effects of the pandemic crisis in the workplace.

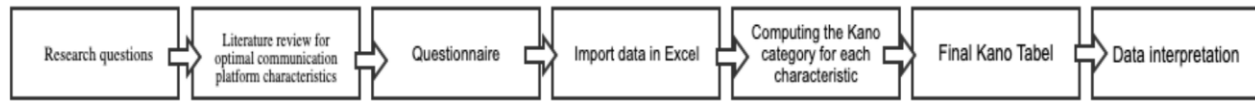


Figure 1. Methodological steps of the present research

Source: Authors own research.

Data collection

The data collection took place during January 2024. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire was 15 minutes. For data processing, questionnaire responses were imported in an Excel sheet for a better visualization of subjects' responses. The first three general questions about the subjects (age, field of activity and seniority on the labor market) are necessary to assess whether the subjects fit into the characteristics required for the current research. Thus, for data processing, only the responses of the subjects with the following specificities have been taken into account: they have a minimum age of 23 years, they work in the corporate field and have an experience in work of at least 3 years. The following 40 questions refer to the characteristics of the internal online communication platform. The characteristics used in the questionnaire have been taken from Table 1. Thus, for each question, two questions were formulated (a functional question and a dysfunctional question) according to Table 2.

Tabel 2. Exemple for functional and dysfunctional question

Functional form of the question	I like it that way	It must be that way	I am neutral	I can live with that	I dislike it that way
1 a. How does it feel if the platform contains a dictionary with explanatory terms used in the workplace?					
Dysfunctional form of the question					
1 b. How does it feel if the platform does not contain a dictionary with explanatory terms used in the workplace?					

Source: Authors own research.

Data analysis

The Kano analysis method was created by Noriaki Kano in 1989 and is used to determine both customer needs and how the presence or absence of a feature on a product is determine customer satisfaction [Witell et. al, 2013]. Also, with the help of the Kano method we find out which feature of a product or service determines user satisfaction or delight, and "brings added value in the production stage of the product" [Gupta et al., 2011].

Following the data collection, the analysis of the results is carried out. In the data analysis process, the specialist evaluates the answers given in the questionnaire for each customer's requirement taking into account both the functional part and the dysfunctional part. The functional part refers to the affirmative questions, and the dysfunctional part to the negative questions. The subject must respond "how it feels if..." the internal communication platform contains a certain feature and if the internal organizational communication platform does not contain that feature [Witell et al., 2013].

The Kano analysis has been done using the Kano evaluation tabel (Tabel 3). Thus, if the subject answers the functional question with "I like it", and the dysfunctional question the subject answers with "it should be that way", the Kano category for the answer is A. The analysis of the answers for each part (both functional and dysfunctional) is done simultaneously [Witell et al. 2013].

Tabel 3. The Kano evaluation model

Quality attribute		Dysfunctional				
Functional		Like	Expect	Neutral	Accept	Dislike
	Like	Q	A	A	A	O
	Expect	R	I	I	I	M
	Neutral	R	I	I	I	M
	Accept	R	I	I	I	M
	Dislike	R	R	R	R	Q

Source: Authors own research.

According to Figure 3, there are six possible Kano categories for each characteristic: A-attractive quality attributes, M-must be quality attributes, O-one dimensional quality attributes, I-indifferent quality attributes, R-reserve quality attributes and Q- questionable quality attributes. According to Kano, attractive quality attributes are those that generate a high level of satisfaction if they exist, but their absence does not decrease user satisfaction. Must be quality attributes represents the basic characteristics that the client does not think about because it assumes that they exist, and the absence of these characteristics increases his or her dissatisfaction. One-dimensional quality attributes are the characteristics that the client expects to find, and the more they are performing, the higher the degree of customer satisfaction. Thus, the level of satisfaction is directly proportional to the performance of the feature. Also, indifferent quality attributes represent a certain quality that has no effect on customer satisfaction whether the quality is present or not. The reverse quality attributes represent the characteristics whose absence is desired by consumers. The questionable results exist due "misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the answers on the survey, also it might be due crossing the wrong answers" [Sauerwein et al, 1996].

A	M	O	I	R	Q
Attractive quality attributes	Must be quality attributes	One dimensional quality attributes	Indifferent quality attributes	Reserve quality attributes	Questionable results

Figure 2. The Kano categories

Source: Authors own research.

Following the analysis of the responses of each feature, a predominant category has been assigned according to Table 4. Thus, in the A- attractive category there are the following characteristics: personal information, alerts about work, the possibility of logging in with the phone number, access to all the feedback, gamification system and place for virtual break. In the O – one-dimensional category we encounter features like: search function, frequently asked questions and answers about how to use the platform, templates for documents, the maximum duration of the sessions held on the platform to be three hours, adapted to people with disabilities, possibility to remove sounds or images, live poll for voting team activities, colour code for each task and informations about mental health. Only two categories have been assessed as indifferent: the

registration of meetings and the presence of information about colleagues. The characteristic number 17 is R-reverse, meaning that the respondents do not want the inactivity on the platform for more than 30 minutes to log them out of the the platform. Also, in the case of characteristics that have the same value in two or more letters, the rule is: "M>O>A>I" [Sauerwein et al, 1996].

Table 4. Results of the analysis

Elements	A	M	O	R	Q	I	Total	Kano
1.Dictionary of the terms used in the workplace	35	8	10	-	-	20	73	A
2.Information about the employee (number of days off, number of hours overtime, bonuses)	24	7	11	9	2	20	73	A
3.Search function	23	6	23	3	1	17	73	O
4.Frequently asked questions and answers about how to use the platform	20	10	24	1	-	25	73	I
5.Alerts about work (deadlines, important projects, teambuilding)	32	4	11	1	-	25		A
6.Recordings of meetings	22	3	10	5	-	33		I
7.Templates for documents	17	4	30	-	-	22		O
8.The maximum duration of the sessions supported by the platform is 3 hours	20	4	24	8	-	16		O
9.The platform is adapted to people with disabilities	14	5	37	-	-	17		O
10.Login with telephone number	25	3	16	5	-	24	73	A
11.Remove sounds/images	19	7	23	-	-	21	73	O
12. Feedback	29	4	28	-	-	17	73	A
13.Live poll for voting for team activities (sessions, projects presentation, teambuilding, various social activities)	26	4	28	2	-	13	73	O
14. Gamification	32	2	23	2	-	14	73	A
15. Information about cyber security	15	9	23	-	-	26	73	I
16. Colour code	18	3	24	3	3	22	73	O
17. Delogation	7	-	4	42	-	20	73	R
18. Data about colleagues	16	-	7	20	-	30	73	I
19. Place for virtual breaks	29	1	13	8	-	22	73	A
20. Information and advice for mental health	13	2	28	8	-	22	73	O

Results and discussions

Mental health is an important factor in employee motivation. Hon argues that performance in the workplace is directly proportional to meeting the psychological needs of employees [2012]. Given that corporate employees face burnout [Liu et. al, 2023], transmissible [Kensbock, 2022] anxiety and a tsunami of fear [Jiang et al, 2023] meeting the psychological needs of employees is a must.

Thus, according to Table 4, the subjects expect that the international organizational communication platform to have those characteristics that ease their daily work. The platform is expected to have a search function, and its improvement adds value to the communication platform. They also expect to have information about mental health in the workplace and improving the quality of information adds value to the product. Both the limitation of the duration of a meeting by the platform and the presence of live votes for different activities are expected and can be improved.

User satisfaction will be increased if those features that ease their work (search function, document model) are improved and allow them to save time (the maximum duration of a meeting

is three hours), working more efficiently. In the category of attractive attributes are those characteristics that attract users, but their absence does not affect customer satisfaction are both functions that allow teamwork or digital socialization. These features have in common the "team spirit" of a corporation that can increase customer satisfaction but do not have the same impact as the features of one-dimensional attributes. Moreover, classification of characteristics into attractive but not essential to increase employee satisfaction, it outlines a possible problem of organizational culture because fulfilling the need for autonomy is greater than meeting the needs of kinship. Although some authors [Gratton, 2021] claim that technology brings many benefits in the business environment such as: decrease in costs with human resources, speed of communication and convenience of people, these can be challenges for human resource management because the unity between employees can be lost.

Also, according to Figure 3, the characteristics that improve individual work and provide a predictability of the time they need to allocate to the attributions must exist and their performance has been improved to increase client satisfaction. Both autonomy (individual work) and efficiency in the workplace represent the psychological needs of employees. Corporate employees offer greater importance to psychological needs that are related to their own capabilities than to psychological needs that provide "relatedness" with work colleagues.

We believe that the importance of meeting psychological needs that refer to autonomy especially to the mental health of the subjects is a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic because some authors [Weritz et al., 2022], [Sokolic, 2022] argue that the effects of the pandemic crisis will be felt in the business environment for a long period of time. More than that, awareness of the importance of mental health in the workplace by subjects outlines that corporate management must focus in the new digital age on creating a work environment that blurs the negative effects felt at a psychic level by employees.

Conclusion

Following the study, two major conclusions are drawn. The first conclusion is that the most important characteristics of an internal organizational communication platform for subjects are those that meet the psychological needs of autonomy and competence. The tendency of the subjects is self-preservation and awareness on the importance of mental health in the workplace. As we have shown in a previous study, mental health plays an important role in motivating employees. Thus, the integration of some features on an internal communication platform that can bring both satisfaction and the sense of understanding from the corporate management regarding the psychological needs of the employees is necessary.

The second conclusion is that organizational culture can meet certain challenges if employee satisfaction increases in relation to the characteristics that provide autonomy, but it does not decrease if the characteristics that make virtual socialization possible are missing.

According to this study, the characteristics that ensure, but also increase user satisfaction once they are improved are part of the psychological needs of autonomy and competence. We believe these results provide a new vision of corporate employee needs in the digital age because they shape the direction of action to ensure that corporate employees are motivated in the workplace through a digital platform. The novelty of the study is its approach. We have not found in the specialized literature research that considers both the fulfilment of the needs of employees in corporations and their identification. More the research also provides a starting point for the future study in which we aim to design an internal organizational communication platform that

meets these characteristics. The limitation of the study is represented by the origin of the subjects only from a certain area of the country.

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