

## Editorial (Sound or Silence? Current Developments in Organizational Communication)

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# Imprint

Sound or Silence? Current Developments in Organizational  
Communication

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## **Editorial**

Miriam Ehrlinspiel, Simona Gulich, Valentin Leißner, Annika Müller,  
Antonia RÜth, Moritz Sauer and Alexander Godulla

In the digital age, where information travels at an unprecedented speed, communication is important as ever in the business world. With effective communication, organizations can gain a competitive advantage by using multiple channels to shape narratives, build a preferable reputation, and demonstrate corporate responsibility. The framework for organizational communication is generally well established, but in a constantly changing world, strategic communication must also evolve to be effective. This book looks at organizational communication in a variety of contexts, all related to current developments in our modern world. To cover a wide range of relevant topics, the chapters provide insights into situations that require different communication strategies and methods with varying urgency and priority.

In some cases, the need to communicate may be based on policies and laws that organizations must follow to avoid serious legal consequences. In other cases, the need to communicate can be less regulated, but based on the demands of stakeholders and the public to be transparent, to speak out, and to take positions on current issues. Failure to communicate in critical situations could be fatal for an organization. Situations in which the pressure to communicate eases and organizations have room for maneuver in their communication efforts, provide an opportunity to reallocate resources to less urgent concerns. An example of this is the exploratory testing of new communication tools, which can help to identify and implement innovative ways of communicating and conveying information.

Effective communication management is undoubtedly a crucial factor for a company's success. However, in today's fast-paced business world, where information is abundant and technology enables constant accessibility, organizations often tend to get stuck in a continuous stream

of communication. Integrating a purposeful interruption of communication into the business strategy not only presents an opportunity for a more profound understanding of stakeholders but also carries the potential to enhance efficiency, both internally and externally. The relevance of a communication break becomes particularly clear when considering the dynamics between organizations and stakeholders. Often, organizations tend to spread their messages in profusion without creating the space for genuine dialogue. Strategically interrupting this unilateral communication stream allows for a deliberate shift in focus, redirecting attention from the company's standpoint to the needs and expectations of stakeholders. In a time where transparency, authenticity and social responsibility are increasingly seen as cornerstones of corporate success, it is essential not only to know the needs of target groups, but also to take them seriously. A break from messaging provides an opportunity to pay attention not only to the obvious concerns, but also to more subtle signals and trends that may be crucial for the company's long-term prosperity.

Rather than solely concentrating on the external propagation of information, the second part of this collection revolves around the deliberate act of not communicating. This not only facilitates the transmission of more impactful messages but also fosters understanding and trust among all pertinent stakeholders. Coupled with the refinement of active communication strategies, this approach can culminate in a sustained competitive advantage for companies.

While the subjects covered in this book are quite varied and diverse, they can be categorized into two distinct yet closely interrelated blocks. Following the theme of *Sound or Silence*, we will initially delve into the avenues of communication within and by companies and subsequently emphasize the until now hardly considered potential of strategic silence.

## **The Art of Strategic Sound**

The first chapter is dedicated to a topic that requires active communication, since the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the EU Commission presents a new challenge for companies in Germany and their sustainability communication. Starting from the fiscal year 2024, large companies are obligated, ahead of others, to disclose their sustainability information in accordance with the new EU directive. In their qualitative study, the authors Melissa Birkmann, Judith Funke, Julia Gulbin, Lisa-Marie Meyer, Moritz Sauer and Lara Wegmann raise the question of the extent to which the new EU directive influences the sustainability communication of large companies in Germany. Their research thus provides early insights into the expectations of communicators from both companies already reporting and future reporting large companies regarding the CSRD. Furthermore, the perspective of external service providers on the issue is also considered. Finally, the chapter identifies three main opportunities and risks that the CSRD poses for sustainability communication.

The following chapter then deals with geopolitical crises, in which it is necessary for organizations to position themselves. The authors Anja Carstens, Enrico Gerhart, Vanessa Huster, Karolin Kelm and Julian Schick investigate the decision-making basis on which German companies developed their positioning in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war. In light of organizational advocacy and issue management, their study also includes insights for future communicative measures. First, the process of the positioning of a company on the meso-level is examined with the help of 11 qualitative guided interviews with communicators from 11 different affected industries. The results shed light on the concrete procedures of the interviewed companies. Furthermore, the external and internal factors that play a role in the conception of the public statements published by companies are discussed. Finally, the study is rounded off with implications on how to manage future crises that could have an impact on a company's public statement as well as considerations for

further research regarding the changing demands on communicators and the associated understanding of the role of PR practitioners in crisis situations.

In the paper by Simona Gulich, Tammo Heinemann, Emma Starke, Franziska Wehr and Leonie Weiß, the focus is on communication that is rather voluntarily initiated. The authors aim to assess the impact of internal sustainability communication on the Corporate Culture of sustainable enterprises due to the growing significance of sustainability in contemporary society and its parallel relevance within companies. Departing from the conventional emphasis on external sustainability communication, their study seeks to shift the perspective inwards. The primary research question centers around the potential of internal sustainability communication, with three subordinate questions dedicated to exploring its goals, measures, and effects concerning Corporate Culture. To address these inquiries, the researchers conducted 15 qualitative expert interviews, selecting participants based on an existing ranking of the 200 most sustainable companies in Germany.

The first thematic section of this book closes with a chapter on immersive media and its strategic use. While immersive technologies are not a new phenomenon, the strategic use of immersive media in the third sector is still largely unexplored in research. In a qualitative study, Kim Brückner, Miriam Ehrlinspiel, Sina Huneke and Marie Henny Prien explore the extent to which NGOs in Germany use immersive media as part of their strategic communication. The paper provides new insights into the current state of immersive applications in the third sector. While there is a general openness towards the use of innovative ways to communicate with stakeholders in the NGO field by providing new communication opportunities, the results also shed light on the challenges NGOs are confronted with when it comes to new forms and technologies within the multimedia landscape. Based on the findings, the authors provide an outlook and implications for communication professionals in the third sector.

## **The Power of Silence**

Exploring the shift from communicating through sending messages to a focus of listening, Valentin Hausmann, Amelie Heinz, Mirjam Hörl, Antonia Rüth and Meike Schröder investigate the extent and methods of Corporate Listening employed by German medium-sized companies. The work focuses on the organizational prerequisites and measures for Corporate Listening, as well as the rationale for implementing such practices and the impact obtained through Corporate Listening within organizations. To achieve this goal, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with communication managers from eleven medium-sized companies. Macnamara's Architecture of Listening and the Communication Value Circle serve as the primary theoretical basis for this study.

Finally, this work concludes with a paper by Emily Korsch, Valentin Leißner, Annika Müller, Sophie Sieghardt and Elena Weiß that explores the role of strategic communication pauses in the internal corporate communication of large German companies. Since the escalating influx of emails, messages, and meetings within the internal communication is steadily increasing, driven in part by the impacts of digital transformation, a deliberate interruption of communication flows within a company is becoming increasingly important. Utilizing a qualitative research framework and conducting semi-structured interviews with communication managers, the study gains insights into the adoption and motives behind communication pauses. Furthermore, the term 'communication pause' is introduced and defined for the first time within the study, accompanied by practical recommendations for its effective integration into the internal communication strategies of companies.