Processes of building trust in organizations: internal communication, management, and recruiting

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ABSTRACT

The article explores ways to build trust in a very specific area of internal and external communication: recruitment. At first it explores the links that communication and vulnerability have with the sciences that study the human dimension of organizations. Second, it addresses the functional and personal dimension of processes in relation to the forces of order or dispersion that press every organization on a personal or structural level (centripetal and centrifugal force). Trust presents itself as the ring that unites and harmonizes the creative or destructive power of those forces. It is an essential element that makes it possible to manage the vulnerability of organizations and their limitations on an organizational or human level. The hypothesis being made is that recruitment is an essential element of internal and external communication and has a strategic importance for the future of the organization because the mobility of the labor market, contractual conditions, and reduced turnover times require creating an environment of trust and transparency in a short time. This begins with the selection process and develops throughout the future professional projection of workers within the company.

1. Trust and vulnerability in organizations

In recent years, technology has improved companies’ ability to involve employees in their work, to increase the quality of relationships, to interact within the organization, and to be in constant contact with customers; but, this does not mean that internal communication processes are necessarily improved or that employees are more satisfied. In fact, employees are changing jobs and organizations more and more frequently, depending on their needs (Tan and Kramer 2012, 87).

Several scientific disciplines have tried to study the human dimension of organizations, particularly companies, in recent decades through various perspectives. This has been done through looking at organizational behavior—meaning the impact that...
individuals, groups, or structures have on the overall behavior of the organization (Langton, Robbins, and Judge 2018, 2)—and organizational communication, understood as an open system where a balance of relationships is created between communication and power so that individuals can achieve collective goals (Wrench, Lynn Majocha, and Carter 2015, 65). The subject of psychology regarding people in organizations has also been explored. This focuses on the employee and the relationship between his expectations and those of the institution, all from a psychological point of view (Goldstein et al. 2017, 4). The sociology of organizations has studied the organization as a small company (Adler et al. 2014, 7) and—in the field of human resource studies—focuses on people as resources to find the most effective way to develop their potential at the service of the company (Trost 2020, 15–23).

From a broader perspective, corporate communications (Belasen and Belasen 2019, 367–70) and public relations have developed an overall communicative vision that should consistently manage internal communication as a part of corporate communication, namely the part that addresses internal publics—employees (Burton 2017, 55). External institutional communication is intrinsically linked to internal institutional communication because a large part of the communication of each organization is carried out by employees through the relationships they develop with other public groups and through their behavior. This explains the link between companies’ Corporate Social Responsibility and their communication with internal audiences (Bednárík 2019, 48–49).

This study starts from the premises of the research mentioned above, which argue that well-managed corporate communication generates trust with different stakeholders and that trust limits the present and future vulnerability of organizations. In the current context (digital as well as physical) the hypothesis of this study is that if recruiting activities are the first contact a company might have with a specific group of people, then communication becomes a strategic (not only functional) tool that the hiring process involves in order to generate trust. It occurs at the beginning of a possible professional relationship even when the people involved in the process are not yet chosen. Following this path, it is necessary to move away from the idea that communication is strictly important within organizations, and move toward the analysis of the links between trust, vulnerability, the human dimension of the company, technology, management, and recruiting.

The development of technology has generated a more volatile dimension of relationships and products and has advanced strong business changes in a short window of time. This article aims to study the relationship and feed-back processes between the trust created by the organization’s culture and internal communication, which is developed through specific relational processes and work management mechanisms (Martilla 2019, 22–23). It is a matter of looking for some parameters to achieve a balance that allows for addressing the vulnerability of organizations without diminishing the trust it deserves in the long term, beginning with recruitment.

The concept of trust has been the key to understanding the social dimension of mankind. Many philosophers and sociologists link it to the possibility of regenerating current society, both through the role of local communities and through communal deliberation (Taylor, Nanz, and Taylor 2020, 25–28) and also through generalized
reciprocity and honesty that creates what Putnam calls "social trust"—or trust in other citizens—and, therefore, social capital (Putnam 2001, 354, 348–387). With statistical data on the evolution of society, Putnam states that people who, from the beginning, trust more than others are able to do more for society in an altruistic way. Other authors have tried to relate philosophical and sociological aspects of Aristotelian roots, with the ability to generate trust in organizations (Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995, 719–720), or have come to propose some models of trust that can give a more human sense to organizations (Guillén Parra, Lleó de Nalda, and Santiago Marco Perles 2011a, 605–614).

The different definitions of trust that have followed one another over the years have a number of concepts in common, according to a study by Alston and Mayer. They are values linked to the presence of trust but they are not able to reach its full meaning because trust is an outcome—an intangible asset that is the result of the interaction of many factors, which can be seen whether or not it is there. It cannot be articulated as a simple result of a mechanical process because there are many personal values involved—many intangible values—which have a great impact, even in contexts where digital processes and technology drive business relationships (Alston 2014, 4, 10–13; Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman 1995, 718). Several authors (Colledge, Morgan, and Tench 2014, 482–483) agree that trust is linked to relationships and that trust can grow or decline in an organization, a role, or a person. Trust implies uncertainty; it is built through specific activities that are shared regardless of whether the outcome of the activity is satisfactory or not. Trust may be mutual between two people, but at times it could be one-sided. It also implies a present judgment about the past that may allow one person to trust another or an institution in the near future. Trust, as an essential element in organizations, is communicated indirectly through competence, integrity, ways of managing personal interaction, and the culture generated by a management style (Kodish 2017, 363).

Ultimately, following the previous scheme, trust seems to be the link that allows the mutual ability to adapt between each worker and the organization: the organization tries to create a context in which the staff can individually develop their creativity because they need the ideas and the contribution of the employees. In the same way, the employees, through the trust generated by the institution, adapt their behavior to the culture and the corporate approach of the organization (La Porte 2003, 132–134). This trust, which becomes the link of union and development of workers and, therefore, of the organization, is threatened by the limits that each institution has—by its intrinsic vulnerability.

Vulnerability management is very much about trust and is defined as the cyclical practice of identifying, classifying, remedying, and mitigating risks arising from the structural or human limitations of the organization (Foreman 2010, 1–9). The way the organization’s natural or artificial vulnerability is managed generates greater or lesser confidence in employees. Companies try to understand future risks by studying their own vulnerability and manage to arrive at a possible typology that can generate early solutions or avoid harmful future scenarios (Sheffi 2015, 27); however, the vulnerability of an organization is not necessarily linked to unexpected extreme situations but also to the common way in which it deals with limitations. A journalistic company or oil
company, food producer or automotive company has a different vulnerability and risk depending on the specific nature of its business. The volatility generated by certain technological processes can increase the risk in organizations with a high digital environment (Husdal 2010, 1–27). The authors mentioned, therefore, express the characteristics of the link between communication, trust, and vulnerability.

2. The human dimension and processes

Taking the aforementioned ideas to the next step, it can be affirmed that the creation of internal communication processes and the development of corporate listening attitudes can ensure harmony in the management of vulnerability (Gode 2019, 385). Employees would feel less affected by vulnerability if there is a balanced way of regularly managing it. That would help to keep the trust that maintains the mutual organization-personal adaptation.

On the one hand, La Porte states, in a study on non-profit organizations, that the processes generate in people a perception of temporal stability, a perception of security—a solid working structure—and therefore generate trust. In fact, it is not easy to see the vulnerability behind processes unless there are problems that highlight their vulnerabilities or show their ineffectiveness. But there is one aspect that is not entirely positive: as they develop, processes may create a false sense of security and lose the necessary flexibility with which workers have to deal with problems (La Porte 2003, 80–85, 158). There is a need for flexibility that guarantees a development in the growth of the organization in an open operating system, together with the social context in which it carries out its business. If the organization is too focused on the processes, it could lose the characteristics of an open system, which allows it to adapt to consumers—to the needs of the cultural context. This then allows it to change and evolve and helps workers to grow with the institution. It is important to consider that the human dimension implies a risk—a vulnerability—but we sometimes forget that organizations are made up of people and cater to customers or consumers, who are also people. The structure tries to coordinate talents and efforts, ensuring that the fallible capacity of individuals is counterbalanced by the collective support of the judgment and work of other employees, that is, by the company as a whole. The balance between managerial security as a system and the limitation and size of the individual requires the creation of criteria that generate harmony.

On the other hand, when the human dimension of leadership does not take vulnerability into account, it could create processes that provide security but are too tied to the personal dimension of the leader—a leader who grows, who changes, who eventually brings into the fold another leader, in an organization that evolves and changes. The leader’s total trust should be extended to the organization and the organization should extend this same trust to the leader, striking a balance. It can be seen that in many contexts an employee’s trust is in the leader but not in the organization, or there might be a great trust in the organization but not in the immediate superior that represents it. When the trust is well rooted and in line with the mission and values, the employee is able to forgive the organization or its leaders for collective or personal mistakes that may show vulnerability (Gillespie, Dietz, and Lockey 2014, 374).
Therefore, trust is not only deeply linked to vulnerability (and risk, as we said before) but also to the processes that uphold the organization over time: there are business processes—also communicative ones (O’Neil 2008, 264)—that provide a sense of security, transparency, and an important impetus for a given organization during a certain period of time. However, once the people who created the processes are gone, there is a danger that the processes will lose the human dimension and become purely functional, rigid paths that have lost contact with reality (Méndez et al. 2012, 16). This could determine the future failure of the organization, when the economic, social, and cultural conditions have changed. In the temporal development of an institution, initial creativity (vulnerability linked to the conceptual character of ideas), needs security and concreteness that are consolidated with the actual organization of work and the creation of processes that allow for the development and carrying out, in a concrete way, those initial ideas.

Vulnerability, therefore, is not only linked to the human dimension of organizations, but also to the organizations themselves because after all they are a human creation—a human extension of the "economic" dimension of people (Lämsä and Pučetaite 2006, 131). Vulnerability is not only linked to creativity but also to the processes of idea development, because it is one thing to generate new ideas and another to carry them out. Creativity has to do with the vital principle of the organization, with the human dimension—its soul, in a certain sense; development processes have to do with the organizational structure—with the way of uniting efforts and making different people’s creativity interact, because in organizations, the added value that is offered does not derive only from the sum of the talents of those who compose them, but from the interaction of different talents, in certain physical and temporal circumstances, an interaction that is favored by the culture of the organization, by the internal communication process, by many various elements that are difficult to list all together.

This is why the functional dimension in organizations should be at the service of the human dimension, and the human dimension at the service of achieving the mission, through the practical functional dimension. A lack of balance and harmony between the two aspects could damage the circle of trust and thus lead the organization to a lack of creativity or a practical functional impossibility. If the business processes created to ensure productivity are not integrated with a human dimension, they could damage the creative capacity—the ability to take risks and find alternative solutions or new paths of organizational growth. The evident formal trust that comes about in a process must take the human dimension into account.

Before thinking about the processes that can generate trust, it is perhaps important to stress that every organization is subject to a centrifugal force and a centripetal force, both linked to trust—to survival over time. The external context in which companies operate and technology with its many possibilities push the organization outwards, towards dispersion. These are phenomena linked to the complexity and forces of organization-disorganization (Broekstra 2014, 6). It is a force that leads people to discover new possibilities and leads the company into the future. This centripetal force corresponds, so to speak, with a centrifugal force that pushes towards structure, towards order and the creation of control processes, towards the achievement of objectives, and towards management.
In this sense, employees are involved in both forces. People who are closer to the reality in which the company operates, who work at lower levels of the hierarchy, or who have a greater creative capacity, tend to disperse and lack coordination of activities that make effective processes possible. On the contrary, people who have a more formal disposition or who are higher in the hierarchy, or who are further from the reality of the context in which the organization operates, tend to control, create structures, and manage processes. Sometimes these two forces take place within each worker.

These elements allow us to affirm that trust is part of the culture that is created within the organization and that it must be strengthened and managed in both a personal and functional way. In order to relate the human side of the organizations with management and trust, it seems appropriate to find some key aspects to generate trust and sharing with the values of the organization.

3. Management processes that generate trust

We have previously seen some elements of trust from a philosophical point of view applied to organizations. After having seen the human side of the processes, it may be interesting to go deeper into the way management generates trust through processes within the company. Luhmann’s sociological perspective frames trust as an attitude that allows individuals to make decisions that involve risks. It is therefore linked to the ability to discern between different alternatives and act accordingly, even though the possible damage may be greater than the advantage one hopes to have. It is important to stress that, according to this approach, trust is an element that can strongly influence the ability to act and the degree of participation of individuals, who are called upon to assess the risks arising from their actions, according to their expectations (Luhmann 1989, 127–134). Other authors understand the act of trust as a combination of belief in the reliability of individuals and their own preferences, including risk aversion, reciprocity, and altruism (Sapienza, Toldra, and Zingales 2007, 3). Hence, the issue of trust becomes central in considering the collective action of people working within the same professional context because they contribute to socially build organizational security, understood as the result of joint action, carried out by individuals, technologies, discursive practices, norms, and knowledge (Bruni 2010, 17).

However, in order to grasp the way in which the process of identifying personnel with the organization is constructed, it is necessary to start from the concept of organizational identity, which coincides with what is important, distinctive, and lasting in an organization, and which, in a relationship of exchange, influences individual behavior and depends on it. Identification can therefore be interpreted as the sense of belonging that binds together, in a relationship of trust, individuals and the organization, performing a function of recognition internally, and of distinction towards the outside world (Mazzei 2006, 12). From this point of view, trust represents the social glue, i.e. the nucleus around which different organizational behaviors are structured, including commitment, collaboration aimed at achieving results, and involvement of employees, through a process that involves the entire organization, significantly affecting personal interactions, expectations, values, rules, identity, roles, reputation, and more generally, the employees’ perception of the organization (Puusa and Tolvanen 2006, 31). In other
words, identification based on a relationships of trust allows individuals to share a common code, and thus to appreciate, recognize, and make the preferences, choices, and needs of others their own, as well as the values and expectations of the company.

As mentioned above, the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations appear to be the result of the combination of a multiplicity of factors, linked by trust, which relate to individuals and groups (formal or informal) operating within them, and also to the organizational structure itself and the interactions that link these elements. The security and, consequently, the reliability of organizations can be considered as social competencies that find an important constitutive element in the interaction between individuals and organizations: it is in fact the interactions between individuals, within an organized system, which allow the social construction of security (Gherardi, Nicolini, and Odella 1997, 87–95). Therefore, the added value of organizations comes from social and relational capital, i.e. the relationships created by individuals with the surrounding environment, and finds in communication the key to a delicate process of exchange that determines the very behavior of the organization. It is, in fact, through the ability to bring together the various actors involved, to activate them and encourage their participation in business processes, that communication takes on its proper meaning.

In the company context, the flow of communication that generally allows the sharing of opinions, ideas, conventions, and emotions is also enriched by professional information that permeates employees’ work days, allowing coordination and encouraging certain organizational behaviors, which significantly affect their performance and, more generally, those of the company. Working is in fact an activity that requires communication skills and discursive practices, which are a constitutive part of the professional activities and occupational identities of those who participate in the activities (Gherardi and Murgia 2012). This is why it is interesting to observe the mechanisms that favor synergies between the different actors involved in the communication process and that determine organizational behavior, influencing the levels of effectiveness, efficiency and productivity—and therefore also organizational security. In order to combine these factors, managers should have a broad vision of the communicative dimension of decisions they make.

It is therefore in the companies’ interest to identify, measure, and possibly improve attitudes that facilitate effective communication, a climate of trust, psychological security, employee involvement and commitment to objectives. It is well known that individuals have a better chance of professional growth and personal development in an environment where they can find support and encouragement.

This means that if you want to use [...] the intelligence [of man], the human environment (superiors, colleagues), the material environment (machines, equipment, offices, departments) as well as the organizational environment, they must be functional for man and not vice versa. [...] He no longer merely produces and earns money, but must be rewarded by work. (Eördegh and Spairani 1996, 16)

Effective modes of communication, which tend to successfully establish and maintain relationships with the surrounding environment, must take into account the specificities of the players involved, and in particular the biographical elements, personality traits, intellectual abilities, and learning skills—aspects that directly affect
the way individuals work (La Porte 2003, 71). There are also elements linked to the commitment of employees (such as the attribution of greater responsibility and autonomy or salary levels), or linked to their skills and knowledge, as well as to the motivational levers of each one. Saltson points out that work performance is determined by three factors: work environment (information, materials, and tools needed to carry out tasks), motivation to complete tasks, and abilities (skills and methods of execution) (Saltson 2016, 190). Therefore, if we consider a company as a complex system, aimed at transforming the resources possessed into others of higher value, be they material (which belong to the company’s assets) or immaterial (which instead depend on information), it is possible to grasp the central role of communication in producing the second type of resources, i.e. in generating a widespread relationality that binds individuals and the surrounding environment, through the diffusion of knowledge and the building of trust (Mazzei 2006, 7–8).

In agreement with Mazzei, it is possible to propose the following definition of internal communication:

The set of interaction processes aimed at generating the catalyzing resources for the functioning of the company. These resources are the knowledge that feeds work processes and the identification of employees in the goals and values of the organization, which motivates them to introduce knowledge into business processes. (Mazzei 2006, 8)

Communication is a strategic element, considered in the light of the role it plays in the processes of socialization, perception, and representation of reality and organizational culture, which links the company and the stakeholders. As a result, internal communication allows employees to identify with the organizational community they belong to, establishing relationships of trust with the company and with their own colleagues.

In this phase, the focus is on the relational and communicative dynamics connected to the performance of work activities, on the awareness that the professional context shapes the communicative patterns and that these, in turn, shape the professional context (Bruni and Gherardi 2007, 135). The response to the vulnerability of organizations requires a mobilization of both human and technical resources, both of the organizational structure and of the specific work context, in order to share a common culture of security that can develop effective work procedures, of which communication processes are a constitutive component (Gherardi, Nicolini, and Odella 1997, 93).

Building and maintaining trust in one’s own company therefore appears to be an essential step, which can facilitate gaining customers’ and investors’ trust, and should be carried out through a twofold method: communicative and managerial. From a communicative point of view, managers are required to "take care" of their employees through internal communication that is capable of conveying the identity of the company, sharing its values, beliefs, and distinctive skills, so that the corporate population is informed and aware of the conventions and objectives that guide the organization. The communicative practices should be accompanied by another fundamental message that leaders are called upon to spread: coherence in the behaviors implemented. Organizational behavior, whether communicated internally or externally, is unlikely to be truly effective if it is not perceived by the workers as such, or if it is not reflected within their own company perimeter. Building trust means keeping the company’s
beliefs alive and actively managing the values, the reasons why the company operates, and the principles that guide it (Sinek 2009, 105).

These considerations lead us to observe the central role employees play in the brand building process, as a relational factor, since their behavior can strengthen the values communicated or, on the contrary, damage the credibility of the proposed message. In light of this, the consistency between the way the brand is promoted externally and the experience offered to employees becomes central. According to Bergstrom, in fact, internal branding is directly connected with the effectiveness with which the value and relevance of the brand are transmitted to the employees, and with the ability to build a strong link between each task carried out and the "brand essence" ability to aggregate people (Bergstrom, Blumenthal, and Crothers 2002, 135). Thus, it is internal communication that also plays a decisive role in external communication.

In this context, human resources and marketing find themselves cooperating and sharing the same tools. HR must equip itself with the tools of the marketing sector, favoring an action complementary to it, promoting a form of communication aimed at creating internal engagement, while marketing has the task of involving the external public. Trust and reputation are the two main pillars that support organizations in these internal and external representations of their identity.

Trust is indeed an abstract concept, nevertheless, like a tangible good—as an actual functioning tool—it must be built and maintained in order to maintain the efficiency of the organization. As already mentioned, developing internal communication processes aimed at promoting the identification of employees and inspiring trust also means adopting managerial tools that place employees at the center of a strategy that attributes value to them and frames them first as customers and then also as testimonials of their work, so that they embody the company’s values and offer a conscious and consistent representation of the brand. The concept of knotworking elaborated by Engeström, well defines how much the collaboration between the different actors depends not only on the ability to weave relationships between them, but also on the ability to keep the network “knotted”—or held tightly together—through specific tools and working practices (Bruni and Gherardi 2007, 31).

Trust is therefore, in our opinion, a multiplying element of the capacity of motivation; but it must be promoted, stimulated, and inspired through practices aimed at guiding and synchronizing employees and teams. It is precisely in the group dimension that interpersonal trust, effective communication, and a way of guiding human resources development become more important. Indeed, it is precisely those employees who are part of a team who tend to demonstrate higher levels of involvement (Buckingham and Goodall 2019, 18–29). It should be remembered, however, that trust is generally placed in the members of a team who are deemed to be able to contribute successfully to the team’s activities, so trust is also associated with each person’s professional integrity and level of competition (Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska 2019, 10).

If a strictly controlled way of managing employees can inhibit the engagement and creative contribution of group members, a way that tends to encourage greater levels of autonomy and empower people contributes to the consolidation of existing relationships of trust and thus to increase the level of cooperation in achieving the common goal. Building trustworthy relationships is essential to promoting a greater level of
cooperation, especially in organizational contexts where relationships between people are less frequent, i.e. where interactions are too rare to allow the relationship to be accompanied by reputation (La Porta et al. 1997, 4). Fostering trust means increasing the possibility that workers’ actions are framed within a common culture of reference, which leads them to work according to the achievement of company objectives and not in favor of particular interests. Working in tune with the organization means being more inclined to take calculated risks, to develop one’s own exploratory capacity, and to have more freedom to seek greater innovative content in the solutions proposed.

The current pandemic has redefined relationships between workers and the company, changing locations, hours, and working methods, demonstrating the inadequacy of leadership models based on employee control, which are increasingly inapplicable in the face of changing working conditions (Parker, Knight, and Keller 2020). Working toward objectives, aided by technology when working remotely, has given employees greater autonomy in organizing and managing their work, while increasing their responsibility for results. More flexible ways of working bring with them a management of work by objectives, but also a higher level of accountability, where trust and communication play a key role. In this context, the interaction that is established between managers and workers must have authentic, clear, and direct communication. It seems important to nourish the existing relationship of trust and combine it with the mechanism of control. Consciously using technological tools, as tools are able to reduce the vulnerability that results from this delicate historical moment, influences the definition of new meeting spaces, which are both physical and virtual (Floridi 2020). It should be noted that collaboration can be improved by increasing the degree of interdependence of employees, in particular by making them responsible for achieving results, sharing information, and workloads, but also through the attribution of rewards to the entire team and through motivation and the belief that they can achieve the goals set (Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska 2019, 3).

It is important to consider that the relationship of trust must be strong and deeply rooted between the different actors, so that true involvement comes about and an effective boost to efficacy is impressed on the company’s organizational processes. This is why it is also important to consider the trust that management is able to get from employees in order to properly manage any change processes. As a result, offering them a broad and integrated overview of work processes can encourage them to become more aware of the tasks and objectives to be pursued. In the same way, broadening the level of discretion with respect to tasks and encouraging opportunities to participate in decision-making processes can encourage a greater commitment to achieving the objectives that the organization sets for itself—precisely because it offers employees new perspectives to interpret their role, new stimuli to achieve results, and different ways of solving problems, which also include greater proactivity and creativity, i.e. important factors of innovation for organizations (Lee et al. 2019, 826).

In conclusion, trust is a strategic element—a crucial tool—for the construction of social and psychological resources and is related to openness to change, resilience, motivation and security with which one interprets one’s organizational role. Those elements can optimize the skills of teams and companies, thereby increasing the chances of retaining qualified resources that can bring value to the organization. However, it
should be pointed out that the possibilities of maintaining resources within the organization vary according to the type of company and the different professional figures: it is easy to think that in companies with a large presence of unskilled laborers, there will be a faster turnover. In any case, it is possible to identify the main elements that differentiate a possible company approach taking into account the worker’s role and his place in the company hierarchy: it could be more expensive to replace resources that occupy strategic roles and consequently the level of retention for certain professional figures could be higher.

4. The selection process

The acquisition of personnel represents a crucial aspect for any company, since the choice of employees is directly related to the efficiency and productivity of the company. Therefore, the results of the selection process have a direct impact on the overall performance of the organization in terms of economy, time management, quality of the work done, or company climate.

The selection process represents an important opportunity for candidates and recruiters to get to know each other. It is the initial moment in which to offer, on the one hand, the best representation of oneself and one’s skills and, on the other, the values and organizational culture that support the company, so that the foundations can be laid for a medium to long term working relationship. The selection process focuses, in fact, not only on the candidate’s experience but also on his or her ability to adapt to a specific organizational culture and the degree of sharing essential values. The level of reliability, which is transmitted on both sides, is enabled by "impression management" through which strengths are highlighted and future development plans are credibly argued.

In the current environment, candidates for new company positions tend to have shorter expectations in terms of time. They approach a new company with the aim of gaining further professional experience, without really intending to stay very long. They are thinking of finding better job positions in the future, even conditioned by a delicate socio-economic context like the present one, where employment contracts reflect a certain precariousness. Talking about job security means not only taking into account the outcomes of critical circumstances but also analyzing the set of cultural, organizational, and socio-technical variables that gravitate around situations characterized by complexity and uncertainty, to which there are also relative questions related to quality and working conditions (Gherardi and Tuccino 2015, 8). The investment of companies in recruiting implies an investment of resources to find the right candidates and training for new employees, so that they can be efficient for the company in the shortest period of time. The problem is that the initial training is given to candidates who, quite often, are known not to remain in the organization for long unless they turn out to be extraordinary candidates. This has implications for the company’s vulnerability and trust in the short and long term: both face a relationship that may not be lasting and still have little knowledge to generate trust. This affects the training that generates trust.
If the company is aware that the relationship may not last very long, it should develop an internal communication strategy that can generate trust in a short space of time and, in the same way, feed it when the employee leaves the company: the relationship of trust should survive the working relationship. Perhaps in the future that same person could become a candidate for other positions in their company or a partner in shared projects with other companies. In order to be able to ask for the involvement of candidates in articulated, demanding selection processes, not only in terms of energy but sometimes also economic (think of the long journey of the selection process), it is necessary that the selection methods used are perceived as reliable, i.e. candidates can count on fairness, precision, and clarity, and are offered a great opportunity to express themselves and be evaluated by competent and empathetic staff. Conveying the perception that the assessment is not objective, transparent, and fair enough could cause candidates to withdraw from the process, discourage others, and produce an overall negative return for the organization, which may even have to defend itself against any legal action taken by candidates. It is also necessary to consider the dual role of the candidates, who are ultimately also potential clients of the company and therefore privileged interlocutors.

The selection process creates an exchange, in which the company "sells" its identity (mission, vision, and values) to the skills and professionalism that it seeks on the market. In proposing their candidacy, professionals are inclined to evaluate the company first of all symbolically, positively analyzing the image, the brand, and the way in which the company presents itself. Next, they will evaluate the traditional organizational and characteristics of the job: an aspect that companies must take into account when proposing their recruitment strategy (Goldstein et al. 2017, 86). In fact, it is crucial to identify the target audience and prepare the most suitable methods to efficiently acquire new personnel. The way in which the search for personnel is made public corresponds to the different breadth and characteristics of the recruitment pool it draws on, which is a direct consequence of the communication strategy that the organization implements. Within a company, using an informal search method—word of mouth—could strengthen the trust between some employees but could, in the same way, exclude entire segments of the company’s population from internal mobility paths, while job posting systems could give greater transparency to company mobility paths. In order to effectively communicate the trust that candidates have placed in the company and the company in them, in both cases it is important to ensure that the candidate receives feedback on the outcome of the application, possibly indicating the reasons that led to their exclusion from the selection process, so that the rejection does not affect the employees’ motivation (Costa and Gianecchini [2005] 2019, 143).

The communication of personnel recruitment is not only the means by which to reach people possessing certain characteristics. The company, during the selection process, also has the opportunity to seek to understand more deeply the way in which the candidate has looked into the job position available, not only to assess the interest and motivation in the role, but also, indirectly, to have valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the communication strategy applied to recruitment, which affects the degree with which the organization generates trust and, therefore, makes itself appealing.

If it is necessary to make the search for personnel publicly known, a company can use a number of tools and methods: self-application, partnerships with schools,
universities, masters, professional or business associations, consulting companies, corporate websites, job boards, social networks, gamification techniques, online recruiting. These are the main tools that companies can use and are closely related to the different roles to be filled and the professional skills to be sought, but are also related to the general way in which the company wants to communicate its identity, internally and externally, and its organizational needs in terms of skills to be acquired. Therefore, it is essential that the company has a well-defined recruitment policy that can be effectively pursued, since the performance and future structure of the organization depend on it. An effective selection process is, in fact, the result of proper human resources planning, the precise definition of skills, abilities, and knowledge the role requires, as well as future development plans (Tomčíková 2016, 3).

The sending and receiving of applications is almost exclusively through the use of IT tools, but it should be kept in mind that technology does not always make it possible to reduce the distance between candidates and recruiters but on the contrary, can constitute a filter that directly affects the intention to apply. As it will be analyzed later, the trust that the potential candidate places in the IT procedure used by the company can be influenced by expectations (i.e. the extent to which the technology will operate according to expectations) and reliability (i.e. the absence of errors or problems), aspects that configure trust in IT as a "dynamic construction that is created and consolidated through experience with the technology itself" (Mariani, Curcuruto, and Zavalloni 2016, 200). This means that the company’s appeal alone is not enough to make the jobseeker apply for a job, noting how technology, and in particular the website, plays an essential role in changing the perception of users or potential candidates, influencing their intention to apply (Mariani, Curcuruto, and Zavalloni 2016, 207). Undoubtedly, digitization is meant to speed up and simplify work processes. The correspondence between a job and the most suitable candidate for a given role requires that the preferences of recruiters and candidates are considered in equal measure, highlighting how technology is not always fully adequate to respond to different needs, but risks flattening processes that are difficult to standardize. Thus, the comparison and exchange of information between companies and technology suppliers are essential in order to look at processes from different perspectives (Furtmueller, Wilderom, and Tate 2011, 245) and take into account the needs of all those involved in the selection process.

5. The communicative dimension of the selection process

Information and communication technologies have led to the multiplication of communication channels and conventions that contribute to changing the paradigm of personnel selection. Now recruiters and candidates may be actively using communication tools, especially social media, that give them access to a large amount of information about one another and promote their ability to identify, evaluate, and choose the most suitable profiles or the companies that best meet their expectations. In other words, the "search and selection" activity is conducted by both actors involved in the process: companies and candidates, who may share interests, resources, and information through social media (Goldstein et al. 2017, 103). The more traditional method of
recruiting is complemented by the proactive and attentive approach of potential candidates. As a result, companies are called upon to use new communication and relational models that enable them not only to search for suitable candidates to meet specific short-term organizational needs, but also to attract the most qualified resources on the job market, in a cyclical and long-term perspective, based on strategic workforce planning. Attracting and retaining talented employees with strong skills, high potential, aspirations, and active engagement seem to be the main challenges organizations face today. In communicative terms it means establishing a dialogue between the actors involved, generating and comparing mutual expectations, sharing values, expressing common goals, and laying the foundations for building a relationship of trust. The company is asked to make itself known to potential candidates, establish a relationship with them and at the same time differentiate itself from its competitors, inspiring trust and leveraging its reputation; the candidate is asked to communicate authentically so that he can speak beyond his CV and the company can get to know his personal characteristics and the motivation behind his candidacy for a specific role in a given company.

In order to make the selection process effective, it is not enough to share with a multitude of potential candidates, internal or external, only the information related to a specific position. The layout of a job advertisement is essential, and it is necessary to respect the rules dictated by the channel and the tools with which are used to reach a specific target audience. For this reason, it is increasingly important to create a web ad with an SEO perspective and with a graphic format that makes the information available online including through mobile devices, in order to ensure greater visibility to content that needs to be clear, simple, and understandable, so that it can be credible. In addition, the company needs to convey to its interlocutors the characteristics that make a particular role unique, communicating the reasons why it is important to be part of that organization. The added value of a staff acquisition process lies in the ability to make the candidate interested in the brand even before the position offered.

In the era of “confidence in work” people tend to want to work in a company that makes a social impact, promotes staff development through an inclusive organizational culture, and offers professionally rewarding opportunities (Edelman Trust Barometer 2019, 29). Increasingly, companies are being selected by talented professionals. In this sense, it is the candidate himself who takes an active part in the job hunt, putting to use his knowledge of technology and contributing to redefine the sphere of sociotechnical relations established between himself and the organization (Bruni 2014, 334).

The company’s reputation is built through employer branding, which helps to create the company’s image, position the organization in the job market, and communicate its culture and value offered. It is an element that has a direct impact on the methods and quality of selection, since it allows companies to maximize their ability to attract talent, reducing the time and costs involved in finding qualified personnel (Berthon, Ewing, and Hah 2005, 154). In fact, it will be the candidates themselves who will apply to the organizations that have incisively communicated the values with which they can identify themselves, by using effective employer branding.

It is interesting to note that the process that leads to the acquisition of future employees depends not only on the work done by the recruiter but also on the
experience that the organization is able to offer to its internal staff. According to HBR, in 2025 50% of the workforce will be made up of millennials for whom more and more relationships are mediated by digital communication channels (Businaro and D’Acunzo 2019, 110). This requires HR to reconsider organizational tools in order to develop greater consistency between the experience offered to employees and that offered to customers, especially in terms of technology. The aim is to improve performance through the development of a greater sense of ownership and advocacy among employees and to increase value for the customer. In particular, it is noted that the construction of a valuable employee experience passes through the organization of workspaces according to different operational needs, an inclusive organizational culture that fosters trust and collaboration, HR systems, and technology that ensure a greater degree of flexibility (Businaro and D’Acunzo 2019, 110–111).

In a context characterized by rapid socio-economic changes, by the increasing obsolescence of skills, and by the increasingly evident push of technological innovations on the company’s organizational fabric, the ability to maintain a high degree of flexibility not only in terms of mental structure and behavior on the part of employees, but also in terms of organizational practices and managerial functions, constitutes a competitive advantage for the entire company system. This perspective becomes central in considering staff recruitment mechanisms, which must take the skills required of the company by the evolution of the socio-economic context into account. A propensity for continuous learning, the ability to accept and promote change, and to move effectively in complex and unclear situations represent distinctive skills, whose evaluation must take into account the selection process in order to increase the degree of suitability of new hires with respect to the real needs of the job placement. Like the other organizational processes, recruiting is also affected by the impulse of digitalization, not only because digital skills are increasingly in demand in the labor market, thus constituting an aspect to be evaluated during the selection process, but also because the search and selection models must be equipped with adequate digital tools to reach the best candidates.

6. Technology, trust, and recruiting

The collective dimension of work emerges in considering the complex of relationships that originate from the coordination of actors and tools, which together define the different working practices, going so far as to shape the use and functionality of technologies. Assuming a relational perspective allows us to grasp the mutual interactions that are established between technology, users, and contexts of use, as part of a single socio-technical system (Bruni and Gherardi 2007, 76–77). From this point of view, technology should not be understood as a set of tools with a predefined role, but rather as a complex of systems in which technical and social aspects are closely connected, creating a sociotechnical network (Hilgartner 1992, 43–44), from which risks and errors may arise, but through which the organization also realizes its own level of resistance to vulnerability (Bruni 2010, 129). Therefore, we want to interpret the technological component not only in consideration of its use, but also in reference to the sharing of
information and knowledge, as well as the creation of relationships, which connect different contexts.

Like a technical object, trust is defined as a real working tool, i.e. a resource that is connected to individual or collective risks and actions and to the reference context, feeding on social interactions and acting as a link between various social spheres. New technologies, which offer effective channels of communication to attract, engage, and communicate with potential future employees, are part of this scenario. In particular, social media offers the opportunity to connect all the actors involved, who can participate and interact in an even more direct way, albeit mediated by the digital tool, activating a communication channel that can strengthen the link between the HR department and employees or candidates, acting in a complementary way to other tools already adopted. Using digital solutions in HR means building relationships and promoting the involvement of employees through collaboration, transparency, and greater trust between employees, the HR department, and the company (Imperatori 2017, 71). The contribution of social media lies, in particular, in the ability to create a network of relationships through which to promote dialogue between employees and the company, encouraging their integration with the organizational culture, as well as the creation of a real community, which can contribute to creating a collaborative climate geared towards knowledge sharing, to the point of positively influencing the appeal of the company, especially towards younger and high potential candidates (Imperatori 2017, 71).

The Human Resources department, working in synergy with the communications department—the center of gravity of the network and manager of social exchanges, can therefore strengthen its role and gain the trust of its interlocutors (Smith and Mounter 2008, 210). In order for the communication channel to be realized, it should be recognized and shared, and both departments should pay maximum attention to the communication flow, aimed at contextualizing and defining the perimeter of the operational practices developed, so that a real and profitable involvement of employees can materialize (Smith and Mounter 2008, 210). Indeed, trust depends on the quality of relationships and not on the quantity of social exchanges developed.

Online forums, talent communities, video interview platforms that integrate AI processes, personality, and hard or soft skills assessment tools, are some of the solutions used by recruiters to identify the ideal candidate. If, on the one hand, the personnel selection process carried out through such tools and algorithms capable of processing large amounts of data can lead to a depersonalization of the recruiting process in favor of predictive algorithms, on the other hand there is a desire to customize the relationship with candidates, implementing varied and articulated communication strategies capable of reaching potential candidates and grabbing and holding their attention. The more the relationship between candidates and recruiters is personalized, the greater the company’s chances of attracting the most interesting candidates. This is why it seems crucial to pay careful attention to communication with candidates, keep them informed about the selection process and career opportunities available, facilitate dialogues with recruiters, and reassure them that the way their personal data will be processed is proper. A large part of the trust that the company can gain in this phase depends on these factors (Furtmueller, Wilderom, and Tate 2011, 255).
The digitalization of hiring processes is not only associated with the efficiency of the process, which therefore includes reducing costs and reducing the time needed to find qualified personnel, but also offers innovative ways to validate skills through testing, collecting the testimonies of colleagues or employers, analysis of social reputation, making the assessment process more objective and open, more focused on professionalism, motivation, and value that the person can bring to the organization (JP Morgan Chase, Freedman Consulting 2016, 29). Through social media it is the candidate himself who makes his skills known and promotes himself, triggering continuous feedback on whether or not he is reliable, competent, and capable.

The experiences offered to employees, as well as to candidates, are becoming more and more crucial to facilitate their full involvement within the company community. It is an aspect that brings about the transformation of talented professionals into brand ambassadors who consequently increase the company’s reputation, fueled by their comments and recommendations, i.e. the communication that originates from them and that goes on outside the company perimeter. The brand ambassadors – charismatic and strongly identified employees – act as testimonials of the organization, exploit their ability to communicate in an authentic and reliable way, produce and disseminate content that can generate interest and involvement from internal and especially external stakeholders, helping to create a network between candidates and employees – and between the company and the public for which the message is intended (Martini and Zanella 2017, 45).

To summarize, it can be said that employees are the main resource for corporate marketing—an aspect that configures each company as a social network (Martini and Zanella 2017, 45), able to promote the company value and messages through its employees—through each one’s own network. It is therefore clear that the involvement of employees becomes decisive in terms of marketing and hiring, and that it is internal communication that increasingly generates the communication that is directed outwards.

The impact of technology in the workplace is leading to the transformation or elimination of jobs, professions, and careers. New skills are being created and redefined, forcing workers to adapt their mindset and skills to rapidly changing organizational contexts. Thus, hiring or promoting an employee on the basis of performance and professional experience gained or on the basis of what is expressed in his or her curriculum vitae may not always prove to be the best choice for the company. A different organizational context and different levels of hiring, motivation, and aspiration may affect the performance of each individual; in a similar way, a career advancement does not guarantee the same contribution to the organization previously made, just as a good performer may not be a good leader. Increasingly, “knowing how to be” connects “knowledge” and “know how” with business objectives. This is why it seems important to prospectively evaluate not only the candidates, as future collaborators, but also to evaluate the potential of current workers, in order to identify the people prepared, motivated, and able to manage relationships that in the future will bring value to the organization (Chamorro-Premuzic, Adler, and Kaiser 2017).

It is clear that a company cannot afford to focus only on so-called "talents" (thus excluding and demotivating the largest part of the company’s workforce), but is
required to build a truly inclusive environment that is able to enhance the work of all employees and welcome them within its corporate project, so that the expression of the potential of each person is encouraged, obtaining from them a commitment proportional to their abilities. In this context, internal communication is the privileged tool to identify and manage the relationships between talented professionals, their bosses, and other staff not included in the same cluster, through a personalized, transparent, and shared approach to the management of each person’s needs (Aielli et al. 2006, 120).

Recognizing employees’ potential also means identifying their needs and expectations, i.e. fostering a relationship of trust from which long-term sustainable development involving the various organizational levels can be generated. Talent management thus seems to give way to a strategic management of Talent, as a managerial and developmental approach that favors the expression of potential and converts it into value for the company, according to the company’s objectives, culture, and strategy (Aielli et al. 2006, 120). These authors emphasize how talent management also passes through the administration of working relationships, all the more so in a socio-economic context characterized by an increasingly shorter duration of working relationships and increasing intercompany mobility.

Consequently, the company’s objective is not so much to maximize retention, but rather to optimize the mutual benefits deriving from the employment relationship – to the point of designing adequate systems that can manage not only internal mobility, but also outgoing mobility through the provision of tools that support the exit and placement of resources on the labor market, thereby supporting the construction of a boundary-less career. This approach thus appears to be part of a management and communication strategy aimed at enhancing the relational capital and the wealth of identity and skills developed within the organization, which allows for the further development of a company’s appeal.

In conclusion, we can say that the functional aspects of models of generating trust are not enough, and it is necessary to rediscover the human dimension of processes (Guillén Parra, Lleó de Nalda, and Santiago Marco Perles 2011b, 46). In fact, there is a deep relationship between communication and hiring not only from a functional point of view but also from a strategic point of view, because it determines the trust that candidates will have in their future employer. The processes of building trust within organizations therefore requires an internal communication strategy that is reflected in the management, in the personal and functional dimension with which HR manages people and in the hiring strategy (short- and long-term). The trust that ties all these elements together manages to mitigate the limits and vulnerabilities of organizations, which are an integral part of their existence, since they are constructed by people (creative but limited people) to offer products or services to other fallible people, in a context that is influenced by the historical circumstances of the time.

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