

Executive secretaries and preparation of communications: Reflections on public communication and transparency



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Silvia Regina Paverchi

Federal University of Sergipe
 E-mail: silviapaverchi@yahoo.com.br

Nathalia Carvalho Moreira

Federal University of Juiz de Fora
 E-mail: nathalia.moreira@ufjf.br

Fernanda Geremias Leal

Federal University of Santa Catarina
 E-mail: fernanda.leal@ufsc.br

Gabriel Antuan Santos

Federal University of Sergipe

E-mail: gabriel.antuan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), as part of the executive branch, must adopt the official norms in their communication actions. In addition, the Access to Information Law (LAI) No. 12,527/2011 determines disclosure (active or via request) as a general rule for public information, involving the provision of data in an accessible language and without technical barriers. In this way, public communications make up the management of information, which in turn needs to meet transparency criteria. This aspect can often hinder the preparation of documents.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), as part of the executive branch, must adopt the official norms in their communication actions. In addition, the Access to Information Law (LAI) No. 12,527/2011 determines disclosure (active or via request) as a general rule for public information, involving the provision of data in an accessible language and without technical barriers. In this way, public communications make up the management of information, which in turn needs to meet transparency criteria. This aspect can often hinder the preparation of documents.

In this context, the official writing is a work of a technical nature to obtain the standardization of writing in public administration, allowing formality, impersonality and unique interpretation of what was written. As a normalizing instrument of this writing, there is the Manual of Writing of the Presidency of the Republic (MRPR), which incorporated, in 2018, emerging aspects of the use of technologies for the operationalization of communications, as well as other instruments such as Decree No. 9,758, of April 11, 2019.

However, although there are rules and manuals to be adopted, it is known that the preparation of official documents and the management of information in the context of public administration need to be executed or even supervised by professionals who have the proper preparation for such tasks.



Considering that the executive secretary has among his legal attributions the writing of specialized texts, as well as the collection of information and interpretation and synthesis of texts (BRASIL, 1985; BRASIL, 1996), it is understood that the performance of this professional is a relevant field for studies on official communication and its management in public organizations.

Thus, the present work aims to examine the official communication and its management at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), seeking to answer the following question: how do the executive secretaries of UFS act in the production and management of internal and external communications? For this, an attempt was made to apply a Survey with the investigated public, aiming to identify the responsibility of the professionals in the process of preparation and administration of communications, which systems are used and their effectiveness and how the management of confidential information is carried out through the observation of the guidelines of the LAI. It is justified that there was an attempt to apply a Survey with the indicated population, however due to the non-significant number of responses, the study, at the moment, has methodological limitations, in which the results do not suggest generalizations.

From this introduction, the theoretical framework is presented, addressing technologies in communication projects, communication in the public sphere and its relationship with transparency in public management and the modality of an electronic government. Next, the methodological procedures, the results obtained and the discussion about them are presented. Finally, the considerations about the study developed up to the present stage are presented.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have expanded the diffusion and circulation of information in societies, enabling virtual operations, sharing and accessibility (FÉLIX, 2020). According to Almeida et. al (2015), ICTs should be considered for the structuring of a communication plan. In this way, digital communication is interconnected to the communication project that intends to be effective in the relationship with the public.

According to Souza et al. (2019), the practice of the principles of transparency and accountability by public managers can generate information that contributes to the monitoring of the execution of public activities. Transparency refers to the dissemination and accessibility of information, while accountability refers to accountability, that is, the demonstration of how public resources and their results are being applied.

One of the current paths for this are the models of electronic government, whose practices should disseminate and facilitate access to information, in addition to contemplating forms of accountability by managers to society, allowing citizens to know and evaluate the management of public resources (GUIMARÃES et al., 2019).



The conception of communication in public administration must be weighed against the necessary interaction with society and the productive system. According to Medeiros and Chirnev (2021, p. 12-13) public communication should be guided by twelve fundamental principles: a) ensure broad access to information, b) foster dialogue; c) stimulate participation; d) promote rights and democracy; e) combat disinformation; f) listen to society; g) focus on the citizen; h) be inclusive and plural; i) to treat communication as a State policy; j) to guarantee impersonality; k) be guided by ethics and l) act effectively. According to Koçouski (2014) public communication is a communicative strategy or action that happens when the gaze is directed to the public interest, from the responsibility that the agent has (or assumes) to recognize and meet the right of citizens to information and participation in matters relevant to the human condition or life in society. It promotes citizenship and mobilizes the debate of collective issues, seeking to achieve, in more advanced stages, negotiations and consensus.

According to Matos and Gil (2013), for public communication to be effective towards the recognition of the different agents and, in a phase beyond, towards deliberation, it is necessary to empower society for participation. The process must be educational, cultural and economic, and necessarily continuous. A specific long-term public policy for communication then becomes fundamental. In this context, Kunsch (2013, p. 4) puts into reflection: "if today companies and civil society organizations are charged and monitored by the public, by public opinion and by society, shouldn't public institutions have much more sense and more responsibility with their acts and, consequently, with their communication? Kunsch (2013) answers the question itself by citing some principles that are fundamental to guide communication in public administration.

According to the author, the public/governmental institution must today be conceived as an open institution, which interacts with society, with the media and with the productive system. It needs to act as an organ that goes beyond the walls of bureaucracy to reach the ordinary citizen, thanks to a joint work with the media.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The present research is characterized as exploratory and descriptive, with documentary research as a data collection technique. To carry out this initial phase of the investigation, information was collected from the higher administrative organs of UFS, with the proper authorization to carry out the research.

Then, the number of executive secretaries of the institution was passed, which at first were analyzed according to the percentage of secretaries and employees of the institution. The purpose of this initial monitoring was to prepare the data for future survey application, aiming to explore and describe the actions and instruments used in the routine involving official documents.



The analyses will be carried out under the bias of qualitative and descriptive research, in order to understand the perception of the executive secretaries regarding the scenario in which they are inserted; in this case, the public universities, which go through rigorous bureaucratic traditions for the elaboration of their communications, carrying traditional characteristics of the bureaucratic model in public administration and, currently, following the guidelines of the LAI.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

UFS has 1,460 effective technical-administrative servers in activity and approximately 718 outsourced administrative employees (UFS Statistical Yearbook 2016-2018, 2018). Of the contingent of the first group, only 27 occupy the position of executive secretary, equivalent to 2% of the administrative workers of the institution. It is possible to infer that this percentage of executive secretaries implies the demands for the preparation of documents, and this task may be the responsibility of several other professionals. The following questions were categorized: 1.

Whether the executive secretaries are responsible for the production and management of internal and external communications; 2. whether the systems are effective for the management of such correspondence, and 3. How they manage confidential information by observing the guidelines of the LAI. It was considered in the choice of this investigated group the fact that the official wording is among the legal attributions of the profession, embodied in Law No. 7,377/1985, and in the description of the position in the Career Plan of Technical Administrative Positions in Education (PCCTAE).

Semi-structured questionnaires were sent to the 27 executive secretaries of the Institution and only three were returned. The main findings of these responses are presented here, knowing the limitation of the results due to the small number of respondents. Regarding the activities of planning, organization and direction of secretarial services, two respondents stated that they never perform and only one stated that they do. Regarding the activities of assistance and direct advice to executives, two state that they perform frequently and only sum states that they never did. Regarding the tasks of interpretation and synthesis of texts and documents, they state that they perform sporadically and in relation to the tasks of version and translation in a foreign language, to meet the communication needs of the company; report that they never did.

Regarding the activities of registration and distribution of files and other related tasks, the three respondents reported that they perform frequently. All respondents participate in the preparation of ostensible communications and especially detail the communications called "dispatches", "memoranda" and "normative acts" and receive more "dispatches" and "memoranda". In addition, all informants indicate that they have a lot of security and confidence in relation to the grammatical rules for the preparation of documents, which shows the great preparation and training they have. In addition, two respondents state that they consider the level of information security to be too strong and



only one considers it weak. In terms of transparency, only one respondent stated that there is a lot of transparency of information and that they have a very friendly interface. In the question: "What is your level of autonomy to make suggestions and improve the system?", the informants answer that they do not have any autonomy to suggest modifications to the systems and only one shows a great degree of dissatisfaction regarding the use and handling of internal systems such as SigaRH, Sipac and SigaADM, and only one did not undergo training to use the systems. Only one has already conducted training to recycle the written production in official Portuguese despite the three respondents considering it very important.

Finally, more technical and specific questions were requested in relation to the nomenclatures of documents and rules of official writing, when it was noticed that there were doubts about the definition and intention of certain documents such as letters, explanatory statement and circular letter, also presenting doubts regarding the destinations of the messages and the communications that have already been extinguished, To wit: the memo, which no respondent was aware of at the time of the survey.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Until this phase of the research, it was possible to conclude that the executive secretaries are the professionals indicated to contemplate the established questions, since they act in the management of communications in the universities. The perception of this public becomes relevant for reflections on the role of new technologies in the context of communications in public higher education institutions.

The public sector adopts the bureaucratic model, which excels in the impersonality and univocity of written interpretation, in addition to legitimizing access to information for citizens. This research had limitations such as the reduced number of respondents until this phase, but it is not intended to extinguish the efforts to deepen the theme.

The objective is that these data, although preliminary and insufficient, also bring reflections of new investigative paths, such as a more comprehensive research in other universities with a regional or national focus so that the official writing practices of the executive secretaries are better known. Moreover, one can also infer several reflections in this regard, on the delegation of administrative activities to other professionals, such as the professors themselves who work in management positions and the administrative and outsourced technical servers. In any case, even if the career of "executive secretary" is in a reduced number in the IFES, the fact of the autonomy of the elaboration of these documents is a worrying fact, because more and more diverse professionals from different areas need to adapt to these functions, without specific training, which can compromise the transparency and accountability of public universities to society, as well as for the democratization of communication.



Therefore, there can also be an overlap of functions and an overload of work for several professionals. Despite the fact that the presence of a professional responsible for official internal communications is essential, it is known that the computerized systems of federal universities have ready-made models of various documents, a fact that on the one hand, facilitates and brings efficiency and less bureaucracy to the processing of information, but also causes a robotization of these communications and an excessive reliance on the systems and their standards, Bringing some professional outdatedness, as was seen in the ignorance of the extinction of the document "memondo" of official communications.

Finally, we can assume and infer that the importance of executive secretarial professionals as a communicator and manager of academic information, especially when preparing official documents, stands out even more in the current scenario, so that information can be disseminated and disseminated in an appropriate way to the community, as well as so that confidential information has its due security guaranteed, Especially with the use of new information technology, which has gained even more traction after the coronavirus pandemic.



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