

# PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE AS A RESULT OF EFFECTIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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## Abstract

Information is essential for organizations. Information and knowledge, associated with technological and scientific advances are, nowadays, easily accessible to all organizations, so whoever holds more information and knows how to manage it in the most adequate way to their vision and style, will be able to acquire a competitive advantage faster than the competitors. In a highly competitive environment for companies today, managers must realize the need to design strategies for organizations based on information as a valuable asset. Companies structure and classify information based on their structure, functions and activities, that is, based on documentary production, information flows between departments, safeguarding and proving what this information constitutes. At Goweb Agency, Lda., the target company of this study, except for the document templates that were intended for commercial proposals and directly linked to sales, most documents existed only for the purpose of quality certification. All documents were organized validly, intuitively and based on the information needs of employees. However these documents weren't used or even known by the employees. The project planning and the accountability for everyday tasks were lacking meaning to them and conflicts were a constant. By incorporating the documents that described the responsibilities and assignments of each function into the routine tasks of everyday life and encouraging their use, creating and adapting the sharing and management of information in the company's activities, there has been a reduction in internal conflicts among employees, an increase in their degree of satisfaction and motivation, its efficiency and effectiveness and the satisfaction of the company's customers, due to the performance and quality of the work presented. In order to maintain each employee's accountability and therefore their motivation in doing a better work it is important to continue to invest in the management of information appropriate to the business area of the company, make known the existence of essential information to each workplace and make the access to documentation quick and intuitive for all employees.

**Keywords:** Information needs, Information management, Psychological empowerment, Professional performance

## INTRODUCTION

Information is the organizations' most precious asset, especially since the emergence of information and communication technologies in the eighties of the last century, and the emergence of social networks at the beginning of the 21st century. Today, good information management within an organization constitutes the primary factor of differentiation and competitive advantage over other organizations, as advocated by Barbosa (2008, p.2) "as professional and business environments become more complex and changing, information becomes, undoubtedly, a weapon capable of ensuring proper anticipation and trend analysis, as well as the ability to adapt, learn and innovate."

"Good" management means that there is a correct treatment of the information that enters and that is produced within the company: its organization, storage, sharing, use and updating.

In other words, that the information managers comply scrupulously with the information's life cycle and that this cycle is appropriate to the company's own culture. The documentary production of an organization thus indicates much of its organic structure, organizational culture, needs and practices instituted within it, presenting information managers as indispensable actors in the organizations' management, guardians and organizers of knowledge and its form of dissemination by organizations to their human resources and the production/ organization of information flows in the various subsystems that make up the whole.

Based on the perception of the information's management importance for organizations, the starting question was formulated: How has the information's management and sharing at Goweb Agency contributed, and does it contribute, on a day-to-day basis to improving employee performance, motivation and empowerment?

This study aims to demonstrate that, in this company, the availability and sharing of information allowed the company's objectives to be achieved, at the level of employee satisfaction, making the company more effective, efficient, profitable and "happy". (This is the expected result after the conclusion of this study).

This work highlights, through the literature review of related articles to the topics of information management, information needs, information practices, employees' psychological empowerment and the consequent improvement of their performance, the crucial strategic importance that the instituted information management's practices had for the increase of the competitiveness of the company Goweb Agency. Quoting Tarapanoff et al. (2002, p. 3) "Educating oneself and others for the information society is one of the great challenges for the information professional and an important step for the formation of the information culture in society and, eventually, of collective intelligence." Souza & Beuren (2018) state that "psychological empowerment leads individuals to trust in their ability to meet labor demands and have fewer doubts about themselves and their work, resulting in better performance" (p. 200). Based on this premise, the problem to be studied was defined and the search for the answer had begun.

The case study conducted at GoWeb is described through the technique of direct observation and semi-structured interview, which allowed to confirm how the information's management appropriate to the company's organizational culture contributed to the psychological empowerment of its employees, which turned into the efficient and effective performance of their functions, culminating in the reduction of internal conflicts and increased satisfaction with the work.

### **Theoretical foundation Information needs and practices**

The well known research of Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, focused on the study of human motivation, having proposed a hierarchy of needs, where they presented themselves from the most basic to the most complex.<sup>15</sup> For Maslow (1943), a human being obtains satisfaction if all his needs are met; however, the satisfaction of the most basic needs is more

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<sup>15</sup> The order includes: physiological needs whose satisfaction is mandatory for the survival of the subject and includes eating, drinking, breathing, etc.; security needs whose satisfaction offers some guarantee of success with regard to sustainability and survival of the subject; social needs that exist because the human being is a social being who lives in community; needs of esteem that arise from the growing complexity of social needs and that contemplate personal fulfillment, prestige; self-actualized needs that presuppose the growth of the subject as an individual and that include satisfaction, personal growth and higher-level experiences.

urgent than the satisfaction of the higher level needs.

In the Information Science literature, Maslow's hierarchy is usually discussed in the context of employee motivation. Ugah and Arua (2011) used this in combination with expectation theory to urge library management to motivate catalogers as individuals, rather than the cataloging department as a whole, while respecting the personal peculiarities of each. James (2011) discussed how the needs of professionals are aligned with the hierarchy and Al-Aufi and Al-Kalbani (2014) studied library staff in Oman and their motivation and found that higher order needs were less likely to be met than lower order needs. Crumpton (2016) joined Maslow and Grumble's theory to suggest that library leaders understand their organization's staff complaints as arising from unfulfilled needs. Hosoi (2005) organizes the library staff's workplace needs with the hierarchy in a useful table describing "well-being of others", "self-acceptance" and "meaningful work" as self-actualization (p. 44). In a reversal of approach, Walker (1994) applied the hierarchy to supervisors and administrators, encouraging hospital librarians to devote less time to "basic" library functions, such as cataloguing and selection, so that they could devote themselves to activities that were more responsible and suited to their professional profile, and that were seen as more important, satisfactory and motivating.

However, there are works related to libraries that apply Maslow's hierarchy in a more holistic way. Francis (2010) compared information literacy to self-actualization and postulated that libraries should take care of students' lower order needs, so that "they are not obsessed only with providing students with information literacy instruction" (p. 142). Pateman and Pateman (2017) marry Maslow with Karl Marx's theories to predict a transformation for public libraries from a traditional, hierarchical and bureaucratic model to a needs-based library model, where it is created and managed in a way that helps its collaborators and the community to self-realize and intervene in a positive socio-economic change. Such a principle can be transposed to private organizations.

According to Dervin (1999), the search for information is initiated because there is a need for information. In short, whenever the individual detects that he/ she has a gap in his knowledge about a certain subject, he starts his search for information to fill that gap, it is the model of the individual construction of meaning: 'Dervin's sense-making'.

Information needs may have varied origins and the individual may not always realize that he or she has them or, being aware of them, may not be able to express them. These situations depend on the subject, the context and the individual in question.

The concept of informational need defined by Wilson (1981) describes a subjective experience that occurs only in the mind of each individual, and is therefore not directly accessible to the observer. Necessity can only be discovered by deduction, through behavior, or by an act of enunciation of the person who holds it (Martínez-Silveira & Oddone, 2009).

For example, Wilson (1981) identifies three types of information needs: cognitive, affective and psychological/physiological. According to Wilson's model, due to his needs, the user is focused on active information research, either because he has a need for information, this need being a secondary need, since the primary needs are those of an affective, psychological and cognitive nature, or because the users are faced with barriers, in information research, that can prevent them from finding the desired information.

The conclusions he reached in the initial phase of his model were:

- Successful retrieval of information enables good results for the user.
- The unsuccessful recovery of information results in a situation of dissatisfaction for the user, leading to a reformulation of the search and the use of new information systems.

In a professional context, the information needs are not constant regarding to topics and subjects, at least not permanent in time. In this context, information needs must be met promptly, otherwise results, effectiveness and competitiveness may be jeopardized. When a need is met and the work is completed, the search for information may cease or, on the contrary, be deepened due to a desire to know more, deepen interests or specialization.

Information practices arise as a consequence of the information needs and information-seeking behavior that individuals develop when they initiate that search. According to Araújo (2016, p.72), "in a perspective close to ethnography, aspects of the daily experience of the interviewees, their interactions with other subjects (other patients, professional team of house health, family members, etc.) and, above all, aspects related to the interpretations and meanings built by them". That is, in the information practices, the emphasis is placed on contextual factors: information search, information use and information sharing. In the professional field, the practices adopted by the individual or organization are related to a great extent, or totally, with factors such as:

- Equipment knowledge
- Educational activities
- Information needs
- Environment
- Information sources
- Specific issues: projects, competition, customers, suppliers, new technologies
- Legislative and social context

### **The company's culture**

Informational and organizational behaviors related to professional life are greatly influenced by organizational culture. The organization's culture is its brand, which distinguishes it from all other organizations. What determines an organization's culture are not just explicit rules and policies disclosed to employees, but the whole set of diverse personalities and groups that are forming within the organization, the personality, values and beliefs of its founder(s) and the entire environment of the organization.

There are two main trends in the approach to the company's culture (Barale & Santos, 2017):

- The one that is more dominant and that explains the organizational culture as phenomena that happen inside the organization, potentializing or not the organizational performance, that are fed by the leaders or founder of the company and that can be influenced by the instituted methodologies, policies and practices. In this trend, organizations can manage, change or create culture.
- The opposite tendency, inverse to the manageable character of the organizational culture, because it considers that it is the result of the people who make up the organization, their personalities, spontaneous phenomena of daily life and innate, natural, therefore, not measurable or susceptible to influences that aim at their change or manipulation.

In the first theoretical aspect, authors such as Schein, Pettigrew, Ouchi, Charles Handy, Peters and Waterman, Deal and Kennedy and Pascale and Athos postulate, in general: that organizations have a culture that reveals phenomena within the institution, enhancing or not the organizational performance; that organizations can measure and even manage, change or create culture, depending on the application of methodologies; that leaders form and change the culture, these being their most primordial roles (as cited in Smircich, 1983). (...) The opposition is found in the critical and socio-anthropological bias of the second strand, whose main argument revolves around the fight against the managerial character of culture, that is,

the impossibility of intentional manipulation of the phenomenon in all its aspects. In spite of the differences between their works, authors such as Chanlat, Dupuis and Aktouf can be grouped in this category for the understanding of the symbolic dimensions of organizational reality. For Smircich (1983), this second trend faces the assumption that the organization is a culture of shared actions to be explained by expressive, ideational and symbolic aspects (Barale & Santos, 2017, p. 130).

Savolainen (1995) makes it clear that the environment in which we grow, live and work condition our behavior at all levels, so organizations are no exception:

«We are born in a culture within a social class that provides basic models for the mastery of life. These models concern typical ways of approaching everyday problems (...) Culture, with its specific values, not only directs habits and attitudes to professional life, but also to spend leisure time, for example, the role of reading books and television. Naturally, besides the specific social classes, these evaluations are also affected by the generation to which they belong. (...) Together with socialization for a class-based culture, the individual will do things in certain ways.» (p. 264)

The trend or approach cited by Barale & Santos (2017) is important because it allows managers to "shape" the culture of the organization according to the path they want to see the organization follow.

### **Framework for the study: the Goweb Agency The company's organization**

Goweb Agency is a digital communication agency which includes communication solutions, since the creation of the institutional image, analysis of the competition, definition of digital business strategy, management of social media and consulting/ sales of the most suitable technologies for each business requirements.

The company consists of 6 permanent collaborators, 2 interns and 2 external collaborators who act as freelancers.

The organization is structured by the departments below:

- Administration/Management
- Administrative and Billing Department
- Marketing and Sales Department
- Production Department
- Human Resources Department
- Customer Service / Support Department

### **The organizational culture**

The company's culture is informal, young, irreverent and relaxed. It favors change and creativity and seeks to receive in their teams newly graduated interns in order to share the knowledge acquired in academic environment and new trends. At Goweb Agency, there is no room for bureaucratic procedures. Everything is decided quickly, according to the need of the moment, which creates the most updated information needs regarding clients, technologies and the Web and Design area.

Over the years this organizational culture has led to a neglect of the information life cycle's importance. There were lost contacts, documents' templates that were not used to formalize procedures, or just to make records in order to retrieve that information later. The work processes as well as the information management, were not valued within the company and, therefore, that was something that they had been trying to improve and establish for some time. Not to "counteract" the relaxed culture, but to improve the people's performance as well

as to diminish conflicts and inefficiencies at work.

### **Information needs**

At Goweb Agency the information needs are related to factors such as:

- specific issues related to projects, clients, new technologies;
- knowledge of policies, standards and practices in the company;
- training actions;
- information needs on specific professional areas, e.g. web design, programming and the consultation of the most suitable information sources for the web area.

Yet, as already mentioned, information needs cover too many aspects (cognitive, affective, psychological) and, nevertheless, are intrinsically related to the performance of tasks at a professional level, include factors of a personal, social and environmental or contextual nature. According to Choo (2003, p. 89) "studies on the use of information recognize that information needs are both emotional and cognitive, so that emotional reactions almost always guide the search for information, channeling attention, revealing doubts and uncertainties, indicating tastes and dislikes, motivating the effort.

Often the search for information is characterized by an incorrect or imprecise definition of need, that is, the individual seeks information that he does not need in reality and not that which is objectively necessary for him to carry out his activities. This is one of the most important aspects in the search for information: - to define the real needs and not to confuse needs with information search (Sanz Casado, 1993, p. 26).

These unfulfilled information needs thus caused internal conflicts among employees, a permanent state of anxiety and had a negative impact on professional performance, in addition to causing an extension in the execution of projects, beyond the expected time.

The behaviors' observation allowed us to identify the needs, formulate them and develop processes and procedures which enabled us to overcome this demotivation and feeling of powerlessness that existed in the company.

### **Information practices at Goweb Agency**

The information practices at Goweb Agency have changed in the last years, as a result of the identification of information needs. Before, there were no established practices, that is, in each situation, even if similar to so many others in the past an employee could proceed according to the moment, without any apparent reason. The employees' behavior was disinterested and a certain demotivation was noticed in everything they did, and this was equally evident in the way they sought (or did not seek) information.

For Berti & Araújo (2017, p. 395) "Informational practices represent the search for information based on the informational relationship influenced by social interactions, in such a way that they include users and information in different, independent but reciprocal spaces. (...) the interaction is present in the movement of search, selection and attribution of value to the information, has its origin in its social environment and suffers interference from socially constructed contexts, resulting from collective markings".

Through document analysis it was possible to have a clear perception of the procedures that needed to be changed, of the habits that had to be set aside, and of the workflows and professional skills that would be fundamental to establish, take advantage of and develop.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted was of a descriptive qualitative nature since there was the intention of describing the results. In this way, we opted for the semi-structured interview as a method of exploration and also the direct observation, to obtain credible information that would allow us to know the reality of those who worked in the company, that is, their needs for information and the practices and behaviors of information research. The interview allows deeper and more reliable answers, capturing reactions, feelings, habits of the interviewees and enables them to clarify any question or terminology not understood. The questions were based on the daily observations of the most frequent information needs, the creation of processes and institutionalization of information practices to meet those needs, and the importance of knowing how the employees were at the time of this study, how they felt about the information they had, how they looked for it on a daily basis, and the suggestions for improvement they could have.

Therefore, for the practical development of this study it was necessary to proceed to the:

- Observation of information flows in the company and detection of inconsistencies, inefficiencies, and/ or duplication of work, which culminated in the elaboration of flowcharts of the company departments;
- Analysis of existing documents in the company: to know what already existed, the reason for its existence and also the resistance in using them, assessment of the relevance of making changes to some of the documents and the withdrawal of others;
- Dissemination of documents, encouraging their use in procedures and daily tasks;
- Observation and attempt to identify the information needs and practices of employees, in the performance of their daily tasks.

By starting the information dissemination process, by preventing communication blockages and eliminating duplication of tasks according to the existing competence profiles, it was attempted that the collaborators knew the contribution to be made to the company with their work and the importance of their knowledge and professional skills in the company's success.

The classification, dissemination and archive of information is essential to obtain efficient and effective results. Each department and collaborator must have the necessary, correct, current and available information in time to carry out their activities. Without information, employees do not know the path they should follow to help the organization with their work, they feel demotivated, do not communicate with each other, there is poor interdepartmental communication, doubts and a weak performance. The quality of relations between departments is fundamental for the overall success of the company, since the various departments are part of the whole system, and if they fail to exchange information and communication they may compromise the results intended to reach the organization's objectives. In fact, "(...) the global performance of a company is imposed by its weakest link. Companies should identify their weakest link, rather than intensify investments in points where they are already quite effective" (Lesca & Almeida, 1994, p.67).

After reviewing processes and making information available, it was necessary to adopt procedures to update information and institute that, recurrently, it is necessary to review, correct or adapt processes.

Ways of measuring the satisfaction of the company's employees and clients were also adopted, through quarterly satisfaction surveys of employees and annual satisfaction surveys of active clients.

The questions asked are as follows

1. When you started working at Goweb, what information needs did you face?	7. What documentation existed about the company? (that you have been made aware of)
2. How did you acquire the information you needed?	8. Did you have any initial training?
3. Where did you look for the information you needed?	9. Do you consider that the sources of information you need to perform your daily tasks are sufficient?
4. How did you look for the information you needed?	10. When you are properly informed about what to do, what procedures to adopt in certain situations and/or about ongoing projects, do you feel more capable/empowered?
5. What kind of information did you look up?	11. When you are properly informed about what to do, what procedures to adopt in certain situations and/or about ongoing projects, do you feel more stressed in performing your duties?
6. What documentation was available to perform your tasks?	12. Do you think the available information and documentary production at Goweb is sufficient?
	13. If the available information is not enough, what would you consider important to implement or create, in your perspective, at the level of the type of information and availability/sharing of that same information to feel more capable or supported in its functions?

### Collected data

- All respondents answered that they had information needs related to their area of expertise/tasks that they had to do within their competencies.
- Everyone seeks information daily on the Internet.
- Two of the respondents stated that they look for information in digital format in the server/project folders (when the intended information is related to projects in which they are involved) and of Quality (when the information is related to company procedures).
- One of the respondents said he often consults information on paper, due to his roles in the financial and administrative area).
- The trainees only look for information on the web.
- They all claim to have obtained the necessary information for their functions relatively quickly.
- Two respondents said they feel that sometimes the information is not clear enough.
- Two employees consider that the information is not always up to date, mainly that



- resulting from subsequent contacts with clients, or resulting from meetings.
- All the respondents claim to have had initial training when they joined the company.
- They are unanimous in stating that they feel more capable of performing their duties if they are properly informed about what is expected of them and the objectives to be achieved.

For the correct interpretation of these results it is necessary to take into account that all current employees, and respondents for this study, arrived at Goweb only in the last 3 years. This means that they were not present in the company when the management, sharing and information practices were not the priority focus and, therefore, have no way to compare with the previous situation.

## RESULTS

After the beginning of the effective information management implementation, following each step of its life cycle:

- Acquisition or Creation
- Organization and archive/ stocking
- Distribution/ Spreading
- Use

The practical results quickly became visible. The teams communicate with each other, know what is expected of each element, the goals to be achieved and where to look for the information they need.

In fact, the results obtained were in line with those expected at the beginning of the study. It was felt in the company a clear improvement in the performance of all employees after the correct management and sharing of information in the organization.

Based on documents such as:

- Competence profile
- Creative briefing
- Summary of the meeting
- Contact registration (in person, by email, telephone, video conference, etc.)
- Customer Support Registration
- Project Management Dossier
- Publications Checklist
- Content Checklist
- Non compliances registration bulletin
- Employee/ Customer satisfaction survey
- Vacation/ Absence request or registration form

And other not used documents, it was possible to start organizing the information and structuring the processes within the company, to elaborate flowcharts, to plan weekly team meetings, to schedule trainings in order to train the employees and update their technical knowledge and soft skills, which led to their empowerment and, therefore, to the empowerment of the entire company, with sales and customer satisfaction results notoriously more positive than before.

It should also be noted that psychological empowerment translates into a decentralization of authority, of operational and tactical decision-making, which is the trend of companies today. The "flattening" of the hierarchical pyramid of organizations is notorious and imperative, in this society of information and knowledge, where employees are valued for their knowledge and

skills much more than for the tangibility of what they produce. The notion of empowerment emerged in the late 1980s. Since then, it has received increasing attention from academia and business society. "This is due to the perception that empowerment can help both organizations and their employees' performance" (Klann & Beuren, 2014, p. 119).

### **Recommendations for the future**

Considering that this approach implies a constant search for organizational effectiveness and efficiency, in the near future it will be important:

- Continue to promote the use of the organization's documents and established information flows.
- To insist on sharing the information and its dissemination by the company.
- Update the information whenever justified.
- To clarify less obvious situations for employees: full communication free of misunderstandings is fundamental, as well as intelligent and goal-oriented sharing of information and knowledge.

In the medium/long term it will be appropriate to create an information system, totally adapted to the company, that integrates all the functions and people, so that the procedures are clear to everyone, the dependencies between functions and tasks are explicit and reminders or new documents/ updates are issued, so that there is not total dependence on the presence of colleagues to perform the necessary day-to-day tasks, which will generate even more autonomy and empowerment for each employee.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Information is crucial so that all human resources are aligned with the strategy and with the accomplishment of their functions for the same objectives, in order to obtain the results that will bring success to the organization.

Without information and informational practices appropriate to the needs of the people who make up the company, and their organizational culture, the results are weak, inconsistent and the employees have poor performance and demotivation.

It is also the responsibility of the information managers to promote this empowerment, through research, document production, processing, classification, updating, archiving and dissemination of information, which must be totally adequate to each organization.

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