

# Identifying the Concept of Communication Capital: Philosophical Analytical Review of Foundational Literature and Approaches

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## **Abstract:**

The following study aims to provide a summary survey of the various literature and works, both in the English and Portuguese languages, which were concerned with establishing the concept of communication capital and determining its basic approaches, whether directly or indirectly, as well as summarizing its common elements and explaining the differences between them. After examining the different meanings attributed to this fertile and most recent concept in the global knowledge circles and analyzing it philosophically in the midst of a diversity of opinions and related concepts, six possible basic approaches to understanding the communication capital were highlighted. In addition, a group of key elements was concluded as a means of organizing the existing approaches.

**Keywords:** Communication ,Corporate communication ,Communication capital , Conceptualization , Intangible assets

**Jel Classification Codes:** M3 , Y3 , B410

## **Introduction :**

Communication science is based on a mixture of interdisciplinary theories and empirical evidence. It contributes to a more informed understanding of how humans transfer information to each other across multiple channels, in multiple contexts, and in different time frames to achieve their desired goals.

Human capital, intellectual capital, relational capital and social capital have been subjected to multiple and varied research in the field of business management and sociology. However, research related to communication capital is still in its early stages, whether in these scientific fields or in the field of communication science

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itself. Some researchers did not make progress until recently when dealing with this issue. They suggested some pioneering ways to the thematization of research topics and related conceptual frameworks.

It is very important to highlight the character, which has not yet been fully defined for the term "communication capital". In this context, a number of researchers such as Aggestam (2006)<sup>2</sup>, say that the latter can have multiple meanings depending on the social and economic context and the environmental shocks.

Matos and Nobre (2009)<sup>3</sup> believe that the communication capital, as an umbrella concept, extends to groups of "new" and "old" skills and knowledge. Malmelin (2007)<sup>4</sup>, one of the first diligents in concept modeling in the framework of intellectual capital research, also considers that terminology is confusing, where he does not see much difference in meaning between the concepts of cognitive capital, human capital, intellectual capital, social capital, and why not say communicational capital as well.

In our circle of knowledge in the communication field, we see that we need to move forward in abstraction to concepts that can be imposed at the level of "public" communication. These concepts can be activated by referring to the personal, public, organizational or symbolic context, especially if we know that the development of "new" concepts occurs naturally in the process of theory building. In this framework, the concepts are arranged and the definitions are sorted out according to the levels of abstraction, and the efforts of researchers in developing a vision for communication capital that commensurate with such processes where communication is the focus of theoretical development. Researchers in the field of communication must seek to build this specialty, and not merely contribute to its dissolution to the psychology of communication, the sociology of communication, the philosophy of communication, and the various other ways in which we search for what we might call intellectual calmness. The development of concepts of empirical validity and utility across the various related scientific and practical fields will enhance that process<sup>5</sup>. In this context, we believe that an accredited concept of communication capital would stimulate efforts to integrate research across various communication contexts.

This article collects and lists a series of foundational and cumulative literature on communication capital and its approaches, which is a new and vital topic for

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<sup>2</sup> **Aggestam, M.** (2006), « A network perspective of communication capital and new venture creation in organizations », Annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dresden International Congress Centre, Dresden, Germany , pp. 1-13 .

<sup>3</sup> **Matos .H , Nobre . G. F.** (2009) , « Communicational Capital », conference: 74th Annual Conference The Association for Business Communication. Portsmouth, VA: <https://www.researchgate.net>. From <https://www.researchgate.net> .

<sup>4</sup> **Malmelin, N.** (2007), « Communication capital : Modelling corporate communication as an organizational asset » , Corporate communication : An International Journal,( 12 ), pp. 298 , 310.

<sup>5</sup> **Jeffres.L , Jian.G ,Yoon.S .** (2013) , « Conceptualizing Communication Capital for a Changing Environment ». Communication Quarterly, 61:5, doi:DOI: 10.1080/01463373.2013.806336, pp. 340-341 , pp. 539-563.

communication science. In addition, it seeks to answer the following central question: **What are the various meanings attributed to communication capital in the research heritage that established the (relational, communicational, accounting, symbolic and managerial) concepts?** From this central question, the following two questions arise: (1) What are the various approaches (theoretical - practical) that were established for the concept and are based mainly on multidisciplinary? (2) What are the definitions and co -relations presented to the concept of communication capital in the various literature that dealt with the topic and that we were able to reach?

This article seeks, on the one hand, to defend "communication capital" as a promising subject and strong research field in the field of communication science above all and adjacent sciences, especially if the current advanced stage of the research's outputs is considered. On the other hand, this study aims to provide a summary survey of the various foundational literature of the topic, and to explore its depths in a way that allows extracting the meanings entrusted to the concept and defining it. This is especially if we know that there is a reluctance, if not a lack of preoccupation with it by researchers in our Arabic and local knowledge circles. This research is considered a desk research, and it relies primarily on the survey methodology because it is compatible with the nature of the study (descriptive and analytical) and its objectives. In order to describe the origin of the concept, a survey of foundational literature has been relied upon. It is worth noting that the Conceptual description, Taxonomies and typologies, Philosophical conceptualization, Conceptual induction, Conceptual deduction and Conceptual systems methodologies are among the most famous conceptual research methodologies. Our current study comes within the framework of researching concepts philosophically and this type of theory building results from the inductive philosophical reflection, and it mainly integrates a number of different works on the same topic, summarizes common elements, and compares differences, which is the method pursued by our current study.

In this article, we have supported our different narratives based on an important set of literature in English and Portuguese. Mainly, the works that were involved in researching the conceptualizing of the concept itself directly , this is in addition to studies that dealt directly with the subject of communication capital and other literature that dealt with it accidentally but critically.

### **1. Communication capital approaches:**

Researchers who have worked on the conceptualization of communication capital view that it is too early to suggest building a single global concept capable of defining communication capital. This is because research on this topic is recent and the number of scientists and researchers who devote time to it is still low. However, we have noticed the emergence of some trends in the midst of a diversity of opinions and concepts where we can propose at least five possible approaches to understand the communication capital. In this regard, it is important to note that some of them have been preferred by most authors, while others have been dealt with in an incidental and succinct manner.

In what follows, the two researchers summarize the most important approaches based on Matos & Nobre's contributions (2009) in this context:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Matos .H , Nobre . G. F, op cit , p. 4.

**-Accounting Approach:** Communication is viewed as an asset, it can be tangible (such as radios and constellations) or intangible (such as operations and relationships), and one must set a price or value for it, which must be recorded on the balance sheet.

**-Marketing Approach:** Communication is a tool (or a set of tools) for strategic thinking, such as a gear in market logic, and it includes brands, advertising, public relations and press relations.

**-Managerial Approach:** Communication is seen as an organizational resource that can be managed and ready to be used to improve employees performance, products, services, and operations, taking into account business value and the best interests of stakeholders.

**-Symbolic Approach:** First, communication is a flux of symbols and negotiation of meanings, and it is a key issue for putting people up in the face of others (concerning the political, economic, social aspects, etc.).

**-Relational Approach:** Communication is understood as the channel through which people build and develop relationships between them, and a way to coordinate interests and actions, thus, get respect and the ability to count on them.

In the *accounting approach*, communication is only an extra line in the balance sheet, where much of the controversy is precisely taking place to define methodologies for understanding the phenomena and procedures of communication using numbers. What is the value of this action or communication project in local currency? Accountants and financiers are usually direct when accurate numbers are needed because complete and reliable financial statements are the basis for the investors and shareholders' guidance.

The *marketing approach* is related to the instrumentalization of practices and procedures, and searching for ways in which communication can be achieved in the planned activities and measured by its effects. From a broad management perspective, marketing for communication represents what engineering represents for production.

As for the *administrative approach*, it is broader than the marketing approach, because the marketing field represents only one component of that institution, where the administrative approach sees that communication is in the same level with production, finance, sales, etc., where every field and sector contributes to generating value and increasing profits.

In the *symbolic approach*, the social aspect is merely the result of the language use, and the focus was, as some say, on the policy and economics of these symbolic practices. Here, communication can be understood as a locus and medium of itself: a field from which everything is determined.

The *relational approach* primarily addresses issues of socialization and interaction, where communication is the medium and the object of interactions. The focus is less on the linguistic or symbolic system (as in the symbolic approach) and more on the network of personal contacts.

## **2. Communication capital: a philosophical analytical survey of the foundational literature that dealt with the concept:**

At the beginning of our survey of relevant literature, and in a study by him entitled: *Communicative Capital for Prosthetic Agents*, Patrick M. Pilarski and other researchers argue that communication capital is the communication infrastructure that has been built or acquired by two partner sides. He also defines it as a set of

communication resources that are built and used through the continuous interactions between the director and the assistant to create value.

In this context, Pilarski and other researchers<sup>7</sup> add that one of the ways to think about the interactions that gradually improve between the assistant and the manager is and capital investment and accumulation in line with investing in capital in the economic sense. The communication capital requires a cost in terms of the exerted effort to create and maintain it. This cost can be incurred during the normal interactions of what they have called a partnership, or, in many cases, through a special effort that is not related to the explicit goals of the latter.

Jeffres and other researchers<sup>8</sup> treat communication capital from a symbolic point of view and consider even the importance of the symbolic communicational capital. Their concept includes four dimensions:

- Discussing the social problems and programs between people across contexts that include family, friends, the workplace, the neighborhood, and the community.
- Discussing social problems and programs in the non-work organizational context.
- Considering the public issues and business in the media.
- Monitoring uses of the media.

For San Jose and Tompkins, respectively, in California and New York the term is understood on the basis that it is an investment in towers and equipment, such as the purchase of mobile radios and data systems). It does not seem wrong to view this as an accounting approach, because it assigns numerical values to the prices and quantities of commodities, as is the case in any type of projects or programs.<sup>9</sup>

Ortiz (2006) and Berthon (1996) perceive communication capital from a marketing point of view, where communication capital is treated through summary procedures as a marketing investment.

In the same principle of the marketing approach, Gabriela and Marcel (2007) argue that the “brand” and the organizational identity culture are elements of the communication capital that allow the creation and strengthening of the image<sup>10</sup>. In light of the current market situation, and at a time when the supply exceeds the demand for the majority of products and services, companies must communicate with their present or potential clients, where most companies tend to adopt promotional strategies such as pull strategy (sales promotions).

These strategies include marketing activities, especially advertising and promotion in the market and targeting the end user with the aim of making him ask the mediators to provide additional products, and determine the latter to request these specific products from the producers.

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<sup>7</sup> **Pilarski.M , Sutton.R, Mathewson.K, Sherstan, C.** (2017) , “Communicative Capital for Prosthetic Agents” , [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321025198\\_Communicative\\_Capital\\_for\\_Prosthetic\\_Agent\\_s](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321025198_Communicative_Capital_for_Prosthetic_Agent_s) , pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> **Jeffres.L , Jian.G ,Yoon.S .** (2007) ,« Conceptualizing communication capital for civic engagement » , Annual Conference of the National Communication Association, Chicago, USA , (pp. 1-25) , p 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p .5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In this framework, Tarcza<sup>11</sup> focuses on the external communication, regardless of the promotional activities. One must take into account a series of supporting communication elements, such as: brand, image, labeling and packing of a product / service, employees' attitude and behavior, environment of workplaces (recorder, head offices, stores, warehouses, etc.) All of these elements led to the construction of communications capital.

In a convergence of the relational and management approaches, Mulholland (2005), in his article entitled: *Communication capital: A manifestation of social capital and an analytic method*, focused on face-to-face interactions, proposing to rename "talk at work" as a communications capital. For him, even the shortest conversation between people may be work-related.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, Aggestam (2006)<sup>13</sup> emphasizes "who said what, to who, how, when, why, and with what effect", and this refers to what the organizational actors say and do together. Aggestam also highlights two characteristics of communication capital: the fact that it is a social process that can be seen through a network perspective and the fact that it is an essential component of the corporate responsibility to create knowledge and technical ingenuity and benefit from it (assets as well as other intangible assets).

Smith (2001) sees communication capital as an interactional capital, while Coutant (2007) combines it with interactive skills.<sup>14</sup>

There is a fine line in the transition from the relational approach to the administrative approach, and from the latter to the accounting approach, and this line is clearer in the way interactional aspects are associated with managerial issues, and less clear in the way administrative processes translate into tangible results.

Hartman & Lenk's communication capital modal<sup>15</sup> also examines the issue of efficient use of resources (including people) to achieve the desired outcomes. This strategic communication capital model shows that the intangible value of the strategic communication system is what drives the effective and efficient use of people and other resources that in turn lead to the desired business outcomes. Furthermore, it contains four main components: a strategic communication system, business operations, business outcomes and feedback on people in the organization and market elements. In this model, the strategic communication system represents the intangible assets that result from the entire set of strategic communication goals and the formulations of the strategic communication system as a comprehensive proactive tool for advancing organizational initiatives.

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<sup>11</sup> **Tarcza, T.** (2010) , « Some aspects of the role of visual identity in the successful implementation of the promotional strategy ». 6th International Conference "European Integration – New Challenges", Oradea, Romania ,(pp. 1158 - 1164), p. 1159.

<sup>12</sup> **Mulholland, J.** (2005) , « Communication capital: A manifestation of social capital and an analytic method ». The 7th ABC European Convention Copenhagen, Denmark: Business School, (pp. 1 - 12 ), p.5.

<sup>13</sup> **Aggestam, M** , op cit , pp. 1-13.

<sup>14</sup> **Matos .H , Nobre . G. F.** , op cit , p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> **Hartman, J ,& Lenk, M .** (2001) , « Strategic communication capital as an intangible asset » , The International Journal on Media Management(2(3) , p. 184.

Moreover, Malmelin (2007) provides an illustrative clip on this topic where he outlines the components of his pioneering model of Capital through which he calls for considering another approach: the communicational approach. In this model, he uses both internal and external communication of organizations of whatever nature, with physical and relational aspects as well as communicative competence. He believes that this type of capital is an integral part of intellectual capital and consists mainly of four factors: legal capital, organizational capital, human capital and relational capital. The communication capital here is understood to be the asset and supplier of the entire organization. Its model includes both internal communication within the organization and communications with stakeholders and other groups outside the organization. In addition to the physical assets of communications, communication capital includes communication systems and communication competencies, as well as assets that contain documented information, as well as organizational culture and management systems. These include inter-organizational interactions and relationships with stakeholders outside the organization.<sup>16</sup>

According to Mar's argument, communication capital includes the full relationship between companies and other persons or institutions, and these communications include: costumers, dealers, employees, raw material suppliers, legal authorities, and investors. This relationship is divided into two main groups: The first group includes the relationship that have been formalized by contracting with customers, raw material suppliers or major partners. The second mostly involves the informal relationship. Communication capital is considered a regulating bridge for intellectual capital operations and a bridge that helps these operations return to the market value. This capital consists of stability, dedicated loyalty, and customer relationship. Customer satisfaction, financial health, and price sensitivity are applied as indicators of this type of capital.<sup>17</sup>

From a different technical standpoint, communication capital is defined as the private assets that are used to create and operate all publicly available voice and commercial data networks in the economy.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the communication capital includes all investments by service providers, including their wireless purchases, in addition to the assets of private network equipment used in public works.

Pereira and Fossá add that communication capital is regulated in the internal relationships of members of organizations that are reflected in the external relations with stakeholders. As with social capital, organizational communication capital is also not measured, as it consists of intangible assets of organizations (assets that do not have a physical representation, but they generate market value) in addition to that they constitute the same intangible assets that can value the organization'

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<sup>16</sup> Malmelin, N , op cit , p. 301.

<sup>17</sup> **Khazani, A. J., & Alvar, S. Z.** (2016) , « Reviewing the relationship of social and intellectual capitals dimensions on the performance of Abadan and Khoramshahr universities staff » , International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1, p. 1292.

<sup>18</sup> **Corrado .C, Jager. K.** (2014) , « Communication Networks, ICT and Productivity Growth in Europe » , The Conference Board and Georgetown University Center for Business : economics Program Working Paper Series , p .15.

businesses.<sup>19</sup> And according to Viana the communicational capital, is what is directed towards capitalist investment in communications companies, which are increasingly monopolized. He supports his argument in his article in Portuguese entitled: *Beyond media criticism (Para Além da Crítica dos Meios de Comunicação)* saying that the communication capital sector is a very recent sector, it was already present in an embryonic form in the previous accumulation system, but it has become stronger and produces the process of increasing focus and centralization. He also believes that the dominance of capital over communications companies is mainly capital communications companies that reinforce what is marked by oligopoly, adding that communication capital is a real expression of capital domination in the process of communication through technological means.<sup>20</sup>

These conceptual outlines were defined from the interpretation that prevailed until then, and which already emphasized the transformation of tangible and intangible assets into a clear value for organizations. However, in recent years, concepts have been rearranged in attempts to define communication capital from a relational perspective, but this trend revealed a kind of inaccuracy, whenever it was approached with the concept of social capital. This can be seen in texts that link the term to the networks of conversations that exist in companies and local communities and, more generally, in areas of interaction, with reference to the human competencies of relationships. The rebalancing of the concept and the relational approach does not mean giving up the consideration of "contact capital" as a stock of tangible and intangible resources. On the contrary, there is an important relationship between the concept and microeconomics; but the assets that used to be considered a part of communication capital are now seen in terms of the relationships that encourage them. On the other hand, understanding this acquisition of capital has become easier than it has been, especially in organizations' balance sheets. After all, the communication capital is "fluid" and it permeates just about anything.

Based on all the above-mentioned, Nobre and Gil 2017<sup>21</sup> tried to revise the previous concepts and build a comprehensive idiomatic control for the communication capital, where they define it as: a group of tangible and intangible resources that spread in organizations and social groups, through exchanging information and perceptions. These exchanges contribute to enhancing human and relational skills, which leads to valuable gains for organizations (when activated through the communication activities with stakeholders), local communities, and social actors, which is what we see as a comprehensive definition.

<sup>19</sup> **Pereira, F. C., & Fossá, M. I.** (2013) , « Capital Comunicacional Comunitário e as Organizações de Comunicação Comunitária ». V Seminário Internacional de Pesquisa em Comunicação. UFSM , p .5.

<sup>20</sup> **Viana, N.** (2007) , « Para Além da Crítica dos Meios de Comunicação. In Indústria Cultural e Cultura Mercantil. », Rio de Janeiro, Corifeu , <https://informecritica.blogspot.com/2011/04/para-alem-da-critica-dos-meios-de.html?m=0> , (pp. 8 - 29) , p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> **Nobre .G.F, Gil P.G.** (2017) « Creative Economy and Communicational Capital » , 24th APDR Congress. APDR. From [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337331831\\_Creative\\_Economy\\_and\\_Communicational\\_Capital](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337331831_Creative_Economy_and_Communicational_Capital) , p .315.

### 3. Discussion of results:

In light of the above and another group of literature that we did not dwell on for brevity, it can be easily said that most of the authors have linked the concept of communication capital to a group of elements and features. We summarize them as follows: First, what distinguishes the relational approach to communication capital is the characteristic of “**Relationships**”, i.e. it closely looks into the cognitive interactive aspects<sup>22</sup>. This is in addition to its overlap with social capital, as many researchers believe such as Castro<sup>23</sup> and Jeffres and others (2013)<sup>24</sup> who argue that there is an optional but welcomed link between the communication capital and the social capital. This trend has enabled communication professionals as people (not just people as professionals) and local communities to consider their humanity aspects (not just the aspects of assets and capital). For instance, aspects as trust, imagination, and "psychological/spiritual support" that are the basis for collective mobilization and participation and work, just like the administrative account and the entrepreneurial pursuit of profit.

**Resources** are used to communicate in organizations and with it<sup>25 26</sup> and are usually activated by marketing teams as many researchers believe like Ciprian,<sup>27</sup> and Fragouli, 2015<sup>28</sup>. Others, in the same context, view communication capital as an investment that is directly applied in corporate communications (Viana 2007) (Viana 2013) and others view it as a result of acquiring media groups (Peixoto, 2011).<sup>29</sup> Whereas, some of the literature focused on companies' commercial interests such as (Córdova's 2016)<sup>30</sup> study, and on the management of image by adding value to brands and reducing investment costs which can be summarized in **procedures and strategies**. The latter has the power to influence bankruptcy of organizations and the investment revenue assessments (Zadeh et al, 2014).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mačerinskienė, I., & Survilaitė, S. (2011), « Communication capital and company's value added », 1st International Scientific Conference “Practice and Research in Private and Public Sector”, pp. 267-274.

<sup>23</sup> Castro, F. F. (2011), « Capital comunicacional, cidadania e território na Amazônia », (pp. 65-82). Scriba/FADESP, Belém, pp. 68-71.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffres, L., Jian, G., Yoon, S. (2013), Conceptualizing Communication Capital for a Changing Environment, op cit.

<sup>25</sup> De Beer, E. (2014), « Creating value through communication », Public Relations Review, 40(2), pp. 136-143, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Khozani, A. J., & Alvar, S. Z., op cit, p. 1291.

<sup>27</sup> Ciprian, G., Radu, V., Madalina, G., Lucia, V. (2012), « From visible to hidden intangible assets », Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, (62), pp. 682-688, p. 687.

<sup>28</sup> Fragouli, E. (2015), « Intellectual Capital & Organizational Advantage: an economic approach to its valuation and measurement », International Journal of Information Business and Management, 7(1), pp. 36-55, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Peixoto, M. A. (2011), Igreja Universal e Uso do Capital Comunicacional. V Congresso Internacional em Ciências da Religião. Goiânia, pp. 85-86.

<sup>30</sup> Córdova, F. M., Durán, C. A., & Galindo, R. (2016), Evaluation of intangible assets and best practices in a medium-sized port community. Procedia Computer Science, 91, pp. 75-84, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Zadeh, M. S., Abdollahian, E., & Ziaei, S. M. (2014), Investigating the correlation between the intellectual capital and financial performance in companies listed on Tehran Stock Exchange. Life Science Journal, 11(12s), pp. 77-83, p. 81.

On the other hand, we find that other literature has focused on the consequences or broad results for companies in terms of competition or financial health (Khozani & Alvar, 2016) but with particular attention to enriching its human capital, in favor of internal entrepreneurship like commitment and learning. It also appears through this review that Siah (2014), Allameh, Rafiei, and others are interested in setting "communication capital" in a triple dimension of capital in organizations (other than human and structural).

The models of (Hartman & Lenk, 2001) and (Malmelin, 2007) may be the most comprehensive models for the various elements mentioned above, as it provides a device for concepts and common relations. This, thus, creates a good basis for discussions on the development of business communication resources. Moreover, it also provides a basis for concepts and common visions to the business communication and its future direction's performance, and other types of communication outside the framework of regulation.

#### **Conclusion:**

The current study has shed light on six possible basic approaches to understanding communication capital (accounting, marketing, managerial, symbolic, relational, and finally communication that has been neglected somewhat by research which have been concerned with the conceptualization itself). In addition, we were also able to come up with the most important key elements shared between the various presented conceptual definitions, which are mainly represented in *relationships*, *resources*, *structures*, *results*, as well as *procedures*. This is in addition to focusing on the argumentation that brings together the intellectual capital and the communication capital, given that the relationship between them is the part-to-whole relationship.

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