Strategic management of communication in the Church

Prof. Juan Manuel Mora
Professore della Pontificia
Università della Santa Croce

Introduction

In management literature, the use of examples and analogies is common practice because they help to illustrate some features of the management function. I would therefore like to begin this presentation by calling to mind the metaphor of the "mirror and the window", proposed by Collins in his studies on leadership.[1]

After analyzing many cases of successful management, this author has found a common denominator. According to Collins, a true leader is the one who, when he wants to find the cause of his company's problems or who is responsible for something that is not going well, would look in the mirror, searching within himself and within his own organization. He also describes a true leader as the one who, in seeking the cause of business success or to whom credit is due for it, would look through the window, analyzing the external factors that have led to this success. The mirror shows responsibilities, while the window shows the merits.

In Collins' view, those who do not have true leadership qualities act in the exact opposite way. They always attribute their problems to external factors while considering themselves the key to success.

I think this metaphor is a starting point, because it transmits the basic idea that to improve the effectiveness of an activity it is necessary first of all to do it better[2]. This experience can also be applied to Church communication, an activity improved through concentric rings, from inside – outwards, a process that can be called progressive professional maturation.

Against this background, throughout this presentation I will try to address three questions: a) What is institutional communication; b) on whom does the responsibility of managing it falls and thirdly c) how is communication governed within organizations, in the sense of strategic management. Please note that I refer to communication within organizations in general, both in the secular as well as religious spheres. I would however try to draw conclusions that can be applied to communication in and from the Church.

1.   What is institutional communication?

In order to manage an activity, it is first of all necessary to know what it is, to identify its component elements as well as its dynamic. Hence we begin by recalling some basic notions on institutional communication. As a point of departure, I will use the pragmatic description

---

[1] Cf. COLLINS, Jim: "Level 5 Leadership", in *Harvard Business Review*, 1-2001, pp. 67-76.
[2] Stephen Covey has popularized the expression "inside-out", to summarize the essential path to business improvement. He says that doing things better within the business is a necessary base for external prestige. (cf. COVEY, Stephen: "Le sette regole per avere successo", FrancoAngeli, Milan 2005). An analogous lesson is recalled by the marketing motto of "simply better", because in the final analysis, in order to increase sales and compete better, it is important to do well whatever needs to be done, be it manufacturing a product or lending a service.

formulated by an English author. Dolphin describes institutional communication as "The process that translates the identity into an image"[3] and says that institutional communication works when identity and image coincide.

Following this thesis, the work of institutional communication does not consist in promoting an image disconnected with reality, nor does it involve creating an artificial popularity through merely technical means. Strictly speaking, an organization does not "manufacture" its public image, but rather "merits" it to the extent in which the image reflects reality.

It is important to take note of the word "process" used in Dolphin's definition. Process calls to mind an itinerary that goes from identity to image. The idea of a process implies a certain complexity, developed over time and which passes through different stages. We will now take a look at the process of institutional communication, distinguishing the phases produced within the institution and those verified externally.

A.   Within the Institution

The part of the communication process produced within institutions can be described as a three-step sequence:

Knowing ones identity

As in interpersonal communication, the starting point of institutional communication is precisely ones identity; that collection of features that make up the personality of an institution and which distinguishes it from others. It includes its origin, history, mission and essential characteristics. The identity of an organization is a given which cannot be invented but is rather expressed in the process of communication.[4]

For an institution to communicate, self knowledge is an indispensable first step. This demands reflection, self-awareness and interiorization.[5] It is common to find this self reflection in texts, statutes, ideals and collection of inspired principles. Self knowledge is also manifested in an intellectual vision shared by the members of the institution because the act of freely joining an institution requires an intellectual adhesion to its principles.

---

[3] "Identity is how the organization really is. Image is what the organization appears to be. If communications succeed in their task, the image and the identity may be one and the same" (DOLPHIN, Richard R: "The Fundamentals of Corporate Communication", Butterworth-Heinemann, London 2000, pp. 42-44). Along this same line, cf. also LA PORTE, Jose Maria: "Introduzione alla comunicazione istituzionale", en ZANACCHI, Adriano & LEVER, Franco & RIVOLTELLA, Pier Cesare (a cura di): "La comunicazione: il Dizionario di scienza e tecniche", Elledici-Rai, Roma 2002.

[4] The key nature of identity in the processes of institutional communication depends very much on the nature of the organization. The importance of identity in communicative activities of an institution should not be confused with the same identity in events. Neither should the relevance of the identity of a political institution be confused with that of a commercial enterprise. Although for reasons of space, it is not possible to dwell too much on this point, it is necessary to point out these nuances.

[5] [The Church] "needs to reflect on itself. It needs to feel its own life. It must learn to acquire a better self-knowledge of itself if it wants to live its own vocation and offer to the world its message of fraternity and salvation" (PAUL VI, Encyclical Ecclesiam suam, 6-VIII-1964, n. 8, in www.vatican.va). On his part, John Paul II notes that the loss of identity is preceded by the loss of memory (cf. JOHN PAUL II, "Memory and Identity", Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2005). This affirmation throws a clear light on the problem of the Christian roots of Europe: more than theoretical arguments it is necessary to revive in European citizens the "Christian memory" written in literature, architecture, art in general and in the lives of saints.

In this first phase, the great obstacle is considering communication as an end in itself, isolating it from the issue of one's identity. This happens when communication is limited to its technical aspects, thinking that the important thing is to express oneself clearly, ignoring the contents. It could also happen when one identifies the aim of communication with a "political" objective, thinking that the important thing is consensus, to be accepted no matter what the cost.

Incarnate Identity into the Culture

The shared vision of ones identity does not remain on paper, nor in texts defining the principles of the institution. Identity is imprinted on life and in the totality of actions that form the culture of the institution. This includes its way of working, its way of organizing itself and its activities.[6] Let us here recall some familiar words spoken by John Paul II in another context: "a faith that does not produce culture is a faith not fully accepted, not totally thought about and not faithfully lived".[7] We could also add that: a faith that does not produce culture is a faith that cannot be communicated.

The great dangers of communication in this second phase are a) the theoretical mentality that leads one to think that communication consists especially in the declaration of intentions, as well as b) the incoherence implied by working against ones identity.

Create a Discourse.

From identity to action, from action to word. In order to communicate it is necessary to know oneself. Next, one needs to work in accord with ones identity, showing it in concrete actions. It is also necessary to express the identity and culture in a conversation with others, making use of understandable words and arguments. In order to communicate, an institution needs to make its being and its deeds public.

The conversation should be above all understandable. Being clear for a religious institution does not imply renouncing mystery, denying transcendence or to make the message commonplace, all of which will be equivalent to forgetting ones identity. To be understandable means to situate in its proper context religious experiences, transmiting the sense of actions, its reasons and its aims[8]. When the time comes to speak, the greatest obstacle to communication is not in the obscurity of mysteries, but rather in the opacity of the language. Transparency is precisely the quality of letting something that is beyond to be seen, because words are not for hiding things, rather they are for revealing things to the extent possible[9].

---

[6] Luigi Accatoli has pointed out that John Paul II effectively communicated the sense of Christian mercy with the words of the Encyclical "Dives in misericordia", and in deeds, by visiting Ali Agca in prison.

[7] JOHN PAUL II: Decree for the creation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in L'Osservatore Romano, 6-VI-1982. Cardinal Ratzinger made reference to the incarnation of faith in culture with these words: "The time-honored and fundamental way of inculturation is the development of a Christian culture in its different dimensions: a culture of communion, social help, respect for the weak, overcoming class differences, attention to those who suffer and to the dying; a culture that offers in a balanced formation of reason and of the heart; a political culture and a juridical culture; a culture of dialogue and of respect for life". A culture ultimately leads to the "artistic work" (RATZINGER, Joseph: "Introduzione allo spirito della liturgia", San Paolo, Milano 2001, p. 197).

[8] "La forma originaria della preghiera cristiana può dirci ancora oggi qualcosa o dobbiamo semplicemente cercare la nostra forma, la forma per il nostro tempo? Ovviamente no vi è solo il desiderio di imitare il passato. Ogni età deve ritrovare ed esprimere l'essenziale." (RATZINGER, op. cit., p. 76).

[9] Joaquín Navarro-Valls, said in an interview with Marco Tosatti: "Vedo in Benedetto XVI la confluenza di due caratteristiche, tra molte altre, per niente comuni. Da una parte, una stupenda ricchezza intellettuale, una brillantissima densità di pensiero. E d'altra, una straordinaria capacità di esprimere le idee con una semantica accessibile. La gente segue affascinata la sua parola che è, insieme, colma di significato e di accessibilità. La nostra epoca così disomogenea ha uno straordinario bisogno di chiarire i contenuti dei concetti, e vedo che Benedetto XVI fa proprio quello che il nostro tempo chiede e necessita" (*La Stampa*, 27-III-2006).

The path that leads from identity to culture and from culture to speech, the "internal" gradient of institutional communication, implies movement. It also requires a harmony, not a contradiction between what an institution is, what it thinks of itself, what it does and what it says. In other words, the main criteria for evaluating institutional communication in its internal gradient, is consistency. The harmony of the process is destroyed more by a lack of coherence than by inefficiency. There is no authentic communication when there is a lack of agreement between being, thinking, doing and saying. Coherence forms, so to speak, the "truth" of an institution which is afterwards reflected in its image.

B.   Outside the Organization

The Identity, culture and discourse of an organization reach the targets, together with many other perceptions, a thousands ideas, actions and words. The construction of the image does not only depend on how an institution expresses itself, but also on how these expressions are received. We refer now to three elements of this external gradient of institutional communication.

Be credible

For the target to accept a message, the person or organization sending it must be credible. Just as credibility is based on truthfulness and the moral integrity of persons, lies and suspicion fundamentally render a nullity the process of communication.

In communication as in economics a lot of weight is given to endorsements. The endorsement of a mediator (a journalist, expert, impartial observer) represents a guarantee for public opinion. It is not possible for an institution to impose its prestige; rather it has to win it with its socially responsible actions. No one can endorse himself. There are instances that exercise this evaluating function. When taking part in public debates one should therefore be aware of that circumstance, acting in consequence without arrogance.

Be Relevant

The public discourse of an institution has to be not only clear and credible but also significant. The discussion has to contribute something new and interesting to whoever hears it. There comes to mind the distinction made by Thomas Aquinas and recalled by Pieper between two possible ways of communicating. The first way, *locutio* consists in saying something which in reality is of no interest to the target and of not effect on it. The second, *illuminatio* consists of saying something that throws light and helps the target audience to understand the reality in a new way[10].

According to this distinction institutions limit their communicative possibilities when they become self-referential, speaking only about themselves and ignoring the problems around them. A message reaches its target public when it is luminous, when it aids the understanding of the deep questions of the human soul and the crucial questions about ones life and the world situation.

Transmit Empathy

The process of institutional communication does not obey the laws of mechanics or that of biology, nor can it be reduced to the mere transmission of concepts. It always implies a relation between

---

[10] Cf. PIEPER, Joseph: "La fe ante el reto de la cultura contemporánea", Rialp, Madrid 1980, p. 132.

free persons, each with his convictions and emotions. Coldness and anonymity makes communication impossible.

Something similar happens when personal interests are converted into the only aim of communication. An institution has to contribute with its actions to the common good, not only seeking its own particular good. The target public has to see that the institution pays attention to the situation of the people around it, listens to their reasons, understands their problems and tries to do something to resolve them.

Credibility, relevance and empathy configure the "external" gradient of organizational communication[11]. The criteria for evaluating the efficacy of this part of the process can be summarized in one word: <u>trust</u>. When an institution merits the confidence of the people it speaks to, communication takes place without obstacle and the perceived image ends up reflecting the identity without any deformation.

Ultimately, institutional communication is a process of dialogue between an institution and its publics[12]. It is a dialogue between free persons who speak and listen to one another. It is at the same time a simple as well as a complex process that calls for careful management.

2.   Who Manages Institutional Communication

A.   <u>The responsibility of the organization's Directors</u>

As we have already seen, important consequences for the life of any organization can be drawn from institutional communication. This includes its public image, its reputation and social prestige. In the case of a commercial enterprise, these consequences constitute the "intangible" elements that have considerable economic effects such as stock value, attraction of new clients and employees satisfaction[13]. In institutions of a religious nature, the effects, though not less intangible and not less important, are of a different kind since they refer to the knowledge of ones identity held by the members of the organization in promoting definite values in public debate.

Communication is a factor that helps or puts obstacles to the development of the mission of an organization in society. It can thus be said that "the vitality of an institution depends to a large extent on its capacity to take on the complexity of its environment and its skill to communicate with other social institutions"[14]. Knowing that what is at stake is "the vitality of an institution", we can now try to answer the first question on the management of institutional communication: With respect to its strategies and ultimate aims, communication cannot be delegated. In other words, communication is governed by whoever governs the institution.

---

[11] It is possible to establish a parallelism between these terms and the three classical elements of Rhetoric: ethos, logos, pathos.

[12] Cf. GRUNIG, Larissa A & GRUNIG, James E & DOZIER, David M: "Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations", LEA, New Jersey 2002, pp. 355-378. As regards dialogue within the ambit of the Catholic Church, cf. PAOLO VI: Encyclical "Ecclesiam suam", cit., especially nn. 27-41. Cf. also WOJTYLA, Karol: "Alle fonti del rinnovamento", Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1981, in particular the chapter "Fede e Dialogo".

[13] Vid. FOMBRUN, Charles J: "Reputation. Realizing value from the corporate image", Harvard Business School Press, Boston 1996. The assessment of the results of institutional communication is a little explored field. Probably the next few years will see the development of research in this direction. It is necessary to have critical methods for interpreting the relation between the work of institutional communication (which subsists above all in the development of ideas) and its results, in the creation of intangible goodwill, with evident economic (and thus measurable) benefits.

[14] LLANO, Alejandro: "Empresa y responsabilidad social", in *Nuestro Tiempo*, XII-2002, p. 57.

The responsibility of communication in its entirety as well as its effectiveness falls on the directors of the institution. This communication functions where and when the directors understand it to be. They sustain and promote it, even though they may not be communication specialists[15]. There is no reason to consider that the Church is an exception in this[16].

The professional profile of the organizational directors is often defined by a collection of qualities which are traditionally related with the activity of governances. These include prudence, leadership, sense of responsibility, enterpreneurship, collegial vision and fortitude[17]. In giving a push to the tasks of communication the directors always put in play other specific qualities such as showing an openness to communication in general; interests for cultural and social trends; capacity to listen and to dialogue and attention to the external repercussions of the activities of their own organization[18]. It is thanks to this collection of attitudes that the directors find themselves able to establish communication priorities, channel resources and follow up the execution of plans. With this strategic vision of communication they assume all these tasks as part of their overall directive function.

B.   The Tasks of the Communication Department

From the gradual development of the aforementioned steps of the first part of this paper, one gets the idea that the process of institutional communication is a jointed phenomenon that is not easily grasped.   All the ideas, actions and words of an institution communicate. We can affirm that the Catholic Church has one billion spokespersons, because this is what each Catholic is. Furthermore, we are talking about a process that is in some sense ungovernable because it involves free persons in unpredictable situations. The dynamic of its work does not allow for rigid planning nor of infallible prophesies, even less of centralized behaviors.[19]

At the same time however, we should recall here an often quoted statement in other spheres: when everything is communication, nothing is communication. The total disappearance of frontiers is equivalent to the disappearance of territories. Without profiles there are no bodies; and without limits there is no matter; and finally, without specialization there is no profession. As is often the case with matters which affect people or financial resources, the directors need the help of a specialized department to promote the tasks of communication in an organized way.

---

[15] Cf. for example, GRUNIG & GRUNIG & DOZIER: op. cit., pp. 178-179.

[16] Cf. CONGREGAZIONE DEI VESCOVI: "Direttorio per il ministero pastorale dei Vescovi", Roma 24-I-2004, in www.vatican.va. Numbers 134-137 summarise the responsibilities of the Bishops in matters of communication.

[17] An interesting description of the personality of the manager is that offered by MINTZBERG, Henry & GOSLING, Jonathan: "The Five Minds of a Manager", in *Harvard Business Review*, XI-2003, pp. 54-63. The article on the state of management published *The Economist* il 9-III-2002 sumarises thus the essential abilities of a good manager, after a period of scandals and errors: "be honest, be frugal, be prepared".

[18] Peter Drucker affirms that the most important flow of information in a business that is upwardly bound, moving towards the manager, rather than the contrary. According to this author, the scarce capacity to listen to this "ascending" information leads to limited flexibility of the business to adapt itself to changing situations. (cf. DRUCKER, Peter: "What Makes an Effective Executive", in *Harvard Business Review*, VI-2004, p. 61).

[19] For those of us who followed from Rome the events of April 2005, the media impact of the death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI, it was easy to see that we were witnessing something that would have been impossibile to programme, something bigger than a communications plan, although it certainly implied excellent communications work. This happens together in the communication of the Church: the media system remains fascinated when faced with the truth and the beauty of the transcendent, of the sacred, which have a symbolism of great communicative force.

The department of communication is the place for organised professional work, where the tasks of communication of the institution are studied, promoted and coordinated[20]. The department offers a platform of knowledge and experience that allows it to discharge these functions with the same professionalism as that with which other tasks in the organisation are done. Of course, those who work in this department need an open vision, not centralised: they have to be aware that communication pertains to everyone; it is a shared culture, not something reserved to them[21]. But at the same time the department has to be the motor of these activities.

Within the framework of general decisions of the managerial team, the department participates in the management of institutional communication. To delimit the way of participating, we could ask ourselves: "What do the directors of the institution expect from the communications department? What does the institution itself expect? In the studies carried out among presidents and board members of businesses, frequent responses include two expectations: the capacity to work with the management team: and the ability to resolve problems in that ambit.

We have already mentioned some features of the professional profile of the directors. Now it would be helpful to refer to the directors of communication. In many countries these professionals usually come from the world of journalism, and their previous experience has allowed them to develop habits typical of communication: curiosity, independence, an instinct for news and the creativity to report it[22]. These qualities are important for the work of institutional communication, especially for resolving practical problems which appear daily. Thanks to this profile the director of communication is considered by journalists to be a well prepared colleague, which helps the professional relationship.

However, in order to co-operate with the management team of the institution, the director of communication needs to develop other habits as well: the capacity to coordinate teams, to plan in the medium- and long-term, to define strategies, to respect hierarchies and procedures, to manage budgets and balance-sheets, to know the institution in depth, to adapt to structures and to be prudent in decision-making[23]. These qualities allow the director of communications to be seen by those running the organisation as a well prepared colleague, even when his or her function is "staff" rather than management. It also eases the integration of the department within the dynamic of the institution.[24]

At this point we can re-formulate the question: who directs institutional communication? The preceding considerations lead to an articulated response: whoever manages the institution manages communication, with the assistance of a specialised department, and the participation of all the members of the organisation. Therefore the management of institutional communication needs a solid point of support: the management team and the department of communication being in-tune

---

[20] Cf. NIETO, Alfonso, "Economia della Comunicazione istituzionale", School of Institutional Communication (handout for the use of students), Rome 2005, pp. 233-245.

[21] Jaoui and Pons state that the creation of a department brings with it this danger: "dare alla direzione dell'azienda l'alibi dello specialista, che la farebbe scaricare del suo ruolo principale: l'animazione" (JAOUI, Hubert & PONS, Francois-Marie: "La comunicazione pratica al servizio delle imprese", FrancoAngeli, Milan 1994, p. 179).

[22] There is an ever-increasing number of professionals who have arrived at this position after having acquired a specific preparation, or at least with work experience in communications agencies.

[23] According to some authors, "the quality of judgement is the top quality" of a director of communcations (DOLPHIN, o.c., p.150). Other considerations about the profile of the communications director are given in SEITEL, Fraser: "The Practice of Public Relations", op. cit., p. 177-178.

[24] Some limiting factors impede the communications director from carrying out his role in a strategic way: "lack of business expertise, passivity, naiveté about organizational politics, and inadequate education, experience or organizational status" (GRUNIG & GRUNIG & DOZIER, op. cit., p. 149).

with one another[25], a characteristic that requires interdisciplinary vision, or better, "inter-professional" vision, capable of integrating the management mentality with the communications mentality. It is a being in-tune that also has to be a feature of ecclesial organisations.[26]

3. How institutional communication is directed

A. <u>Characteristics of strategic management</u>

After describing the process of institutional communication, and indicating to whom corresponds the responsibility of managing it, now is the moment to ask how it should be directed and, specifically, what "strategic management" means[27]. In its origin, the word "strategy" refers to the art of directing military operations. This concept has its counterpart in the word "tactics" which refers more to the shorter term: we could say that tactics are aimed at "winning a specific battle", while strategy aspires to "winning the war".[28]

With time, the idea of strategy has been exported to other fields, such as business management, and even sports. Nowadays, the term strategy has been quite generalised, and refers to the science or art of ordering the actions of an organisation as a whole, and orienting them to the achievement of its ends in the long term, in accord with its possibilities and with the opportunities of its environment. We could underline three fundamental aspects of strategic management:

a) Good results are aimed at, therefore it is not reduced to rational planning of activities, or to a theoretical program, but it aspires to achieve operative benefits, which are conditions for the survival for an organisation.

b) It attempts to attain good results in essential aspects of its activity; it is not satisfied with achieving targets in secondary matters: a car-making factory needs to sell cars; a public transport system has to offer a good service to users. Successes in peripheral matters are not crucial.

c) It tries to get good results in a sustained way over time, and therefore brilliant but ephemeral results are not enough, nor profitable activities that expend capital or diminish sustainability in some way.

---

[25] Integration is not always easy. An example taken from academia: If we look over the *curricula* of the Schools of Business Management we note the abundant presence of communications techniques, such as the communicative ability of the leader, or the use of communication in print. But we miss the lack of material analysing the strategic dimension of communication. On the other hand, looking over the *curricula* of the Schools of Communication, we observe a significant lack of the basic notions of management. It is licit to affirm that communicators come equipped neither to understand the logic of leadership, nor to work with or direct organisations. When the moment arrives to work together, the formative limits of these professionals bring with them inevitable practical consequences: it is not strange that problems of incompatibility arise between leaders and communicators, who use a different logic and language. Anyway, as we have seen, in the field of institutional communication, it is necessary to join forces: both must make an effort to integrate, for the good of the institutions and their work.

[26] In his various interventions in the "Communications and Management" course of the School of Communication of the University of the Holy Cross, Prof. Yanguas has repeated these concepts: "Chi lavora nel campo della comunicazione, come in qualsiasi altro ambiente ecclesiale, deve sforzarsi per mantenersi sempre in sintonia con il proprio Vescovo, deve inserirsi nel quadro generale della pastorale diocesana, essere attento agli indirizzi del Vescovo, assecondando e a volte suggerendo iniziative o argomenti, dando forma concreta ai propositi, intenzioni e obiettivi del Vescovo. In sintesi, senso di responsabilità ecclesiale". We can summarise these ideas in the formula: giving professional expression to pastoral aims.

[27] The expression "strategic management" could even be considered tautological, repeating as it does two concepts that in fact can be similar: management and strategy.

[28] KIM, W. Chan & MAUBORGNE, Renée (Etas Libri, Milano 2005), in "Strategia Oceano Blu" make an original contribution in the field of strategy. A panoramic vision of the diverse schools in this discipline can be found in MINTZBERG, Henry & AHLSTRAND, Bruce & LAMPEL Joseph: "Strategic safari", Prentice Hall, New York 1998.

These are the kinds of results that strategic management aim to achieve. To bring this about it makes use of available resources while involving the members of the organization. Strategy requires the work of planning, which means to determine general objectives, establish the line of action and take principal decisions. Strategic management is not however a collection of rigid rules and a programmes that cannot be modified. It is a general directional plan that is flexible and capable of being adapted to changing contents and unforeseen situations.

These considerations on strategy can be applied to the government of institutions in all its aspects and they are also useful in the specific field of communication.[29] When speaking of Church communication we can conclude that its management strategy aims to bring about a public image that faithfully and stably reflects the reality of the Church, in essential aspects with the participation of all those who form part of the institution.

With respect to determining objectives that are fundamental aspects of government, an immediate consequence can be drawn from this approach. Effective strategic management of communication demands that the specific objectives of the department be aligned with the more general aims of the institution.[30] In the case of the Church the activities of communication are at the service of its essential mission in its permanent aspects such as communion and evangelization, as well as in tangential aspects as for example a crisis of vocations. This orientation of the particular to the general is the criteria for establishing priorities in the work of communication.[31]

B. Principles of Strategic Management of Communication

Strategic management does not only refer to the selection of objectives but affects also the planning of the means to use as well as the attitude of those at the head. It is not possible to programme *a priori* all the specific steps of a plan. It is however important to establish the general outline of these steps of action and the main affirmations and disagreements that would guide the decision making processes. What can be done and what should be avoided should be clearly stated in all cases. Strategic management defines these general principles of action and these principles should always be respected in all operations.[32]

We have illustrated institutional communication as the process of transforming identity into image through the expression of the culture and discourse of an institution. It has also been stated that this process always presupposes credibility, relevance and empathy. Against the background of this process, we will now state four principles of strategic management of communication, principles that give dynamism to this process and imparts movement to it. These principles can be applied to the Church:

---

[29] Vid. BEARD, Michael: "Running a Public Relations Department", Kogan Page Ltd, London 2001, a text that puts propounds a overall vision and also outlines many practical elements in the management of a department of communication.

[30] With reference to a different sphere, Seitel indicates that the general objectives of the business "dictate" the particular objectives of the department (SEITEL, op .cit., p. 178).

[31] Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS: Pastoral Instruction "Aetatis Novae", Rome, 22-II-2002, in www.vatican.va. In particular the appendix dedicated to the "Elements of a pastoral plan for social communications". The "Direttorio sulle Comunicazioni Sociali nella Missione della Chiesa" of the Italian Episcopal Conference, published in 2004, represents an important contribution in this field.

[32] Vid. MORA, Juan Manuel: "El departamento de comunicación: factor de cohesión y dinamismo", in ARRESE, Angel (Editor): "Empresa informativa y mercados de la comunicación. Estudios en honor del Profesor Alfonso Nieto Tamargo", EUNSA, Pamplona 2003, pp. 389-410.

Take the Initiative: To make public image reflect reality, institutions cannot be satisfied with a policy of reactive and defensive communication that is limited to proceeding at the pace of external requests for comments. Being aware of their identity and as masters of their acts, institutions can also be "designers" of their image. If the image does not correspond to the identity, nothing is gained by laying the blame on third parties. We have already said that communication does not invent identity, because identity is something received. This conviction does not however mean that one should be passive. On the contrary, initiative is called for. The way of expressing ones identity has to be faithful and at the same time creative, realistic and attractive. The director of communication needs to be enterprising, have an eye to the future and be able to overcome difficulties. In other words, he has to pay attention to the entrepreneurial aspect of his work.

Work with Projects: One of the most effective ways of working with an enterprising mentality is what is usually called the "management by projects". Projects are concrete initiatives that express the identity of the institution and which shows them "in action" at the service of the society in which it lives. For example, the starting of a hospital, the presentation of a doctrinal document, the restoration of a work of art, are activities that can either pass unnoticed or be converted into communicative projects of great efficacy. These are events that allow one to make known in a visible and concrete way an aspect of the Christian identity, which is part of the message of the Church. The job of institutional communication can be summarized as discovering interesting projects and transforming them into opportunities for communication. The interest elicited by the projects is greater according to its increased capacity to express the essence of the institution. One should just think for example of the communicative force inherent in works of charity whenever it is reported with the due tone, without being either paternalistic or immodest. The director of communication needs imagination and practicality to carry out this work and to think more about projects than about problems. In summary, he should develop the communicative aspect of his task.

Stay Focused: Strategic management of communication obliges one never to lose the essential point of view. The main thing for the Church is to transmit its "message of salvation".[33] Consequently, everything which bears on contents has a preferential place in the work of the department of communication. This includes every shared reflection that allows one to better understand his own identity and to transmit it to his environment; the search for new ways of expression about life, the family, grace, education, charity, peace and the sacraments. It also refers to the effort to show that the Church is relevant and a source that makes a generous contribution to good sense. The director of communication is not a spectator but a guide who is always looking for personal testimonies, faces, interesting and attractive stories, which will show the reality of the Church in its fundamental aspects.[34] This means that he should give a great importance to the intellectual aspect of his work such as observation, dialogue and study.

Take care of personal relations: Even though other tasks may seem more urgent and more effective, no aspect of the work of institutional communication is more important than professional relations. For a department of communication in particular, as an authoritative source of information, relations with journalists and creators of opinion are fundamental,[35]as people who should be provided a quality service. The communication department has to ensure that these relationships do not take the form of conflict, but rather of cooperation, always respecting mutual independence. Giving priority to the relational dimension of the work means converting it into a

---

[33] Cf. Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1992, n. 774.

[34] This communications effort represents a cultural change, described it is essential characteristcs by JOHN PAUL II in the Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio", 7-XII-1990, no. 37, in www.vatican.va.

[35] Vid. CARROGGIO, Marc: "Calidad en las oficinas de prensa", in ARRESE, op .cit., pp. 411-426.

constant learning opportunity, through attentive listening, in the permanent process of dialogue in which the Church is immersed.[36]

At different points in this presentation, some key works in the process of institutional communication have appeared. Examples are <u>coherence</u> between what an organization is, what is does and what it says. Another is the <u>confidence</u> attributed to it by its different publics; and the being <u>in-tune</u> between the directors of the institution and the department of communication. We can also include a final prerequisite which is <u>professionalism</u>, in managing the process of institutional communication. In particular, the director of communication needs to "learn the profession" in the four "dimensions" we have talked about: the entrepreneurial dimension, the communicative dimension, the intellectual and the relational dimension. These four aspects delineate the professional profile of the director of communication.

Epilogue

Before concluding let us return once more to the example of the mirror and the window with which we began this presentation. Collins affirms that the strangest aspect of this metaphor is that it actually does not conform to reality.[37] This author in effect maintains that reality is paradoxical because the true leader feels responsible for the failures of his business, when in reality that is not the case, as the problem is due to other causes. The true leader never considers himself to be the key to the success of his organization, but he frequently is, because he has known how to be a good director. Collins concludes that the true quality of a government is measured by the absence of a protagonist, meaning that good government is the sum total of professionalism and humility. Leaders with these characteristics are those who manage to transform a good business into a great business.[38]

The Church, which certainly has a particular and unmistakable identity, seeks neither privileges nor exceptions[39], not even in its activities of communication. The director of communication needs to "learn the institution", learn the Church, know its identity, its culture and the discourse of the institution for which he works. In a way, he has to allow himself to be personally surprised by the joyful news that is at the very origin of the Church and which will be extended throughout its history[40].

---

[36] On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of "Ecclesiam suam", John Paul II said with respect to dialogue: "non si tratta di un'esigenza pratica o di una opportunità dettata dalle circostanze. Oggi, in realtà, sarebbe inconcepibile una vita ecclesiale non dialogica e non ecumenica" (JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, 13-II-1994, in www.vatican.va).

[37] Cf. note 1: ibidem.

[38] Cf. COLLINS, Jim: "Good to Great", Harper Business, 2001. See also LLANO, Carlos: "Humility and Leadership", Ediciones Ruz, Mexico 2004.

[39] BENEDICT XVI: Discourse to the Quirinale, 24-VI-2005, in <u>www.vatican.va</u>.

[40] This is not the moment for an analysis of the relationship between identity, communication, and images in the life of a Christian. But perhaps it is worthwhile re-reading some interesting words of John Paul II on this topic. The text in question is a meditation from the Way of the Cross. "Secondo la tradizione, sulla via del Calvario una donna si fece strada tra i soldati che scortavano Gesù e con un velo asciugò il sudore e il sangue sul volto del Signore. Quel volto restò impresso nel velo; un riflesso fedele, una "vera icona". A questo si collegherebbe il nome stesso di Veronica. Se è così, questo nome, che rende memorabile il gesto compiuto da questa donna, racchiude allo stesso tempo la più profonda verità su di lei (...) Si manifesta così la profonda eloquenza dell'evento. Il Redentore del mondo dona a Veronica un'autentica immagine del suo volto. Il velo, su cui resta impresso il volto di Cristo, diventa un messaggio per noi. In un certo senso esso dice: Ecco come ogni atto buono, ogni gesto di vero amore verso il prossimo rafforza in chi lo compie la somiglianza col Redentore del mondo. Gli atti d'amore non passano. Ogni gesto di bontà, di comprensione, di servizio lascia nel cuore dell'uomo un segno indelebile, che lo rende sempre più simile a colui che "spogliò se stesso, assumendo la condizione di servo" (Fil 2, 7). Così si forma l'identità, il vero nome dell'uomo" (JOHN PAUL II, Via Crucis 21-IV-2000, VI station).

An institution that has given rise to universities has the condition to be relevant among intellectuals. An institution that for twenty centuries has dedicated its best resources to take care of the poor and sick possesses a rich patrimony of credibility. An institutional in whose womb was born the "Pietà" of Michelangelo knows what it means to express itself with clarity.

With such a comforting history, the work of communication in the Church today requires the building of bridges to connect identity and image, memory and project. We have the resources and we do not lack experts who teach us how to discover the essential things and to express them in ever new forms. The service of the communicator is the service of the mediator and the translator, and it implies being transparent and letting the inexhaustible beauty of the original figure shine out. It is the paradox that is contained by the metaphor of the mirror and the window: the secret of greatness is hidden in humility.

Thank you very much.