

TRENDS AND DIRECTIONS IN STUDIES ON INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze emerging trends, research directions, and conceptual developments in the study of internal communication and employee satisfaction within the public sector. Using a bibliometric approach, the research examines scientific publications indexed in major international databases in order to map the evolution of the field, highlight influential authors, journals, and keywords, and identify thematic clusters that define current research agendas. The analysis provides insights into how internal communication is conceptualized in relation to organizational climate, motivation, employee engagement, and public sector performance. results reveal increasing scholarly interest in communication effectiveness, digital communication tools, participatory management, and their impact on job satisfaction and administrative efficiency. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how the academic community approaches the intersection between communication practices and human resource outcomes, offering valuable guidance for future research and for improving communication strategies within public institutions.*

Key words: *research trends; organisational communication; public sector; knowledge mapping.*

Introduction

In contemporary public administration, the quality of internal communication has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness, employee well-being, and the delivery of public services. Public sector organizations-characterized by complex hierarchies, bureaucratic structures, and a strong service-oriented mission-presents unique challenges for fostering transparent, timely, and engaging communication flows. Unlike private firms driven primarily by profit motives, public institutions must balance accountability to citizens, political oversight, and rigid regulatory frameworks while striving to maintain a motivated workforce [1]. Consequently, the linkage between internal communication practices and employee satisfaction has gained increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades.

Employee satisfaction in the public sector is not merely a human resource concern; it directly influences absenteeism, turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior, and overall administrative performance[2]. Effective internal

communication is widely recognized as a foundational mechanism that shapes organizational climate, strengthens employee engagement, and enhances motivation [3], [4]. In recent years, the rapid digital transformation of public administration-accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic-has further intensified interest in how digital tools, remote communication platforms, and participatory management approaches affect job satisfaction among civil servants [5], [6].

Despite growing research, the field remains fragmented, with studies scattered across public administration, communication, management, and organizational psychology journals. Systematic efforts to map the intellectual structure, trace historical evolution, and identify emerging thematic clusters are still scarce. This bibliometric analysis addresses that gap by systematically reviewing scientific publications indexed in major international databases (Web of Science and Scopus). Employing performance analysis and science mapping techniques, the study identifies influential authors, core journals, keyword co-occurrence networks, and thematic clusters

that define current and future research agendas. By illuminating how internal communication is conceptually linked to employee satisfaction, engagement, motivation, and public sector performance, this study offers both theoretical insights for scholars and practical guidance for public managers seeking to design more effective communication strategies in an increasingly digital and participatory administrative environment.

Research methodology

This study employs a bibliometric analysis as its primary research methodology, a quantitative approach widely used in academic literature reviews to systematically map and evaluate scholarly output within a specific domain. Bibliometric analysis enables the identification of patterns, trends, and intellectual structures by analyzing metadata from publications, such as citations, authorship, keywords, and affiliations. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, this method provides an objective, data-driven perspective, minimizing researcher bias while revealing the evolution of research themes, influential contributors, and emerging directions. In the context of public sector studies on internal communication and employee satisfaction, bibliometric techniques are particularly suitable for synthesizing fragmented literature across disciplines like public administration, organizational communication, and human resource management.

The analysis focuses on scientific articles published in the Web of Science (WoS) database, selected for its comprehensive coverage of high-impact, peer-reviewed journals in social sciences and related fields. WoS was chosen over other databases like Scopus or Google Scholar

due to its rigorous indexing standards, citation tracking capabilities, and relevance to interdisciplinary topics in public administration. The temporal scope is limited to the period from 2020 to 2024, encompassing five years of recent publications to capture contemporary trends influenced by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, digital transformations in public services, and evolving employee well-being paradigms. This timeframe ensures the analysis reflects current scholarly discourse while providing a manageable dataset for in-depth examination (Fig. 1).

The methodology follows a structured, multi-step process adapted from established bibliometric frameworks. First, research objectives are defined to guide the inquiry, focusing on trends in internal communication and employee satisfaction. Second, data collection involves formulating precise search queries (e.g., combining terms like "internal communication," "employee satisfaction," "public sector," and synonyms) and retrieving records from WoS, including articles, reviews, and proceedings papers. Exclusion criteria will be applied to filter out irrelevant documents, such as those not in English or outside the public sector context. Third, data cleaning and preparation will address duplicates, incomplete entries, and standardization of keywords.

Literature review

Empirical research on internal communication and employee satisfaction in the public sector has proliferated, drawing from diverse methodologies including surveys, case studies, and regression analyses. Studies consistently demonstrate that satisfaction with internal communication channels—such as emails, intranets, and meetings—positively impacts employee engagement and



Fig. 1. Research methodology approach

organizational identification [7]. In higher education and military-affiliated institutions, for instance, communication satisfaction has been tied to broader human resource outcomes like retention and performance [8].

Transformational leadership emerges as a recurring theme, where leaders who prioritize transparent and strategic communication foster higher satisfaction levels [9]. This is particularly evident in public sectors like transportation and healthcare, where employee participation in decision-making via communication enhances job satisfaction and mitigates dissatisfaction from hierarchical structures [10].

To synthesize these insights, the following table summarizes key empirical studies, highlighting methodologies, samples, and primary findings (Tab 1):

Tab.1. Literature review

Study	Authors (Year)	Journal/Sources	Methodology	Sample/Context	Key Findings
<i>The interplay between internal communication, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and employee loyalty</i>	Nguyen & Ha (2023)	Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	Survey-based, structural equation modeling	Higher education institutions in Vietnam (public sector)	Internal communication mediates engagement and satisfaction, leading to loyalty via SET.
<i>Internal corporate communication and its impact on internal branding</i>	Sharma & Kamalanabhan (2012)	Corporate Communications: An International Journal	Empirical survey	Indian public sector employees	Communication and training enhance brand satisfaction and employee alignment.
<i>Internal communication satisfaction and employee engagement as determinants of the employer brand</i>	Špoljarić & Tkalac Verčič (2022)	Journal of Communication Management	Quantitative analysis	General public sector organizations	Satisfaction with communication boosts employer branding and engagement.
<i>Does good internal communication enhance life satisfaction?</i>	Šinčić Čorić & Pološki Vokić (2020)	Corporate Communications: An International Journal	Regression models	Croatian public and private employees	Internal communication predicts job and life satisfaction spillover.
<i>Communication and job satisfaction among public employees</i>	Pirrotta, Ferrari, & Cantarelli (2024)	International Journal of Public Sector Management	Large-scale surveys, linear regression	Healthcare professionals in public sector	Internal processes significantly influence job satisfaction.
<i>Employee Satisfaction with Internal Communication in Higher Education</i>	Hussein (2025)	Dibon Journal of Education	Mixed methods	Public relations and security media at Al-Istisqal University	Communication impacts engagement and satisfaction in educational public settings.
<i>Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction</i>	Men (2014)	Management Communication Quarterly	Survey with adapted scales	U.S. public sector organizations	Transformational leadership via channels improves satisfaction.
<i>The influence of internal communication satisfaction on employees' organisational identification</i>	Santiago (2020)	Journal of Economics & Management	Path analysis	Transportation and storage public sector	Perceived support mediates communication's effect on identification and satisfaction.
<i>Internal communication, employee participation, job satisfaction, and employee performance</i>	Kulachai et al. (2018)	15th International Symposium on Management	Hypothesis testing	Thai public sector employees	Participation through communication positively affects satisfaction and performance.

This illustrates a shift from early focus on basic satisfaction metrics to more integrated models incorporating engagement and leadership. Notably, post-2020 studies reflect pandemic-induced emphases on digital communication tools.

Despite advancements, the literature reveals notable gaps. Much research is concentrated in specific contexts like higher education or healthcare, with limited cross-national comparisons or longitudinal data [11], [12]. Emerging trends include the role of digital tools in enhancing communication effectiveness, particularly in remote public sector work

environments, which have been underexplored in pre-digital studies [13]. Additionally, participatory management-where employees contribute to communication strategies-has shown promise in boosting satisfaction but requires more empirical validation in diverse public sectors.

Recent works highlight the intersection of communication with broader outcomes like organizational performance and employer branding, suggesting a maturation of the field [14]. However, there is a scarcity of bibliometric analyses that map the intellectual structure, influential networks, and thematic clusters in this domain. Such analyses could reveal keyword evolutions, such as from "job satisfaction" to "employee engagement" and "digital communication," providing a roadmap for future research.

Addressing these gaps, this bibliometric study aims to quantify trends, identify core authors and journals, and cluster themes like motivation, climate, and efficiency. By doing so, it offers guidance for public institutions to refine strategies, ultimately improving employee satisfaction and service delivery in an era of rapid administrative change [15], [16].

Research results

The bibliometric search conducted in Web of Science (using the query combining terms related to "internal communication," "satisfaction,"

“public sector”) retrieved a total of 3,271 documents published between 2020 and 2024 (articles, reviews, and early access papers in English). The temporal distribution of these publications is presented in Figure 2.

peak that accounts for more than a quarter (27.66%) of the entire five-year production. This accelerating trend provides a solid justification for the present bibliometric study and highlights the timeliness of mapping the field’s intellectual

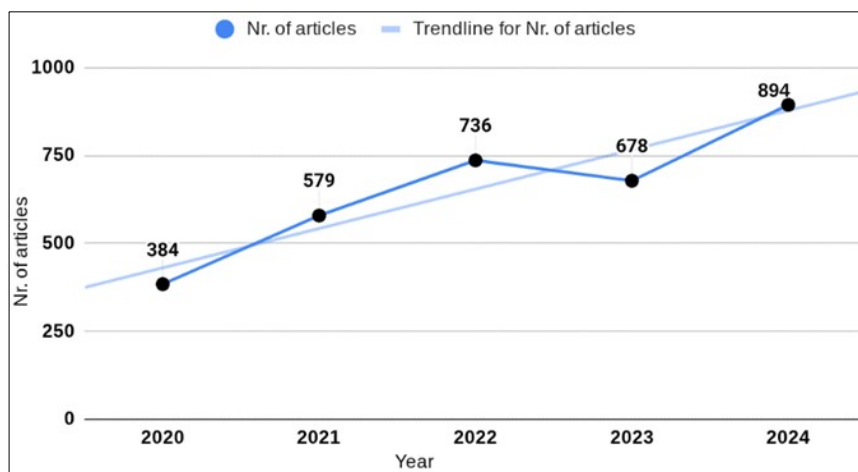


Fig. 2. Time distribution of the articles exported from WoS, for period 2020-2024

Source: Adapted by the author according to data exported from the WoS database (ISI indexed)

The field demonstrates clear and sustained growth over the five-year period, increasing from 384 documents in 2020 to 894 in 2024 – representing a cumulative growth of 133% in just four years. The most significant leap occurred between 2020 and 2021 (+50.8%), very likely triggered by the sudden shift to remote and hybrid work models during the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed internal communication and employee well-being at the center of public organizations’ agendas.

After continued strong growth in 2022 (+27.1%), a slight dip of –7.9% was registered in 2023, possibly reflecting a temporary consolidation phase or the effect of post-pandemic normalization. However, the remarkable rebound in 2024 (+31.9%, the highest absolute and percentage increase in the period) signals a renewed and even intensified scholarly interest. This recent surge coincides with widespread adoption of new digital communication platforms, rising concerns about public servants’ burnout and quiet quitting, and policy emphasis on employee engagement as a driver of administrative efficiency and public service quality.

In summary, the data confirm that research on the intersection between internal communication and employee satisfaction in the public sector has moved from a niche topic to a highly dynamic and expanding domain, with 2024 marking an all-time

structure and emerging priorities (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 Sample of articles grouped by publication years in % – period 2020-2024
(Source: Adapted by the author according to data exported from the WoS database (ISI indexed))

Year	Percentage
2020	11.73%
2021	17.70%
2022	22.50%
2023	20.72%
2024	27.33%

The following figure shows the distribution of research interest from the authors’ perspective (corresponding author’s country) across 34 countries that have produced the most documents in Web of Science during the analyzed period (Fig. 3).

The scientific production is highly concentrated in a small group of countries. The United States leads by a wide margin with 369 articles, followed at a distance by England (274), China (264), and Germany (234). These four countries alone account for approximately 36% of the total global output on the topic.

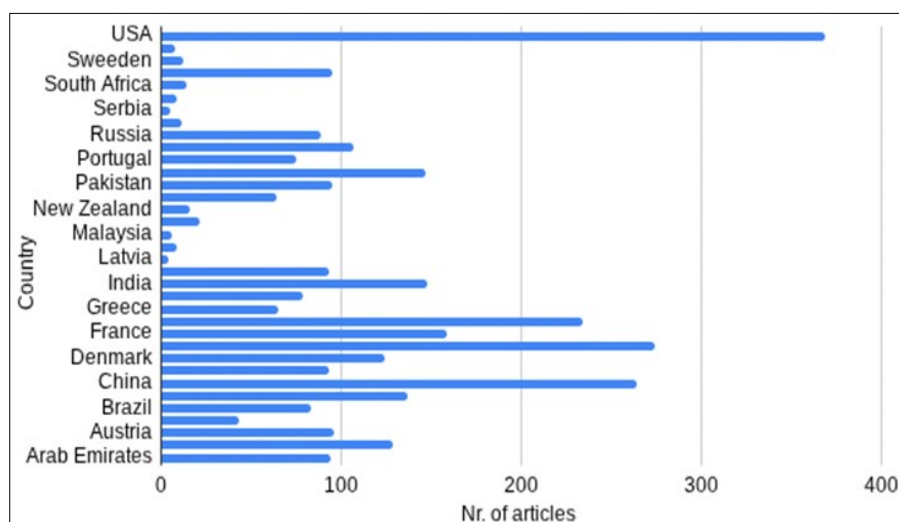


Fig. 3. Distribution of research interest in the subject from the authors' perspective
(Source: Adapted by the author according to data exported from the WoS database (ISI indexed))

A second tier of very active countries includes India (148), Canada (137), Australia (129), Denmark (124), France (159), and Poland (147), each demonstrating strong and sustained interest in public-sector employee well-being and internal communication practices.

European nations are particularly well represented: 15 European countries appear in the top 34, with Spain (95), Italy (93), Czech Republic (93), Austria (96), and Romania (107) showing remarkable productivity relative to their size.

Emerging and middle-income economies also contribute significantly, notably Brazil (83), South Africa (14), Pakistan (95), and rising fast, and United Arab Emirates (94), reflecting growing attention to modernizing public administration and digital internal communication in these contexts (Tab. 3).

The International Journal of Public Administration (Taylor & Francis) is by far the most prominent outlet, with 648 articles (20.0% of the entire corpus), confirming its status as the leading venue for empirical and theoretical work

Tab.3. Distribution of analyzed articles among journals
(Source: Adapted by the author according to data exported from the WoS database (ISI indexed))

Journal name	Nr. of articles
International Journal of Public Administration	648
American Review of Public Administration	539
Public Management Review	327
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	214
Corporate Communications: An International Journal	206
Management Communication Quarterly	124
Public Relations Review	65
International Journal of Public Sector Management	58
Governance	53
International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age	37

on public-sector human resource issues, including internal communication and employee satisfaction. Close behind is the American Review of Public Administration (539 articles, 16.7%), reflecting the strong North American scholarly tradition in this domain. Public Management Review (327 articles) and Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (214 articles) reinforce the central role of high-impact public administration journals.

Communication-oriented journals also occupy important positions: Corporate Communications: An International Journal (206), Management Communication Quarterly (124), and Public Relations Review (65) together demonstrate that the topic is actively studied at the intersection of communication studies and public management. The presence of International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age (37 articles) among the top 10 signals growing attention to digital tools and platforms in internal public-sector communication.

Conclusions

The bibliometric analysis of 3,271 Web of Science-indexed publications (2020–2024) confirms that research on internal communication and employee satisfaction in the public sector has experienced remarkable and sustained growth, evolving from a relatively niche topic in 2020 (384 articles) to a highly dynamic and prioritised field in 2024 (894 articles, +133% cumulative growth). The sharp acceleration observed after the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by an even stronger rebound in 2024, clearly reflects the global recognition that effective internal communication is no longer a “soft” HR issue, but a strategic lever for employee well-being,

engagement, administrative efficiency, and public service quality in times of crisis and digital transformation.

Geographically, the field remains led by the United States, England, China, and Germany, yet contributions from Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, Czech Republic), South Asia (India, India, Pakistan), and several middle-income countries are growing rapidly, highlighting the universal relevance of the topic across different institutional and cultural contexts.

Publication patterns reveal a concentrated yet interdisciplinary intellectual structure: approximately 70% of all documents appear in only ten specialised journals, with International Journal of Public Administration and American Review of Public Administration acting as the undisputed core outlets, complemented by high-impact public management and organisational communication journals. This concentration facilitates knowledge accumulation while the presence of communication-focused titles underscores the increasing convergence between public administration and communication studies.

In summary, the field has reached maturity and critical mass within a very short period. The accelerating publication trend, broad geographic participation, and consolidation around a well-defined set of leading journals provide solid foundations for future synthetic and comparative research. At the same time, the results send a clear message to public managers and policymakers: investing in transparent, participatory, and digitally enabled internal communication is now supported by a robust and fast-growing international evidence base as one of the most effective strategies for improving employee satisfaction and, ultimately, the performance of public institutions in the 21st century.

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