

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION IN THE MODERN WORKPLACE: INSIGHTS FROM EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK AND PRIVATE SECTOR PRACTICES

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Abstract: *Effective communication and collaboration are fundamental to organizational success, yet their application and institutionalization vary widely between sectors. This paper synthesizes findings from private sector employee feedback with insights from EU-level analyses of public administration, highlighting the systemic importance of internal dynamics. While private organizations increasingly use structured tools to assess communication and collaboration, public administrations often lack mechanisms for gathering feedback from civil servants. EU case studies and comparative reports reveal that hierarchical rigidity, fragmented organizational frameworks, and limited cross-functional interaction hinder performance in many public institutions. The quality of internal communication and collaboration is more than an HR concern; it is a strategic factor that influences a region's economic trajectory. High-performing public administrations are better equipped to design and deliver effective policies, attract investment, and foster a trustworthy environment for private sector development. Conversely, weak internal dynamics contribute to inefficiencies that undermine public trust and economic competitiveness. This paper argues for a shift in public sector culture: investing in leadership, inclusive feedback systems, and interdepartmental coordination. By institutionalizing communication and collaboration as core competencies, public administrations can not only improve internal operations, but also act as catalysts for broader economic growth and regional resilience across the European Union.*

Keywords: *communication; collaboration; private sector; public sector; EU funds; peripheral regions; employee engagement*

JEL Classification: H83; O18; R58; M12

1. Introduction

Communication and collaboration are increasingly acknowledged as foundational dimensions of organizational effectiveness. In the private sector, they are systematically cultivated through structured employee feedback mechanisms, collaborative tools, and inclusive leadership practices. These internal dynamics are no longer perceived as ancillary, but as strategic capabilities that support innovation, agility, and institutional resilience.

Conversely, public administrations frequently operate within rigid and hierarchical structures where employee voice is limited, and communication silos persist. This organizational fragmentation weakens institutional learning, obstructs adaptive governance, and undermines service delivery. The consequences extend beyond internal performance: public institutions that neglect communication and

collaboration face declining legitimacy, ineffective policy implementation, and reduced investment attractiveness.

This paper explores how internal communication and collaboration affect institutional performance and contribute to regional socio-economic outcomes. Through a dual lens grounded in structured private sector feedback and public sector institutional analysis it identifies transferable practices and proposes context-sensitive reforms that strengthen public sector capacity.

2. Literature Review

Extant literature consistently underscores the positive correlation between internal communication, collaboration, and organizational performance (Edmondson, 1999; Robbins and Judge, 2020). In the private sector, empirical studies affirm that these practices are closely tied to employee satisfaction, organizational trust, and innovation capacity. Structured feedback mechanisms and participatory leadership are increasingly deployed to harness employee insights and foster institutional responsiveness. One illustrative example is the structured feedback collected from employees of a private company operating within an EU Member State, where qualitative data revealed significant emotional responses both positive and negative tied to communication and collaboration practices. Employees cited frustration, fear, and disengagement as consequences of unclear messages, inconsistent collaboration, and a lack of psychological safety, while positive mentions emphasized trust, appreciation, and professional fulfilment when effective practices were in place.

Public administrations, in contrast, lag in integrating these practices. Despite strategic frameworks such as the European Commission's Quality of Public Administration Toolbox (2022), feedback systems remain underdeveloped and inconsistently applied across Member States. Reports by the European Court of Auditors (2021) and the OECD (2021) highlight persistent barriers including hierarchical rigidity, poor interdepartmental coordination, and minimal employee engagement in institutional reform processes.

This paper contributes to the literature by juxtaposing private sector practices with public sector conditions, thereby providing a critical lens for examining how communication and collaboration can be institutionalized to improve public sector outcomes. While literature affirms the strategic importance of communication and collaboration, empirical evidence shows that the public sector continues to trail the private sector in adopting inclusive, data-informed practices, despite the significant role public institutions play in shaping the EU's development trajectory and impact on private investments

3. Methodology

This paper uses a comparative qualitative methodology to explore the role of internal communication and collaboration in shaping organizational performance, using a dual-source approach: (1) primary qualitative data gathered from a private company operating within an EU Member State, and (2) secondary analysis of EU-level literature, policy documents, and case studies concerning public sector institutions. In the private sector, structured feedback mechanisms have been shown to improve trust and performance (Edmondson, 1999; Robbins and Judge, 2020). In contrast,

public administrations struggle to institutionalize such mechanisms (OECD, 2021; EIPA, n.d.).

Case studies confirm that fragmented organizational frameworks hinder cross-departmental collaboration (Bouckaert, Kuhlmann and Reiter, 2020), while hierarchical rigidity often blocks institutional learning (Capano, Howlett and Ramesh, 2015).

3.1 Private sector feedback analysis

The private sector component is based on employee feedback collected through structured workshops conducted internally by the company. Participants were selected using eNPS (Employee Net Promoter Score) segmentation to ensure representation across departments. During the workshops, employees engaged in guided sessions resembling the Six Thinking Hats methodology, providing insights across cognitive and emotional dimensions. Themes included communication practices, collaboration dynamics, trust, psychological safety, and leadership accessibility. Data was thematically analysed, identifying emotional patterns (positive, negative, neutral) and recurring issues that impact workplace performance.

3.2 Public sector component

The public sector analysis is based on institutional documents and best practice case studies from the European Commission, European Court of Auditors, OECD, and EIPA. These sources provided critical insights into the status of internal coordination, leadership practices, and communication mechanisms in regional and national administrations.

The documents were examined for recurring themes related to communication and collaboration, the presence or absence of feedback mechanisms, and their implications for institutional effectiveness.

This paper draws on structured employee feedback collected from a private company in one EU Member State, applying qualitative analysis in line with organizational behaviour research (Edmondson, 1999).

For public sector insights, secondary sources include tools and reports developed by the European Commission (2022), the OECD (2020–2023), and the European Court of Auditors (2021).

3.3 Comparative analytical approach

The paper identifies sector-specific patterns and crosscutting issues by comparing the private sector's employee-centred evidence with public sector institutional dynamics. Its originality lies in developing a cross-sectoral diagnostic framework that captures early indicators of institutional misalignment, such as communication breakdown, emotional disengagement, and isolated practices, which are often overlooked in conventional public administration literature. It proposes an analytical framework for assessing communication and collaboration quality, with potential for institutional transfer. This framework can be adapted by public administrations to diagnose internal dysfunctions, prioritize feedback-informed reform measures, and benchmark progress in cultivating collaborative cultures. This constitutes the paper's theoretical and empirical contribution, offering a structured methodology for institutional learning grounded in comparative insights.

4. Findings

The structured workshops conducted in the private sector elicited a broad spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses to internal communication and collaboration. Thematic analysis of participant input revealed several patterns.

4.1 Data presentation private sector

The private sector analysis provides valuable insights into the current state of communication and collaboration, highlighting both significant challenges and areas for potential growth based on employee feedback. The review process involved selecting candidates from each department based on eNPS results and grouping them into teams for workshops. During these workshops, participants used a structured thinking method, potentially similar to the *Six Thinking Hats* framework that explores different perspectives including facts, emotions, risks, benefits, creativity and process. Team members were also instructed to collect information from colleagues, ensuring a broader representation of views.

Content analysis of the discussions revealed a marked prevalence of negative sentiment regarding communication and collaboration. In the domain of communication, the emotion most frequently expressed was frustration (33 mentions), often linked to inefficiencies, lack of message clarity, and delayed responsiveness. Fear (13 mentions) was also prominent, primarily reflecting apprehension around idea-sharing, potential criticism, or work overload. Additional sentiments such as uncertainty, disappointment, and stress further illuminated a complex emotional landscape. Feedback on collaboration mirrored these themes: frustration (16 mentions) and fear (5) dominated, with employees citing experiences of being ignored, isolated, or blocked in team contexts. These emotions were compounded by a perceived absence of support and psychological safety.

Despite this emotional burden, the feedback also included 382 neutral mentions for communication and 311 for collaboration. These reflected a general awareness of the significance of communication and teamwork, as well as a willingness to improve. Words like *understanding*, *responsibility*, and *curiosity* indicated latent capacity for reform. Positive emotions, though fewer, were also present - 47 in communication and 63 in collaboration emphasizing experiences of *trust*, *encouragement*, *optimism*, and *professional satisfaction* when communication structures functioned effectively. Thematic synthesis identified multiple structural and behavioural challenges:

- (i) employee feedback frequently cited hierarchical opacity, with senior leadership perceived as distant or unresponsive;
- (ii) communication was seen to vary significantly by team and individual, suggesting a lack of standardized practices;
- (iii) a pervasive sense of inequity emerged from reports of accountability imbalances and workload misallocation; and
- (iv) organizational segmentation was found to restrict knowledge sharing and effective cross-functional collaboration.

In response, employees proposed a series of actionable recommendations, including:

- implementing training on feedback, conflict resolution, active listening and effective communication and collaboration;

- strengthening relationships and encouraging teamwork across departments and team building workshops;
- improving employee recognition and incentives: implementing a peer-to-peer recognition program;
- improving cross-team communication and collaboration: hosting regular department and meetings and defining collaboration ground rules;
- enhancing meeting efficiency: implementing meeting guidelines requiring agendas and action items and potentially "*no meeting Fridays*";
- hosting monthly "*ask me anything*" sessions with leadership and training leaders on collaborative and transparent management and encourage open dialogue and trust;
- launching a "*psychological safety*" initiative and a "*safe to fail*" initiative to encourage open sharing and innovation and to normalize constructive dissent and support inclusive dialogue;
- enhanced use of collaborative digital platforms for visibility and transparency;

Several of these proposals are now undergoing implementation, including training in feedback delivery and team dynamics, peer-to-peer recognition platforms, and standardization of collaborative expectations across departments. This case underscores how a data-driven approach to employee feedback can inform internal governance models and enable systematic reform. It also illustrates the critical role of leadership in anchoring such reforms in organizational culture, echoing broader public sector findings.

4.2 Case study - public sector

The public service centre, also called "*the Pyramid*", inaugurated by Oradea City Hall in 2023 integrates 27 dispersed service counters into a single, glass-enclosed facility that blends architectural transparency with procedural simplification. Prior to the reform, residents navigated an average of three separate offices and waited 55 minutes for basic administrative tasks. Six months after implementation, the mean waiting time fell to 17 minutes, and citizen satisfaction scores (captured through on-site counters) rose from 62% to 88%. Crucially, these gains were reinforced by a bespoke training curriculum for 130 civil servants, covering active listening, plain-language communication, and conflict de-escalation. Interviews with frontline staff revealed that the new layout encouraged spontaneous peer consultation and reduced hierarchical bottlenecks, mirroring the collaborative clusters observed in high-performing private organisations. This case exemplifies how investment in internal communication and service orientation can transform administrative effectiveness and public trust.

When juxtaposed with the private sector case analysed where frustration and fear dominated employee sentiment due to isolated workflows and email overload, on the other hand the public case, the *Pyramid* highlights three differentiators:

- service orientation - whereas the private company struggled with an inward administrative focus, the *Pyramid*'s design embeds an external, citizen-centric metric (waiting time) that stimulates cross-desk coordination;

- physical and digital co-location – by co-locating counters and deploying a unified queue-management system, the *Pyramid* replicates the digital dashboards adopted by the private company;
- both contexts invested in training; however, the *Pyramid* tied modules to clear behavioural standards (e.g., a “no wrong desk” rule), yielding measurable trust gains among both employees and service users.

4.3 Interpretation

These findings suggest that communication and collaboration are not solely technical processes but also shape organizational identity and psychological safety. Effective practices help cultivate an environment of mutual accountability, while deficiencies create emotional distance and operational fragmentation.

The recurring themes were synthesized into a diagnostic framework to identify early indicators of institutional misalignment: emotional disengagement, communication fatigue, and isolated behaviors. While derived from the private sector, these indicators are applicable to public institutions, where similar challenges are compounded by bureaucratic inertia and limited feedback loops.

5. Discussion

The findings affirm that employee-centred strategies common in high-performing private companies offer actionable insights for public sector reform. Transparent communication, inclusive leadership, and cross-functional collaboration are not merely efficiency tools but foundational to trust and institutional legitimacy.

The positive correlation between transparent communication and timely project delivery supports previous research on administrative coherence (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006). When information flows are clear and uninterrupted, teams are better positioned to respond to evolving EU regulatory demands. In a policy environment characterized by complexity and multilevel governance, adaptive communication practices are vital for institutional resilience.

Similarly, collaborative mechanisms such as cross-functional task forces are found to mitigate bureaucratic fragmentation and foster collective accountability. These results resonate with Bouckaert et al.'s (2020) findings on horizontal coordination and highlight the need for structured interdepartmental linkages in regional administrations.

A key contribution of this paper is its emphasis on employee voice and engagement. Feedback mechanisms not only improve ethics but also serve as indicative tools for identifying inefficiencies. Involving staff in post-project reviews and organizational learning builds institutional memory and strengthens the foundation for continuous improvement. This reinforces the European Commission's emphasis on human-centric governance models under programs like the Just Transition Mechanism (European Commission, 2023).

Another implication is the critical role of leadership. Managers who practice open-door policies and encourage bottom-up dialogue set the tone for inclusive governance. Leadership training and strategic communication competencies should thus be prioritized in capacity-building programs funded through technical assistance instruments.

Digitalization emerged as both a facilitator and a performance differentiator. Regions that adopted collaborative digital platforms demonstrated not only better fund absorption rates but also enhanced interagency transparency. These practices align with the EU's Digital Decade objectives and should be mainstreamed across all managing authorities (European Commission, 2022).

Comparative evidence from the *Pyramid* in Oradea further underscores the potential for public sector innovation. By integrating 27 service counters and training civil servants in active listening and clear communication, the initiative not only reduced wait times by 70% but also significantly improved employee collaboration and citizen satisfaction. This case demonstrates that spatial design, citizen-centred metrics, and behavioural training can yield measurable improvements in workplace cohesion and trust (Oradea City Hall, 2023).

While in the private sector, such analyses bring significant value and helps shaping a way forward in the public sectors, in order to bridge the implementation gap, the institutions can adopt several proven interventions from the private sector. These include structured feedback mechanisms, such as anonymous employee surveys and post-project debriefs, which can reveal latent organizational issues and promote a culture of continuous improvement. Equally applicable are initiatives that improve meeting efficiency, including standardized agendas and actionable outcomes, as well as the integration of collaborative digital platforms for visibility and workflow management. Moreover, structured recognition programs and targeted training in soft skills, particularly in feedback delivery, conflict resolution, and active listening, could enhance interpersonal trust and collective accountability. While such measures are often embedded in performance driven private sector environments, their adaptation to public administration must align with the sector's democratic values, legal constraints, and multi-stakeholder complexity. Nonetheless, importing these practices can substantially strengthen the communicative and collaborative capabilities of civil servants, ultimately improving service quality and EU fund absorption outcomes.

Ultimately, this paper underscores that strengthening communication and collaboration is not a peripheral HR concern but a strategic lever in achieving EU cohesion policy outcomes. Targeted investment in human capital, leadership development, and digital infrastructure can transform administrative culture, thereby unlocking the developmental potential of EU funds in Europe's most vulnerable regions.

6. Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that internal communication and collaboration represent foundational capabilities for institutional performance and adaptability. Drawing on empirical data from a private sector company and contextualized through comparative analysis with EU-level public administration assessments, the paper underscores the extent to which structured communication systems, leadership accessibility, and interdepartmental coordination contribute to enhanced organizational outcomes.

While private sector organizations are progressively adopting mechanisms that foster responsiveness and inclusion, public institutions often remain encumbered by

traditional bureaucratic models. The case of Oradea City Hall serves as a compelling illustration of how targeted reforms combining physical restructuring, staff training, and procedural streamlining can yield tangible improvements in administrative quality and public service delivery.

The paper's principal contribution lies in its integrative methodological design and the formulation of diagnostic indicators for internal misalignment. By mapping employee-level insights onto broader governance frameworks, the paper facilitates the translation of operational practices from the private sector into actionable strategies for the public sphere. This approach enhances both theoretical understanding and practical application in the field of public sector reform.

In conclusion, embedding communication and collaboration as strategic competencies within public institutions is imperative. Their systematic integration into institutional processes is not only essential for achieving operational efficiency but also for reinforcing public value, fostering institutional trust, and advancing sustainable socio-economic development at regional and national levels.

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