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## Article

# Evaluating the Mediator Role of Organizational Identification in the Relationship between Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance of Hotel Employees

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**Abstract:** The tourism industry has been distinguishing itself by promoting economic benefits and contributing to the creation of employment and opportunities in the country. This paper aims to investigate and analyze the impact of symmetric internal communication on individual performance and organizational identification, as well as to evaluate the mediating role of organizational identification in this relationship. Through the cooperation of several institutions in the tourism business sector, online surveys were applied resulting in a convenience sample of a total of 237 hotel employees in Portugal. The results of this study demonstrate that symmetrical internal communication has a positive impact on organizational identification and individual performance, and that organizational identification exerts a partial mediating effect on the relationship between symmetrical internal communication and individual performance. This study therefore extends the knowledge of the effects of important variables usually treated separately by the literature, and thus we build bridges between the communication literature and human resource management, providing information to support the structuring of new strategies.

**Keywords:** human resources; hospitality management; tourism; hotel employee; internal communication; organizational identification



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## 1. Introduction

The tourism industry worldwide has been growing in importance for economies, by promoting employment, job opportunities, economic growth and countries' promotion (Costa et al. 2018). With effect by the year of 2016, international tourism was responsible for 7% of the world's total exports (Rasool et al. 2021). Thus, this business sector presents itself as having the laudable attention of diverse areas of research, due to relevant expectations the sector has been presenting both for society and for new business development. human resource managers should be considered as an area of investment in this sector, as this market presents specific challenges worthy of consideration (Blomme et al. 2009; Costa et al. 2018, 2021).

One of the relevant issues to address in this area of research is the way internal communication is being handled as a valid way of playing a multidisciplinary role in organizations, by building bridges regarding the relation between the goals of organizations and employees' behaviors (Men and Yue 2019). Having as reference the specificity of the Portuguese economy, data retrieved from the *Turismo de Portugal* shows that the sector

was growing during the period of 2012 until 2019 by 7.2% of stays in an enhancement of 39 million stays in 2012 to 70 million stays in 2019 and a net worth value of EUR 8 billion in 2012 to EUR 18.4 billion in 2019. In 2022, the tourism sector represented 15.8% of the Portuguese Internal Product. As such, it is of scientific value to understand in what way may managers improve their business performance, notably, over the role of internal communication processes in order to improve workers' productivity.

Additionally, internal communication practices reflect the transparency of managers to their stakeholders (Kim et al. 2010), which is a very relevant issue to address in the tourism business sector.

According to Grunig (1992) internal communication has the ability to determine critical elements for the management of organizations such as trust, credibility, openness, reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centered approach, tolerance to dissent and negotiation. One of the most interesting models for dealing with the internal publics in organizations is symmetrical internal communication practices and strategies. This method of producing internal communication bears on the concern of bringing the stakeholders closer together as it consists of various forms of communication to contribute to a mutual understanding between the organization and the employee, aiming to produce long-term internal benefits due to the intention of having high involvement between organization and internal publics (Dozier et al. 1995; Yue et al. 2021). A critical aspect of the high involvement aims of internal communication deals with its presumable effects on employees' identification with the organization.

Organizational identification can be increased through strategies that involve a two-way, transparent flow of information between the company and the employee. These effects are presumably related to symmetrical internal communication practices; for example, listening to what the employee has to say and giving feedback can increase the feeling of belonging or attachment to the company, stimulating, thus, an emotional feeling and a strong bond (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004).

As a consequence, the harmony between these strategies can increase individual performance in the workplace making the employee feel fulfilled and perform their tasks to help the organization to achieve its goals (Campbell and Wiernik 2015). These factors can bring value to the organization enabling better delivery and creating more competitive advantage (Sinčić Ćorić et al. 2020). Over time, some scholars have explored knowledge in the field of internal communication, and its benefits and results when inserted into company strategies; even so, new studies are suggested to build knowledge (Grunig 1976; Welch 2011; Gomes et al. 2021, 2023; Sidorenkov et al. 2022).

Based on these considerations, the present study brings the added value of expanding knowledge on how the management of people in organizations through symmetrical internal communication practices can increase employees' organizational identification and have a positive behavioral impact on the individual performance of employees. Additionally, it seeks to understand how organizational identification mediates the relationship between symmetrical internal communication and individual performance of employees using a Portuguese sample for this matter. This was made possible through data collected from employees in the tourism sector, resulting in an innovative research model that contributes to the understanding of the effects of symmetrical internal communication on important psychosocial variables.

In order to set a logical direction and make this research possible, the present study is organized into sections. Thus, after the introduction, the literature review is presented, which consists of three main topics in which the hypotheses regarding this study are structured. Next, the paper offers a section that includes the approach used in data collection, sample size, description and measurement used in the study. The next sections include the results, discussion, conclusions and theoretical contributions of the authors, as well as the implications of the study, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Finally, three objectives emerge in this study, namely: (a) to understand how the predictor variable Symmetric Internal Communication can affect Organizational Identification;

(b) to clarify how the predictor Symmetric Internal Communication interacts with Individual Performance and (c) to examine whether the variable Organizational Identification mediates between Symmetric Internal Communication and Individual Performance. These objectives aim to clarify little explored aspects about these variables, especially regarding Portuguese hospitality employees.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Symmetrical Internal Communication and Organizational Identification

In the development of daily activities, companies in the tourism industry face enormous competitive challenges in today's global markets, striving to produce advantages facing competitors. One of the valid paths to follow towards competitiveness in this sector may be through the enhancement of organizations' internal strengths. Considering that communication is important for companies (Tkalac Verčič et al. 2012; Yue et al. 2021) and that internal communication can be described as any form of communication within an organization, this may very well be a solid ally for the stakeholders of organizations in this specific sector (Hociung 2011).

For some human resource researchers, internal communication can be understood as a valuable management area that should be considered as fundamental in building strategic alignment of companies and occupy prominent places in a managers' priority list (Lachotzki and Noteboom 2005; Meirinhos et al. 2022). An interesting and complementary way of viewing internal communication is the marketers' vision as, for them, internal communication views employees as internal customers of companies, suggesting that managers should adopt strategic internal marketing mechanisms to reflect benefits of the involvement between managers and employees (Ahmed and Rafiq 2002).

Given this dynamic, Kalla (2005) found that internal communication can be further understood as a concept of a multidisciplinary nature and defines it as an example of the integration of four dominant communication concepts:

1. *Business Communication* as the employee's communication skills and competencies to satisfy human needs and desires related to business development. According to Dhingra et al. (2022), this type of communication occurs when the object of information exchange deals with business-related perspectives having the purpose of enhancing business effectiveness.
2. *Management Communication* directed to strengthen and disseminate the knowledge to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of managers in business environments with the managerial communication skills for good performance. In this regard, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) argued that management communication "takes place between the management level of the organization and its internal and external audiences" and "includes, not only senior management, but also various levels of business-unit and department managers within the organization" (p. 14).
3. *Corporate Communication* aimed at formal communication in the various communications functions of the organization to distinguish itself in front of its stakeholders, with the focus on internal communication. On this matter, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) argued that corporate communication should be seen as a "communication structure describes a vision of the ways in which an organization can strategically orchestrate all types of communication" and "as an integrative communication structure linking stakeholders to the organization" (p. 14).
4. *Organizational Communication* understood as the communication that can influence people's understanding of the interpretation of the meanings of messages, verbal and nonverbal, of communications in companies and in the compression of philosophical and theoretical issues. According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), these types of communication "encompass public relations, public affairs, investor relations, corporate advertising, environmental communication, and internal communication" (p. 20).

In effect, internal communication is a concept based on a dynamic process integrating both a transactional and symbolic dimension, because it involves at least two people in

information exchange (transaction) and a symbolic level of communication that is present in the transaction. Regarding this aspect in particular, internal communication shares the significance of organizational communication studies involving considering the context of the organization in which information exchange is occurring as well as the symbolic nature of it (Miller and Barbour 2015).

In view of the diversity of paths and the complexity that involves communication, it seems important to remember the connections made by James Grunig in the 1970s, who conducted studies on the management of symmetrical internal communication and public relations in organizations (Grunig 1976). In this context, Yue et al. (2021) reinforces that this mode of communication approaches the ethics of companies, particularly with reference to the method of communicating with stakeholders, through openings, interactions, response capabilities and bilateral understanding mode, and how these factors contribute to stability between interests and power.

The symmetrical internal communication model contributes to the building of beneficial relationships between organizations and their employees (Men and Yue 2019). This concept is seen as a tool used by many leaders to promote employee engagement, in addition to molding and transmitting company values and missions to achieve organizational goals (Welch 2011). The mechanism works perfectly when it reaches the moment when the employee is heard, valorized and empowered. This generates a feeling of care and respect fostering mutual trust between the organization and the employee, made possible by open and equal communication, and, thus, contributing positively to company and employee well-being (Men and Yue 2019). On this issue, in their most recent research, the authors Luo et al. (2021) found that employees in the tourism industry have higher job satisfaction when they recognize that they are valued by their employer, especially when managers use orientation techniques, training and interpersonal help. This suggests an approximation of the employee with the company and may generate greater organizational identification (Jo and Shim 2005). Adopting strategic measures aimed at symmetrical internal communication can also translate into positive results for employees (Grunig 1992), as the interaction promoted by this strategy awakens precious behaviors in employees, for example a healthy relationship between co-workers, work satisfaction, trust, and organizational identification (Men and Stacks 2014).

Understood as a cognitive construct, organizational identification demonstrates a person's feeling of belonging or even being connected to the company where he or she works (Allen and Meyer 1990; Rhoades et al. 2001; Smidts et al. 2001; Miao et al. 2019) and this sentiment helps human resource managers better understand how workers are connected to the organization and how much they identify with it (Gilbert et al. 2011; Ribeiro et al. 2022). Ashforth and Mael (1989) describe that organizational identification as a kind of feeling of psychological attachment to the organization's own values. This occurs as a result of employees' emotional commitment to companies that demonstrate pride in the social principles they support (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004; Weisman et al. 2023). This behavior can be made visible when the company shares information clearly, for example, at a time of crisis and the stimulation of symmetrical organizational communication has an impact on employees' perceptions of the quality of communication, which can generate an improvement in employees' cognitive and affective experiences with the organization (Sun et al. 2021; Yue et al. 2021).

Once organizations adopt effective actions of symmetric internal communication they can demonstrate a strong image of transparency, awakening in the stakeholders a feeling of belonging and, consequently, this positive representativeness built by managers can lead the organization to a scenario in which the employee feels more attracted to the company and increases his or her self-definition and his or her attachment to the organization (Tajfel 1974; Brown et al. 2006; Wegge et al. 2006; Kim et al. 2010), and the building of internal employer branding (Vokić et al. 2023). Thus, the concern with promoting a positive sense in people stimulates adhesion and belonging on the part of stakeholders (Gond et al. 2017),

because such adhesion to a group is satisfying and generates a sense of pride (Wegge et al. 2006; Men and Stacks 2014).

It is thus essential to better understand how this feeling of belonging represented by organizational identification can be stimulated by another variable, since the more the employee feels identified with the company the lower the possibility of turnover intention (He and Brown 2013).

Following this literature review process, this study arrives at Hypothesis 1, which states that symmetrical internal communication has a positive relationship with organizational identification.

**H1.** *Symmetrical Internal Communication relates positively with Organizational Identification.*

## 2.2. Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance

In their studies, Clampitt and Downs (1993) indicated the benefits inherent to management guided by a good internal communication system and how this could reflect directly on the performance of the organizations and their stakeholders. Over the years, it has been observed that there are positive relationships between the application of internal communication actions for employees and the reflection of good performance (Dickson et al. 2003; Tkalc Verčič et al. 2012).

In the reality of many organizations, the employees may represent one of the most important work forces and their attitudes contribute to individual productivity and organizational performance (Men and Stacks 2014; Gomes et al. 2021). Following the suggestions of Sinčić Ćorić et al. (2020) it is important to observe how strategies that use internal communication produce positive impact over life satisfaction of the employee and contributes to better and higher performance at work.

Some scholars define individual performance in the workplace as the actions, attitudes and behaviors that are developed by the employee to help achieve the organization's objectives (Campbell and Wiernik 2015). This can be observed when the employee performs the tasks and assignments required, and these behaviors help meet the goals set by the organization (Swalhi et al. 2017; Rego and Cunha 2008). Fachrunnisa et al. (2021) understand also that individual performance can be the achievements of an employee, in the workplace, after the execution of a work plan, or even the fulfillment of responsibilities and realizations of the organization's objectives. This may take a positive or negative perspective (Borman and Motowidlo 1997).

In this sense, many organizations and their managers are trying to better understand work performance and its relationships with other variables (Ribeiro et al. 2021; Gomes et al. 2021; Duarte et al. 2021; Yücel et al. 2020). On the other hand, some scholars recognize that factors such as continuing education, proactivity, encouraging teamwork and the advancement of technology can be some of the indicators of success and reflect on good work performance (Latham et al. 2002). Thus, it is considered important to note the value that work performance can represent to the organization, given the behavioral episodes that each individual performs during a standard time interval (Motowidlo et al. 1997), especially when the implementation of measures oriented towards internal communication can positively impact on the satisfaction and well-being of employees, and stimulate attitudes that contribute to better individual performance (Rego and Cunha 2008; Nishii et al. 2008; Sinčić Ćorić et al. 2020; Men and Yue 2019).

Given this scenario, and based on the research, it is possible that internal communication can have a positive correlation with the individual performance of the employee and Hypothesis 2 can be supported in the present study.

**H2.** *Symmetrical Internal Communication relates positively with Individual Performance.*

### 2.3. Mediating Role of Organizational Identification

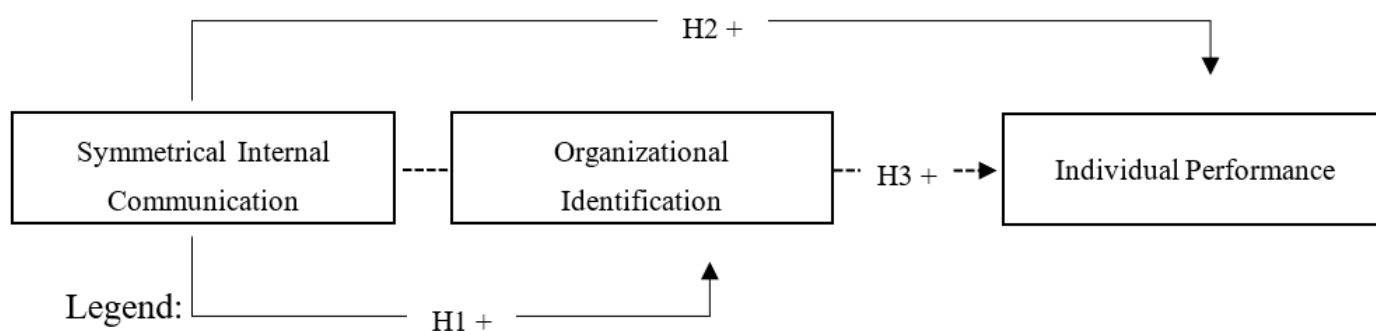
It is important to note how the values of good internal communication may result in benefits in organizations, namely in employee engagement, employee involvement that increase supportive employee communication behaviors, promotion of better employee relations and employee commitment (Kang and Sung 2017).

Organizational identification evolves as a type of social identification in which a person develops an emotional relationship or a sense of belonging to the company where they work (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Dutton et al. 1994), and, with symmetrical internal communication practices and the stimulation of organizational identification, it may be that employee performance will increase (Motowildo et al. 1997; Sinčić Ćorić et al. 2020). The manager who can create strategies to improve the performance of employees, consequently making them contribute more to achieving the strategic goals of the organization, can ensure the success of organizations and create a competitive advantage, especially in the tourism industry (Campbell and Wiernik 2015; Swalhi et al. 2017).

Following the logical reasoning of these discussions it is possible to observe that there is an empirical and theoretical basis for the mediating role of organizational identification in the relationship between symmetrical internal communication and individual employee performance. However, there are still some gaps and limitations in knowledge about the important role that organizational identification can play in other variables and what their relationships and interactions are, especially if considering the lack of studies using samples based on the tourism sector. Furthermore, by proposing organizational identification as a mediator between symmetrical internal communication and individual performance it will be relevant to further explore this relationship as a way of attending the agenda of Sidorenkov et al. (2022) and thus increasing the scientific value of this study. Symmetrical internal communication should increase organizational identification, which in turn positively impacts individual performance, thus fulfilling research Hypothesis 3.

**H3.** *Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance.*

The proposed conceptual research model is the following (Figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Conceptual research model. H1: Symmetrical Internal Communication relates positively with Organizational Identification. H2: Symmetrical Internal Communication relates positively with Individual Performance. H3: Organizational Identification mediates the relationship between Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Procedure and Sample

To test the hypotheses of this research, a self-report survey was given to employees working in four- and five-star hotels in the tourism sector in Portugal. The participants were required to have been working for at least 6 months in the establishment, since this is the time needed to have a solid sense of the organizational reality (Semedo et al. 2018). To enable and support the process of applying this survey, a database was created with email addresses of approximately 837 hotels in continental Portugal and the islands, as well as

institutions within the scope of tourism in the country. In the e-mail that accompanied the survey, the Human Resources Managers of the establishments were encouraged to encourage as many employees as possible to respond to the survey.

The questionnaire used in this investigation included information about the objectives of the survey, data confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, as well as informed consent. A convenience sample was used. All respondents were also encouraged to be truthful in their answers. Between July 2021 and January 2022, email surveys were distributed to people working in various tourism organizations in Portugal and this was the data collection period.

### 3.2. Measures

#### 3.2.1. Symmetrical Internal Communication

A total of six items that were applied in the research of [Dozier et al. \(1995\)](#) and [Men and Stacks \(2014\)](#) were also used to assess symmetrical internal communication in organizations. Employees were asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly disagree”; 5 = “totally agree”).

The items contemplated in this survey were “Most communication between me and my organization can be said to be two-way communication”, “My organization encourages differences of opinion”, “One purpose of communication in our organization is for managers to be responsive to employees”, “Supervisors encourage employees to express differences of opinion”, “Employees are usually informed about major changes in policy that will affect jobs before they take place” and “Employees are not afraid to speak up during meetings with supervisors and managers”. All statements were translated into the predominant language of the location studied. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.94.

#### 3.2.2. Organizational Identification

The three questions created and validated by [Kim et al. \(2010\)](#) were used to assess organizational identity. As an example, “I feel strong ties with my company” and “I am part of my company” were the items included. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.96.

Individuals were asked to report the degree to which each of the three statements applied to them, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Never”; 5 = “Always”).

#### 3.2.3. Individual Performance

To measure individual performance, an instrument was used that was also applied in the study by [Rego and Cunha \(2008\)](#) consisting of four items. Sample items included affirmations, for example, “I believe I am an effective employee” and “My manager believes I am an efficient worker”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.85.

Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “It doesn’t apply to me”; 5 = “completely applies to me”), employees in Portugal’s tourism sector were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with each affirmation presented.

## 4. Results

A total of 237 employees from various tourist organizations in Portugal were included in the final sample. In the gender distribution the sample of female respondents (66.2%) was higher than the male participants (33.8%). The age that prevailed in this sample was the range 39–54 years old (45.6%) of respondents followed by 22–38 years old (44.7%). When it comes to education, a total of 58.6% of the respondents had a Bachelor’s degree and 17.3% had a Graduation. Concerning employment seniority only 5.1% of the respondents had worked in their company for the time interval of 11–15 years. On the other hand, a total of 37.6% of respondents had worked in their organization between 1 and 5 years. Almost half of the sample held the position of subordinates within their organization (44.7%).

Primarily for the detailed and forthcoming treatment of the data, we have taken the option of performing the Harman test as a cautionary measure to test for common method bias in our data. This decision meets the suggestions of [Podsakoff et al. \(2003\)](#) when a

significant amount of common method bias in the data may exist. In this way, our results showed that the data in this study is robust to the common method bias.

Following this approach, the data was examined in the correlation matrix (Table 1), so one can see how the research variables are related to each other in this table. The Symmetrical Internal Communication variable is positively and significantly correlated with the Individual Performance variable ( $r = 0.670$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.01$ ) and with Organizational Identification ( $r = 0.752$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.01$ ). Similarly, Individual Performance and Organizational Identification are also positively and significantly correlated ( $r = 0.584$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.01$ ). Regarding demographical variables and their correlation with the composite variables, education is significantly and negatively correlated with age ( $r = 0.130$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.05$ ). The remaining demographic variables have not shown any significant correlation with the composite variables of the study.

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix ( $n = 237$ ).

|                                        | Mean | SD   | Gender | Age      | Education | Symmetrical Internal Comm. | Organizational Identification | Ind. Perf. |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|--------|----------|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------|
| Gender (a)                             | -    | -    | 1      |          |           |                            |                               |            |
| Age (b)                                | -    | -    | 0.028  | 1        |           |                            |                               |            |
| Education (c)                          | -    | -    | -0.018 | -0.130 * | 1         |                            |                               |            |
| Symmetrical Internal Communication (d) | 3.87 | 1.04 | 0.060  | 0.076    | -0.009    | 1                          |                               |            |
| Organizational Identification (e)      | 4.03 | 1.02 | 0.064  | 0.110    | -0.002    | 0.752 **                   | 1                             |            |
| Individual Performance (f)             | 3.66 | 0.92 | 0.053  | 0.051    | -0.051    | 0.670 **                   | 0.584 **                      | 1          |

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ . (a) 1—Female; 2—Male; 3—I prefer not to say. (b) 1—Until 21 years old; 2—22–38 years old; 3—39–54 years old; 4—More than 55 years old. (c) 1—4 years of school; 2—6 years of school; 3—9 years of school; 4—12 years of school; 5—Bachelor’s degree; 6—Graduation; 7—Master’s degree; 8—PhD. (d) 1—Strongly disagree; 2—I partly disagree; 3—I neither agree nor disagree; 4—Partly agree; 5—Totally agree. (e) 1—Never; 2—Rarely; 3—Sometimes; 4—Almost always; 5—Always. (f) 1—It doesn’t apply to me; 2—Rarely applies to me; 3—Sometimes applies to me; 4—Almost always applies to me; 5—Completely applies to me.

These results seem to indicate that the strategies oriented in organizations towards symmetrical internal communication positively influence employees’ organizational identification and individual performance. It is also possible to observe that the identification between employees and the organization is positively associated with the individual performance of workers.

When the variables are studied together, these first findings seem to confirm the hypothesis that the greater the symmetrical internal communication the stronger the organizational identification and individual performance. In addition to this observation, it seems that the correlation between organizational identification and individual performance supports the idea that the higher the organizational identification of employees the more likely the individual performance of employees will increase. Both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 of the study appear to be supported by these findings.

The methodological procedure proposed by [Baron and Kenny \(1986\)](#) was used to investigate the mediation effect predicted in Hypothesis 3, which predicted the existence of a mediating effect of organizational identification on the relationship between Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance. As these authors suggest, it is necessary to perform some steps to test the mediation effects; namely, the following regression equations should be estimated: first, the regression of the mediator variable on the predictor variable should be performed; second, it is necessary to regress the criterion variable on the predictor variable and finally apply the regression of the criterion variable on the predictor variable, controlling for the mediator variable.

These same authors further state that, for a mediation effect to be confirmed, a set of criteria need to be completed. In this sense, the first effect must be the predictor variable, in this case Symmetrical Internal Communication, needs to significantly affect the mediating variable in the first regression equation. Next, the predictor variable must be affected by the criterion variable in the second equation. It is also necessary that the mediator variable affects the criterion variable in the third step of the equation. Only then is it possible to confirm that the study presents a partial mediation or a total mediation; that is, if the impact

of the predictor on the dependent variable remains significant or not in the presence of the mediating variable in the equation. It is verified that mediation is partial when the impact of the predictor variable on the criterion variable in the third equation is smaller than in the second equation, while total mediation is verified when the effect of the predictor variable on the criterion variable in the third equation is no longer significant (Baron and Kenny 1986).

According to Table 2, on applying the methodology in the present study, the first equation evaluated the association between Symmetric Internal Communication and Organizational Identification ( $\beta = 0.732$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.000$ ;  $t = 17.246$ ), with a significant and positive relationship. The second equation was intended to verify the Symmetric Internal Communication effect on Individual Performance ( $\beta = 0.244$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.000$ ;  $t = 7.133$ ) and the third equation added the mediating variable, Organizational Identification, into the analysis model ( $\beta = 0.122$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.020$ ;  $t = 2.339$ ). It is possible to verify that, when the mediating variable is jointly predicted in the estimated regression, the relationship between Symmetric Internal Communication and Individual Performance remains significant ( $\beta = 0.244$ ;  $sig. \leq 0.000$ ;  $t = 7.133$  /  $\beta = 0.154$ ;  $sig. \geq 0.003$ ;  $t = 3.014$ ) ( $R^2_{adjust.} = 0.207$ ) and the effect of Symmetric Internal Communication on Individual Performance in the third equation is smaller than in the second equation. These results support the assumptions for the existence of a partial mediation effect of Organizational Identification on the relationship between Symmetric Internal Communication and Individual Performance. All steps of the methodological procedure were made with the inclusion of control variables that seemed relevant to integrate into the scope of the study, such as workers' gender, education and age.

Table 2. Regression table.

| Coefficients <sup>a</sup> |                                  |                               |           |                           |        |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|--------|
| Model                     |                                  | Non-Standardized Coefficients |           | Standardized Coefficients | $\tau$ |
|                           |                                  | $\beta$                       | Std Error | $\beta$                   |        |
| 1                         | (Constant)                       | 3.743                         | 0.279     |                           | 13.418 |
|                           | Gender                           | −0.091                        | 0.082     | −0.072                    | −1.113 |
|                           | Age                              | 0.111                         | 0.060     | 0.122                     | 1.869  |
|                           | Education                        | 0.074                         | 0.038     | 0.125                     | 1.930  |
| 2                         | (Constant)                       | 2.919                         | 0.278     |                           | 10.489 |
|                           | Gender                           | −0.122                        | 0.075     | −0.096                    | −1.639 |
|                           | Age                              | 0.082                         | 0.054     | 0.090                     | 1.521  |
|                           | Education                        | 0.073                         | 0.035     | 0.125                     | 2.111  |
|                           | Symmetric Internal Communication | 0.244                         | 0.034     | 0.419                     | 7.133  |
| 3                         | (Constant)                       | 2.813                         | 0.279     |                           | 10.067 |
|                           | Gender                           | −0.127                        | 0.074     | −0.100                    | −1.718 |
|                           | Age                              | 0.072                         | 0.054     | 0.079                     | 1.343  |
|                           | Education                        | 0.072                         | 0.034     | 0.122                     | 2.090  |
|                           | Symmetric Internal Communication | 0.154                         | 0.051     | 0.265                     | 3.014  |
|                           | Organizational Identification    | 0.122                         | 0.052     | 0.206                     | 2.339  |

<sup>a</sup> Dependent variable: Individual Performance.

In order to add additional evidence and discussion to our results, we have taken the option of performing a supplementary mediation test using the Sobel test (Sobel 1982), which proposes the following equation for estimating indirect effects, such as the one foreseen in Hypothesis 3:  $Z\text{-value} = a*b/\text{SQRT}(b^2*sa^2 + a^2*sb^2)$ . This test should be seen as complementary to the methodology carried out based on Baron and Kenny (1986), by permitting evaluating in a more direct way the existence of indirect effects, as the Sobel test is indicated as a more restrictive test. In our study, the Sobel test value

was of  $Z = 2.32518078/p = 0.01$ , thus confirming the existence of a mediation effect of Organizational Identification on the relation between Symmetric Internal Communication and Individual Performance.

## 5. Discussion

With a focus on the Portuguese tourism industry, this study examined the impact of symmetrical internal communication on employees' organizational identification and individual performance, as well as the mediating role of organizational identification in the relationship between symmetrical internal communication and individual performance.

Therefore, this study is in line with other studies previously conducted that found a relationship between symmetric internal communication and organizational identification (Sun et al. 2021; Yue et al. 2021). It can also be found that adopting practices geared towards good internal communication can improve employee performance in the organization (Ahmed and Rafiq 2002; Latham et al. 2002; Gomes et al. 2021, 2023).

Reinforcing the existing literature, this study also indicates the benefits of internal communication practices and how these can be incorporated into the strategies defined by human resource managers, especially in organizations in the tourism sector in Portugal (Men and Stacks 2014). These actions can promote attitudes in employees and the activation of the adoption of behaviors that contribute to improved performance in the workplace. It is evident in these results how symmetrical internal communication reflects either in the increase of individual performance of employees or in the feeling of identification of the employee by the company. However, it is important to highlight the mediating role played by organizational identification in this process. Symmetric internal communication seems to be a useful option to synchronize employees' attitudes and behaviors towards individual performance in organizations (Kang and Sung 2017).

The favorable perceptions of employees about the implemented internal communication practices were observed rationally and considering the social identity theory, consequently resulting in company identification and, as a result, increased individual employee performance.

## 6. Conclusions

The first hypothesis that was born in the literature review about the positive relationship between Symmetric Internal Communication and Organizational Identification gave hints that the predictor variable can relate positively to Organizational Identification; that is, when there is a management oriented by a good internal communication strategy this increases the identification of the employee with the company. The second hypothesis of this research suggests that the predictor variable Symmetrical Internal Communication (internal communication oriented strategies) can increase the Individual Performance of employees in companies. This, too, was able to be supported through this study. The third hypothesis proposed in this research model was added to deepen the knowledge about this subject, still little explored by the literature. Thus, it indicates that Organizational Identification acts as a mediating variable between the variables Symmetrical Internal Communication and Individual Performance of employees. It was possible to verify that this hypothesis was partially supported, considering that the statistical tests revealed a partial mediation. This conclusion brings knowledge by checking the correlation between the study variables, as with the estimated regression equations.

### 6.1. Theoretical Contributions and Implications of the Study

The development of this study emerged to corroborate and add to the literature regarding the benefits of symmetrical internal communication and its impacts on organizations, providing support for managers in the tourism sector to take decisions that can add value to their organizations (Tkalac Verčič et al. 2012), in addition to reinforcing that strategies oriented towards the promotion and development of internal communication in organi-

zations can increase the competitive advantage of companies (Clampitt and Downs 1993; Dozier et al. 1995; Men and Yue 2019).

The first contribution is born when this study expands knowledge about how symmetrical internal communication in Portuguese organizations, guided by good communication skills and bilateral understanding, may be related to employees' identification with the organization and their behaviors as indicated by (Yue et al. 2021). After the development of this study, it was possible to support Hypothesis 1, because in fact the variable was proven to be an important tool for human resource managers to increase the organizational identification of employees generating benefits for both sides (organization and employee).

Taking a closer look, the second contribution concerns the understanding of how employees can be one of the most significant work forces in the routine of organizations, since their attitudes affect both individual productivity and business effectiveness (Men and Stacks 2014; Gomes et al. 2021). This study brings clarification to organizations regarding the benefits of implementing internal communication actions through human resource management. These strategies will have a positive impact on individual employee performance. In practice, employees stimulated through internal communication have the feeling that their opinions have validity before their managers and, consequently, their productivity increases generating benefits for the organizations (Dickson et al. 2003; Tkalc Verčič et al. 2012).

The development of this study evidenced the partial mediation of Organizational Identification in the relationship between Symmetric Internal Communication and Individual Performance. When inserted in the plan of activities of human resource managers, Internal communication strategies are stimulated by the feeling of belonging to the organization in which the employee works. These actions contribute to a better relationship between employees and organizations (Kang and Sung 2017). Therefore, it is observed that even if there is a partial mediation Organizational Identification can help in the development of Internal Communication strategies to benefit the Individual Performance of employees.

It was also possible to contribute to the knowledge of the literature on the Symmetric Internal Communication variable, namely through evidence of the role that this variable plays in service sectors such as tourism (Costa et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2022).

These findings are significant for human resource managers and for the literature, since they present a set of results that respond to the need pointed out by Madera et al. (2017), namely, the need for the development of research within strategies for human resource management oriented to reinforce practices that increase the individual performance of employees in the tourism sector, in addition to reinforcing the benefits reported by Khan et al. (2022) about the practices of symmetric internal communication implemented in the strategies of managers.

In addition to these contributions, this work can be considered an important practical management tool that can be applied in organizations, for example, as an alternative to increase the sense of belonging and identification of employees with the organizations and, consequently, improve employee performance in the execution of their tasks. It is noteworthy that for the best effect of the practices of symmetrical internal communication, it is essential to design strategies that use several clear and direct communication channels with important and valuable information in the perception of the employees, and that the objectives are explicit and as aligned as possible with the employees (Kang and Sung 2017).

Human resource managers should ethically explore every way to communicate with their employees favoring an openness with interactions, good responsiveness and two-way mode of understanding among other mechanisms that can balance whatever are the interests of companies and employees in the work environment (Yue et al. 2021). It seems that the more these information sharing actions are valued, the greater the feeling of identification of the employee with the company's goals and the greater his or her performance in the workplace will be, in addition to this feeling further enhancing the employee's performance.

When considering that these results were based on a Portuguese tourism business sector non-probabilistic sample, some additional remarks seem appropriate given both the relevance of the sector for the country's economy and the scientific relevance of exploring the relations of the proposed variables of the study. In effect, managers of this sector should be aware that internal communication seems to be quite relevant to update workers on information concerning the functioning of these organizations of this business sector. The sector depends on the quality of the service provided and, to perform at an outstanding level, workers need to be aligned with the purposes of the organization, its objectives and expectations, but, also, to be permeable to the influence of bottom-up inputs provided by the workers in a symmetrical way of managing internal communication. These types of circuits seem beneficial to enhance workers' participation in work-related decision-making processes and, consequently, their performance, by making viable the workers' involvement and their identification with the organization's standards. Thus, investment in internal communication procedures and practices intertwined with human resources management practices seems to be a valuable path to enhance the global performance of the organization.

### 6.2. Study Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study occupies a small space in the comprehensive and multidisciplinary theme that is internal communication (Tkalac Verčič et al. 2012); on the other hand, the findings of this study can serve as an important alternative for human resource managers to define new strategies. Although this study model proves to be robust to specifically analyze the variables that comprised this research, some limitations are inevitable, namely, when we were not able to analyze other psychosocial variables in this model. For this reason, it is suggested that new studies be conducted in other sectors of the economy and that they test the interaction of symmetric internal communication with turnover intention, for example. In this study, data were collected at a single time point and through the same source, which may imply risks of variance from the common method (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Future studies may collect data at different points in time or by using the double source method. For example, individual performance can be reported by managers.

Finally, it is evident that, when organizations invest in leaders who have strategies oriented towards good communication, managing the diversity of their employees well with transparent processes, both sides are satisfied. In short, the company becomes more competitive and the employees have their social-emotional needs met.

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