

THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The force and the permanence of technology innovations, of economic and political pressures environment have generated in the modern educational organization a ubiquitous need to adapt to change. To inform, to secure, to motivate, to involve, to value the professional community, to promote the group cohesion, to solve the crisis situations, to decide, to coordinate, to assess represent managerial requirements that assign to the internal communication the status of management tool for the implementation both of the evolution and the performance principle.

Considering these facts, internal communication is vital, especially when the welfare of the employees is threatened. It is obvious that the relational size of the communication cannot be ignored. The teacher needs to be informed about the workload, but he is equally in constant search for satisfaction, motivation and involvement in the work.

The analysis of the relationship between the internal communication and the management requires a reflection on some problematical aspects represented by communicational stakes in the educational organization, by the relational and technical dimension, components of communication which are of equal weight in contemporary management, by the anticipation of possible trends of the act of communication inside the professional community.

In the near future, the educational management will require to the internal communication a human finality that would harmonize with the economic one, an ethical implication, a consolidation of the organization's value. Otherwise, the communication will become a tool of propaganda and will lose credibility.

KEYWORDS: *internal communication, educational community, relational dimension, interactional processes, referent.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION : *L32 , L 39*

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous actions of reforming the education system are proof of the existence of a school which is constantly looking for a balance between the adaptability to the changing environment and the organizational effectiveness. Reforming causes the behavioural change of the educational actors, of their relationships, so it is felt as an aggression of the identity and individual habits. The resistance of the professional community members can be counteracted by persuasion, process that transforms the internal communication into a vade me cum of the reform.

Dinescu (2010) considers the interest for communication "*a direct effect of the democratic change*" originally cultivated in the Romanian economic area, among private companies, after 1989.

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"In groups' life there occur and are possible: changes of goals, of attitudes, of statuses and roles, of organizational system, of social norms and values, of the group members interpersonal relationships." (Tudorică, 2007)

The change, multidimensional in the way it is understood by the employees, leaving rarely those in question indifferent, is a phenomenon that requires serious attention from the managers in the education system. No matter the subject they teach, which their status is or how long they have practiced, the teachers are interested by the changes which affect the educational organization. It is necessary to adapt themselves, to change the teaching methods, to use different means and tools, to change their habits. In this way they have to understand the reasons in order to accept to become the actors of the reform imposed to every person. In this level the internal communication must demonstrate its role which doesn't limit to conveying the message of the Minister of Education.

G. Willett describes the relationship between the communication and the management in the organization, emphasizing their interdependence in the functioning process: "... *A society, an institution or an enterprise is established and maintained by and through their numerous processes and communication networks that give them coherence. [...] We start to notify that the communicational and the organizational action are mutually dependent*" (Willett, 1992)

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2. COMMUNICATION STAKES IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Communication stakes are significant for the school system since school is an organization where most of the members of the educational community are temporary.

In secondary school education, the pupils in the senior year leave school so as the new ones can begin by attending the classes of the ninth grade. The same situation applies to teachers who, teach in more schools in order to complete their number of hours required. Abric (2002) notes that "*the microculture of an organization, of an institution [...] determines different means of communication and an interaction system that can be entirely particular.*" In this case, each educational organization is characterized by partially single communication skills and habits. We remind, moreover, that most teachers which are having a break from their timetable are not present at school.

In this context, we must admit that the development of a sense of belonging to the same community encounters most often difficulties. In the last years there has been noticed the use of the concept of *educational community* to designate the school actors, but also the concern for how these actors may have common professional interests. The absence of certain people from scheduled appointments, the avoidance of meetings make the school organization cover a mixture of cultures and it rarely becomes a community.

The internal communication can become a tool for the professional association, in order to ensure the consolidation or the creation of a sense of belonging and to secure the organizational performance. It can also be a means of conciliation of the different actors' interests, being able to make the new employees loyal, in an objective way, diminishing their personal subjectivity and resistance. Bill Hybels believes that the rapport between the internal communication and the motivation is directly proportional to make employees loyal: "The employees motivated are 87% less likely to leave a company than those unmotivated." (apud Maxwell, 2010)

Therefore, there is required an analysis of the correlation level between the communication strategies and the need of communication, causes of the communication gap in schools. One can speak of a collective adhesion to this communicational strategy?

To provide potential answers it is necessary to analyse the factors favouring the relational dimension of internal communication: communication spaces, employee behaviours, their representation, the interactional processes, and the content (referent) communication.

2.1. SPACES DESIGNED FOR COMMUNICATION

An analysis of the direct communication space allows, as signals Etienne and Amiel, "*revealing some (im)possibilities of exchange of the information between the members of a community.*" (Etienne & Amiel, 1995)

For example, positioning the teacher’s room on the same landing / hallway with the secretariat, the manager’s office, the accounting department gives the teacher the opportunity to meet various actors of the school community by facilitating access to certain information. The proximity of school managers offices allow more trade in informal communication in the key moments of the unit program, as well as in breaks.

In this way the communicational perspective, the positioning and the spatial planning should not be done randomly.

Zahorik (1987) specifies that the school size is an important factor which influences the communication process. For example, a small school facilitates the communication.

2.2. THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE EMPLOYEES WITH REGARD TO THE ATTENDANCE AT THE COMMUNICATION SPACES

There is an initial group composed mostly of young teachers or newcomers who rarely leave the classroom. These remain in class during the break. Avoiding the teacher’s room has a negative impact on the communication quality. Teachers in this category require a poor relationship with managers and colleagues and sometimes with students. But the latter are the only actors of the educational organization which are given the possibility of interaction, in the belief that most of the time (50 'from 60') the teacher communicates with the student and his professional performance is closely related to the student's school attendance.

It should, however, be specified that attending or avoiding these areas of communication and the perception (positive or negative) are united in a circular relationship can be summarized according to the following scheme:

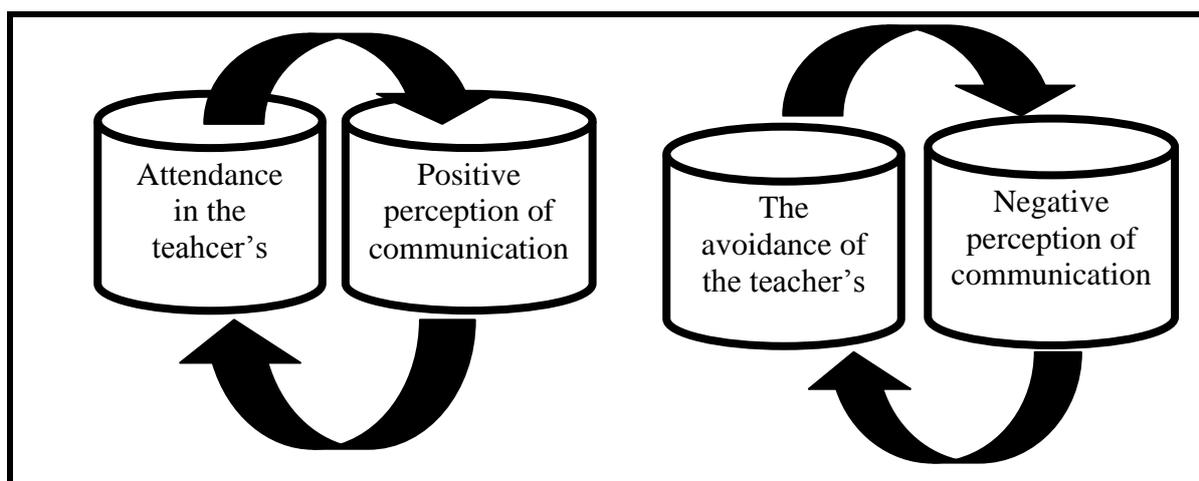


Figure 1. The relationship Space -perception of communication

Source: developed by the authors

On the other hand, attending the spaces created for teachers during the break does not guarantee the improvement of the communication quality, but, at most, its quantity. However, in a context where

the communication exchanges involve a negative perception, the desire to meet the other colleagues may be replaced with a certain type of isolation.

The communication difficulties can be notified in the older teachers' category. These teachers have a certain experience specific to the school environment that they transmit in the form of a relational dissatisfaction: neither the organization managers nor the colleagues or the students can be interlocutors to satisfy, in their view the needs and the personal interests in the communication situations. During breaks they go in the teacher's room and talk only with those in the same group. So it is obvious that arranging a space is not enough to guarantee communication development. Without any doubt, the limits of the relational dimension of internal communication are dependent on individual perceptions' field.

There is, ultimately, a category of teachers satisfied with the internal communication in the educational organization. They are the "migrants" inside the professional staff. The breaks or the free hours inserted into the individual timetable represent opportunities to meet each other either in informal communication spaces (other than the teacher's room) or at the library, secretariat, in the manager office or on the halls of the school. Their presence in various locations in the school unit allows them to receive maximum information, to socialize with different members of the educational community.

The conclusion to be taken is that the use of the space is not the only variable with explanatory value regarding the quality of internal communication. It is necessary to take into consideration the expectations of members forming the professional staff. For sure the young teachers have different expectations related to the interaction with those like them, different from those of the teachers working for more years in the institution and therefore more integrated in the school environment.

If the seniority and the chair experience support the integration, why can't communication requirements be reduced in relation to the other teachers? How to decode the attitude of this category of older teachers more dissatisfied with the internal communication than any other teaching group?

We may forward the hypothesis of the consequences produced by the syndrome "burnout" on the interactions. "Burnout" is described as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, of depersonalization and reduced personal fulfillment that can occur among people who work with others at a certain capacity"(Zahorik, 1987). Demotivation also prevents a dynamic communication process.

2.3. TEACHERS' REPRESENTATION

The employees' representations should be put in relation to the communication polysemy, postulate which proves that the meaning of a message is not the same for everyone. This multiple interpretation / decoding can explain, in part, certain differences of opinion among the school actors.

Locke (1961) believes that the language represents "*an important tool and binder of the society*". In the opposite direction stands Kant's view who believes that it cannot be brought into question an individual reaction to an objective world because human beings react to the world built in their minds. This is why we emphasize the importance of coding and decoding the message, pointing out that one cannot achieve an identity between the communicational intention of the sender, the message issued and the meaning given to the message by the receiver after the decoding process.

This idea could be graphically represented according to the picture below:

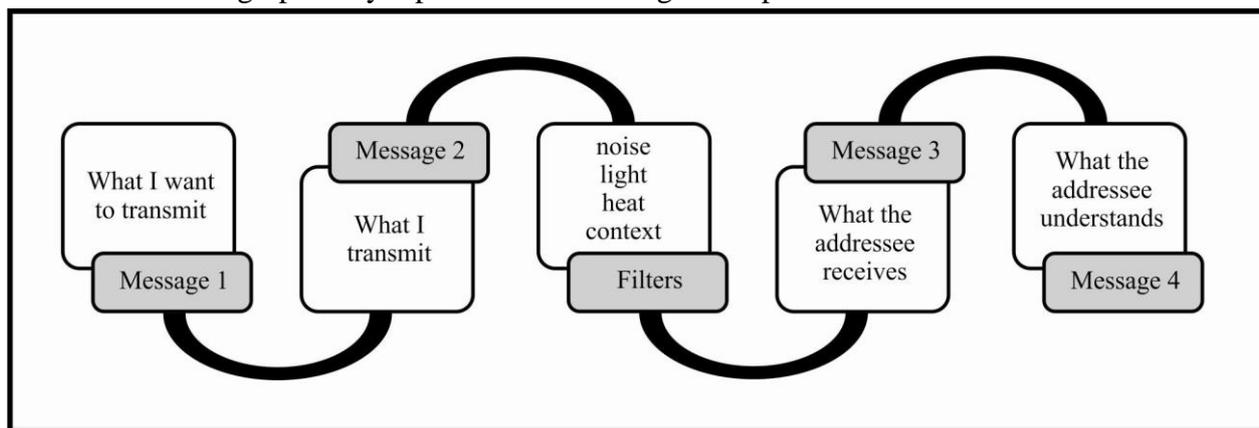


Figure 2. The diagram of the ideal communication

Source: adapted from Laramée (1989, p. 17)

Kant philosophical concept makes possible the inclusion in the category filters as a disturbing element, the individual experiences previously acquired by interlocutors. Dr Daouda (2004-2005) confirms that the two processes are influenced by the "rules, forces and working group climate, but also by affection."

In this way, there occurs each individual representation. An analysis of the field of communication addressing these representations would allow to the members of the educational community to clarify their images about reality, to perceive the diversity of interpretations which are offered to them (Bergson's philosophical principle according to which the reality is unique, but different for each one) to agree on changes to be made in the project of internal communication in order to represent each member of the school unit. In the same sense, should also be interpreted the Sauret (2012) statement: "... the reality is the one of the actors and it is negotiable and is being rebuilt in the communication interactions."

The illusions management analysis conducted by Goff in "*Les Illusions du management. Pour le retour du bon sens*" develops the idea of different interests or aspirations of the members of a professional team, and accuses the management of standing on the same involvement level and work implication for all employees.

The communication strategy has to start from the belief that every individual which communicates is directly involved in the communication process. But this communicational participation is shaped by his personality, needs and personal motivation system that can be explicit, implicit, conscious or not. "Whenever people do something, they do that thing for their own reasons, not mine or yours." (Maxwell, 2010)

Internal communication has the purpose the good administration of the relationship supply of information inside the organization. The features of the application must be integrated: demand evolutive in time (depending on events), variable depending on context (curriculum areas, departments don't have the same needs) and different according to the organization's members (the maintenance staff expectations are different from those of the teacher's). Related to the characteristics of the application, it is obvious that the supply of information must be adjusted and adapted.

The teacher can contribute to success of the organization only if he understands the stakes of the school unit, if it turns them into personal goals of employment, if he understands its utility in the project of the organization. Any internal recognition of the good individual practices (initiatives, success, and involvement in various projects) will strengthen the individual and the group dynamic. So, improving the performance of the educational organization depends on the efforts made for the internal communication effectiveness. The time when the order was sufficient is outdated. To listen,

to explain, to reflect and to act together with the internal actors means to motivate, to build the loyalty, to increase in performance, without forcing the objectives.

2.4. INTERACTIONAL PROCESSES IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Interactional processes designate the size of inter-communication, whether we take into account the internal actors of the school organization (members of the educational community exercising their functions in the school), semi internal actors (parents) or external ones (the community where unit school works, other organizations etc.).

Sauret (2012) considers that the process of interaction, in order to achieve a balance in the triad of the communicational intent – spread of the message - understanding of the information, there is necessary an "adjustment of the direction" decided depending on the nature of the group and the role of interlocutors inside.

2.5. THE COMMUNICATION REFERENT IN SCHOOLS

The analysis of the communication content (referent) involves an identification of the themes approached by the interlocutors depending on the context of communication. The communication referent in the communication context can be seen in the following graphics:

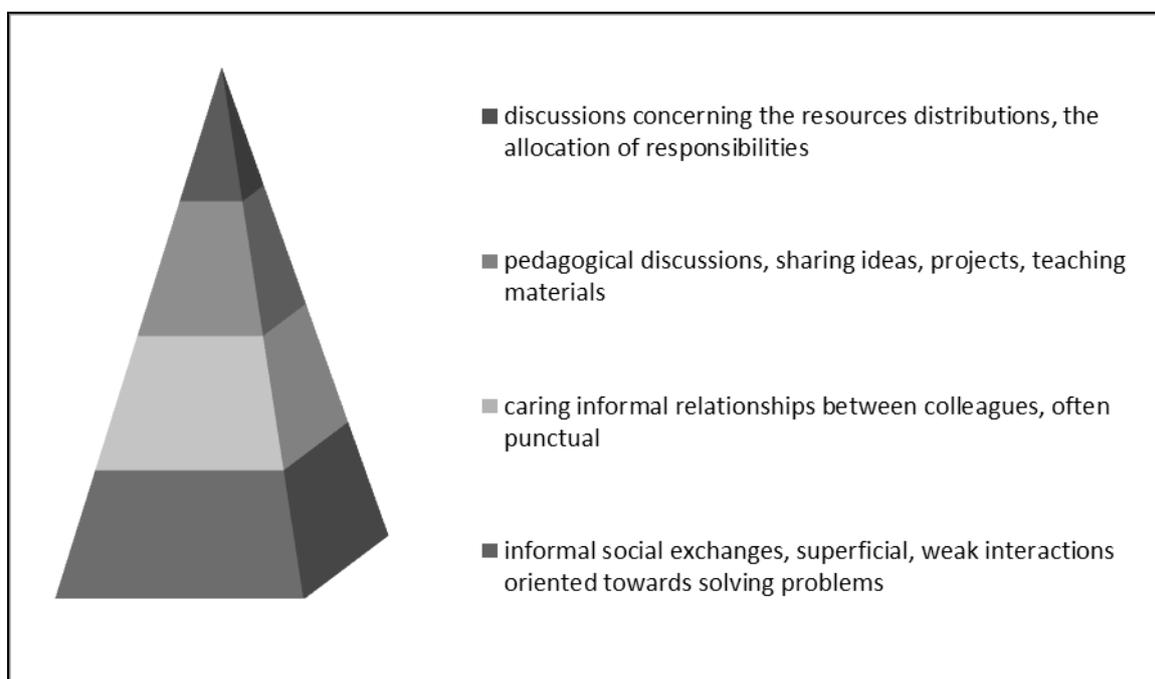


Figure 3. The communication referent in the educational organization

Source: developed by the authors

The first two levels of the pyramid concerns the relational dimension oriented to the improvement of the organizational climate, while higher levels reveals the technical dimension of internal communication, primary source of professional development because it allows the employability insertion and team learning through the exchange of information.

3. THE DOUBLE SIZE OF THE COMMUNICATION

An analysis of the double dimension of communication is also conducted by Marc (2008): "*communication often involves two distinct aspects: the transmission of content and the definition of a relationship between the interlocutors.*"

The statement is based on one of the communication axioms according to which through communication the individuals communicate and is communicated. Likewise, Palo Alto school adherents say that *"any communication has two dimensions: the content and the relationship, so that a relational dimension includes the first, which implies the existence of a meta-communication"*. (Watzlawick et al., 1972)

Customizing the act of communication in the context of the professional staff it is necessary to specify that the linguistic acts primarily respond to two needs:

1. A "functional" need, at which responds the language in the workplace by allowing the implementation of an activity and the fulfillment of tasks;
2. A social need.

The role of the language is not limited to the use of a code to convey information necessary to perform duties, or to exchange information purely professional. Beyond the "functional" role of the word involved in the execution of a task, there is the word "nonfunctional" facilitating the creation of the social links. Teiger (1995) emphasizes the importance of the linguistic acts "nonfunctional" considering that they play an important role in the professional activity: *"They are involved in the social relations inside the team. They have therefore an intermediate position, aligning coherently two dimensions - operational and relational, cognitive and affective - having the role to facilitate both the work and the collective existence - at least the social interaction - and the construction and the maintenance of the individual's mental activity and internal coherence of his life"*.

Girin (2001) reveals the double aspect of communication which presents speech acts *"targeted mainly towards activity and acts oriented towards social order"*. According to the communication axiom mentioned above there is an obvious interdependence between the two dimensions. In this way, the workplace interactions respond to two distinct needs: the transmission of instructions ensuring the professional operations and the inclusion of employees in a social framework.

We mention however, that one of the most prominent needs, especially in the case of the starting teachers represents the emotional support. Maxwell (2010) emphasizes the emotional aspect involved in communication considering that *"people won't always remember what you have said or what you have done, but they will always remember how you made them feel."*

This is the reason why relational dimension remains the foundation of an effective internal communication, leading to a new approach to the management oriented towards the human resource. Furthermore, the relational dimension influences teacher motivation, the involvement in school life and the job satisfaction. An optimal management of relational dimension decreases defensive attitudes of teachers, abuse of power, certain prejudices, conflicts and competition, facilitating the collaborative practices.

3.1 INHIBITORY FACTORS OF THE RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS IN SCHOOLS

Undoubtedly, the interactions are tributary to the context in which interlocutors are. In this way, the school program in shifts, the reduction of the breaks between classes from 10 to 5 minutes, the tasks to secure the perimeter of school unit by teachers who assure the order in school, the personal schedule, the absence of certain teachers, but also the fact that some teachers split their time between more schools become barriers to communication. But these contextual variables cannot be the exclusive source of the communication difficulties. The same problem is caused vertically interactional by:

- The teachers' reluctance regarding the school managers' intentions;

- The discomfort created to the teachers by placing the managers who are concerned with getting the job done to the detriment of motivating their employees
- The authoritative climate and the lack of feedback
- The preferential communication felt by others as discriminatory
- The realization of a class framing based on a personal and not professional relationship between the manager and the teacher.

The communication skills of the manager are a guarantee of the organization performance, the primacy of these skills being recognized by Hellregel et al. (1992) "... *the communication is the real job of the manager. [...] A manager acts like a transmitter – the receiver of an essential information in making decisions.* "

Moreover the comparison carried by Drucker (1999) between the XX century organization, whose important funds were production equipment and XXI century organization whose performance is ensured by employees, as knowledge holders, and productivity resulted from the exploitation of this knowledge. Repositioning the employee at the center of management is logically motivated by Manolescu (2001) saying that „*people are only able to produce and reproduce all other resources available to an organization.*” Such repositioning involves that the manager has to give up being authoritarian.

Horizontally, communication failures are caused by:

- Teaching staff individualism (titular or substitute status, studies graduated)
- Path addiction
- attitude of superiority supported partially by the subject taught or by the student performance at national assessments, but especially in the Olympics and school competitions;
- Preferential relationship with the school principals that enhance the level of professional dissatisfaction and indirectly generate poor performance.

It should be noted that on the effectiveness of internal communication also depends, in some cases, the teacher interaction with his students because the exchange of information which have as subject a particular student or group of students and which takes place in situations of communication between teachers can facilitate the understanding of a behavior which is a disciplinary offense, for example.

The key to success in the organization, internal communication allows the involvement and the optimization of the performance of each teacher and student. It is obvious that the winning team is the one in which its members work with pleasure.

In the case of the educational organization it is created a particular context in the sense that the success and the competitiveness of services mainly depends on the dialogue supplier - customer. "A teacher is not good in terms of what he knows, but in terms of what his students know." (Maxwell, 2010) This is why the internal communication as a vector of the school unit image outside, is a principle that cannot be denied.

The need for expression on other topics than those imposed by the workload in each subject studied has materialized for students in the creation of the National Student Council (NEC) among the main objectives of which can be found "*the active participation of students in the decision making about all aspects of school education*". (<http://consiliulelevilor.org/prezentare.php>)

The parents, semi internal actors in the educational organization, in spite of the establishment of the *Representative Council of the parents* and their legal representation on the Board of Directors of each school according to the *National Education Law* no. 1/2011, they were kept outside the sphere of the communication.

Most often, they have been associated with negative representations which the pedagogical research identified as three kinds of attitudes:

- Attitude of fear
- Aggressive attitude
- Attitude of indifference

The parental involvement in schools is still felt by some teachers as an intrusion into the educational process. In fact, very few undergraduate schools have special places for the communication with the parents and meetings often take place in the corridors, although when establishing the communication strategy of the institution they are considered targets of information.

4. COMMUNICATION ACT TRENDS IN SCHOOLS

The summation of these contextual aspects specific to the internal communication allows the realization of a forecast in the communication area in the educational organization.

The internal communication should be seen as a resource of the educational management that aims to attract, retain, motivate employees and create a collective relationship and coherence.

In the current competitive world where the beneficiary of the educational services is at the center of the customer marketing strategy, the establishment of an internal communication department would enhance the contribution of teaching, non-teaching and auxiliary collective to the creation of a general feeling of satisfaction. The relationship between the educational services provider with direct and indirect beneficiaries does not primarily lie on procedures (although they are useful), but they develop on a human dimension basis.

In the near future, the educational management will require to the internal communication a human finality that would harmonize with the economic one, an ethical implication, a consolidation of the organization's value. . Otherwise, the communication will become a tool of propaganda and will lose credibility.

This summary analysis of the internal communication inside the organization from the pre-university education reveals the capital value of the management communication strategies. The findings made permit to identify the effective communication functions, specified by Détrie and Meslin-Broyez (1995) *"encourage the active listening behavior, facilitate the dissemination of information, support the team work, and promote the spirit of cooperation. In short, develop a collective sense"*.

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