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Public communication structure enhances scientists' public engagement. A comparative assessment.

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Internal public relations offices in research institutes play a more important role in the generation and promotion of communication activities with the general public than the motivation of scientists. According to our cross-European empirical study, these offices also have a positive impact on scientists when their motivation to engage in these kinds of activities is low. This study included face-to-face interviews with 112 scientists and 9 national and local public relations and press officers of 5 relevant European centres involved in the field of nanotechnology and materials science, as well as observations of the public communication activities and interactions occurring in the centres. This work is an empirical and exploratory study with a qualitative approach but also using quantitative information to analyse scientists' public engagement activity at research institutes. Therefore this study does not offer statistical representativeness. We formulated and tested the following two hypotheses to find the predominant factor that enhances scientists' PE activity. Hypothesis 1: The amount of scientists' public engagement activity (PE) in research institutions varies mainly in relation with scientists' motivation to public communication of science. Hypothesis 2: The amount of scientists' public engagement activity (PE) in research institutions varies mainly in relation with the existence of a public communication structure. Our data strongly confirm Hypothesis 2.

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