

Communications strategy

FUNDAMENTAL STEPS FOR DEVELOPING A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Any type of communication action, from the creation of a simple poster to the development of an organization communication strategy, should first answer these basic questions:

- ▶ **What?** What is the message/messages you want to transmit?
- ▶ **Why?** The objective?
- ▶ **Who?** Who is the target audience?
- ▶ **How?** What Communication Tools, how to use them (internal/external human resources, budgets, etc.)?
- ▶ **When?** When to do the communication?
- ▶ **Results?** What are the results of the communication action? How was it perceived? (This will require establishing measurable indicators)

Any communications action is taken in the context of a goal, an issue, a message, and a relationship. The choice of which communication tool to employ should only be decided after answering these initial fundamental questions. The mistake that is usually made is to first decide on a tool (Website, brochure, etc.) and then think about how to make use of it. Before doing any kind of commu-

nication action, and especially if planning to develop a full communications strategy, the overall context should be well studied, including possibly doing an assessment of the existing communications actions, looking at the overall context, the organization image, communications tools being used, media presence and Web presence.

For a long time it was believed that communication should be reduced to broadcast the message to the receiver. **Today, communications is thought of as a relationship** with interactivity (in particular through the Web). Communication actions that integrate inter-activity as part of its plan are likely to be more effective. **Listening** is equally important when it comes to implementing upstream and downstream communication actions.

When developing a comprehensive communications strategy for an organization or a program, the plan should include the answers to the fundamental questions listed above. The strategy is then developed into a communications plan or an action plan that serves as a "Road Map" detailing how to go about implementing the strategy. This can be created in the form of a Calendar Table that clearly notes for each target, the messages, the communication tools to be used, the expected results and the target audiences and the stakeholders.



The Main Goals of Communication

▶ **Build, Maintain, and Improve image.**

Without a good image, all communication actions run the risk of being useless or at the least not very effective. The perception of an organization is linked to the following: Notoriety/Recognition (the fact of being known); Reputation (more or less "good", something that should be able to be expressed by words, adjectives, that readily come to mind when anyone is asked about the organization), Identity (activities, history, logos, awards, recognition, its partners); Values; Personality (as defined by its actions, statements made by its leaders, etc.) In general, some of objectives for doing Corporate Communications (organizational/institutional) are as follows:

- ▶ **Inform, Sensitization**
- ▶ **Joining a Cause, Fundraising**
- ▶ **Defending its interests; Influencing** (lobbying and advocacy).
- ▶ **Reassure; Reduce or eliminate displeasure/Protests**
- ▶ **Create/improve feelings of belonging, pride, loyalty** on the part of staff, associates, members of an organization, partners in a network, etc.
- ▶ **Attract, Reassure** investors, shareholders.
- ▶ **Recruitment**
- ▶ **Crisis Management**
- ▶ **Sell Products and services**



The Main “Targets” or “Stakeholders”

- ▶ **General Public**
- ▶ **Communities, Social Groups** (according to gender, age, geographical location, etc.)
- ▶ **Tourists**
- ▶ **Elected Officials, Institutions, Ministries and Regulatory Authorities**
- ▶ **Funders, Investors, Clients, Sponsors**
- ▶ **Partners**
- ▶ **Scientists**
- ▶ **Collaborators, Organization Members** (internal targets)
- ▶ **NGOs, Associations**
- ▶ **Media** (The media are intermediary targets through which other targets can be reached)
- ▶ **Clients, Prospects** (potential clients).
- ▶ **Suppliers, Distributors, Service Providers**

NB: Targets need to be identified and defined as “Main Targets” and “Secondary Targets”



Communication Domains

Here are some of the types of communications campaigns that managers of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and their partners could employ for doing communications actions:

Awareness Communication

This involves informing, sensitizing, drawing attention to a topic for the purpose of raising the consciousness of the target audience in order to influence its future actions. In this type of communication the facts are presented, usually statistics concerning a problem and the issues at stake, with the objective that the recipient of the communication will understand and then act positively and in turn transmit the message. This requires well-articulated arguments and messages. This is an active, engaged communication. The success of a Sensitization/Awareness campaign rests on the fact that the targets come to understand by themselves, through reflection, the problem and issues raised, and then decide to take action. Inter-action is a key aspect.

- **Most widely used communication tools:** Public Speaking (meetings, conferences-debates, theater and games, trade shows); Internet and Social Media; as well as mass media: Radio, TV, Journalists/Media; Signage (billboards, posters, etc.)

Influence Communication

This is aimed at advocacy (general public, through mass media) and lobbying (decision-makers, usually done with discretion), and public affairs.

The objective: To influence decision-makers, such as elected officials, board/committee members, federations, certification boards, regulatory agencies, etc.

- **Most widely used communication tools** Media, Internet, advocacy billboards in urban areas, Face-to-face, meals (lunches, etc.), lobbying meetings.

Institutional Communication

The objective is to establish and/or improve an organization's image. The target audience: All audiences can be considered the "main target."

- **Corporate Communication utilizes a range of communication tools, among them:** Corporate advertising (TV, radio, billboards, Web, films, media); Website (official), Public Relations, Annual Reports, Brochures, Conferences, Official Statements (from top officials), "Citizen Actions," Sponsoring, Philanthropy, Promotional Products.

Acceptability Communication

The aim is to persuade about the usefulness of an internal or external project. This is a difficult type of communication effort because it has to take into account the psychological and social processes that could block the acceptance and which at times may be contradictory. This requires identifying and taking into account the many different types of profiles among the targets (supporters, skeptics, indifferent, resistant, etc.)

- **Most widely used tools:** Brochures, meetings, billboards, posters, media, Website. Focus on interaction! The voices of the stakeholders should be heard. Do not over promise. Do not promise the impossible.

Proximity Communication

This is communication conducted in the field, at the grass-roots level. The targets are: village communities, fishermen, local actors such as elected officials, the local media, community residents, etc.

- **Most widely used tools:** Basically those that do not require expending a large amount in resources, such as public meetings, posters, flyers and leaflets.