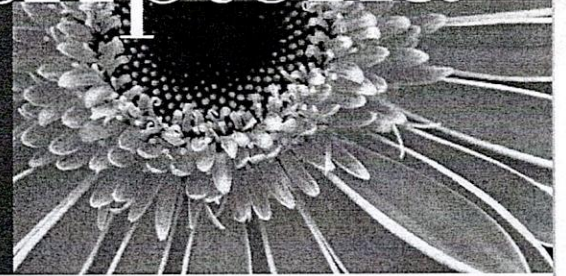
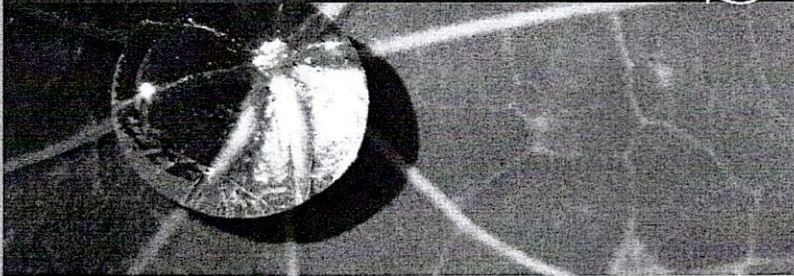


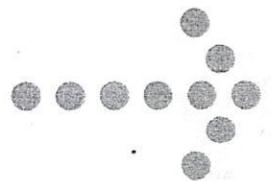
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Strategic Communications for Development

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Understanding strategic development communications

What is communications?

Communications can basically be divided into two main areas: 'communications to influence' and 'communications to inform'.

Now obviously the boundaries between these two divisions aren't black and white. Advertising, for example, seeks to influence you in some way. But it often does this by informing you of (in the case of a chocolate bar, for instance) the high quality of the ingredients, its great taste and aroma, etc.

Where advertisers often struggle is with the quality of the information they're providing, because ideas like 'taste' are subjective. So they have to work very hard to persuade you that their chocolate bar is 'better tasting', or that one pair of trainers is that much more desirable than another.

In the development arena, this very often isn't such a problem. Concepts like 'it's wrong to let children die from lack of clean water if we can avoid it'

aren't that difficult to grasp and they aren't that difficult to sell.

So we can agree that your products (your development foci) aren't boring and they should be easy to sell. Why then aren't people beating down your door trying to learn more about your work? And, why aren't they all fighting to implement your policy recommendations?

The reason is that while you don't have to cope with the 'yawn factor' that many other communicators have to face, you do have to overcome the other major hurdle that all communicators struggle with every day – the general background noise of everyday life.

Coping with the crowds

In the modern world, where information overload is the norm, your attempts to communicate anything are pretty much akin to you standing in a big crowd and shouting as loudly as you can.

The only problem is that a lot of other people are shouting out their messages too.

Getting yourself heard

So, how do you make sure that your message is heard? There are three

simple techniques that spring immediately to mind:

- Simplify your message in order to catch people's attention
- Find an attention-grabbing channel
- Reduce the size of the crowd that you're talking to by segmenting your audience.

Simplifying your message

If you're shouting in a crowd, people find it much easier to hear and understand single words or short phrases than they do long sentences. The same is also true of life in general, where busy people won't take the time to listen to long explanations of a subject just to find out if it interests them.

So, you have to use short, snappy explanations to grab their interest – after which they'll be more willing to listen to your point of view and all the information you have to give.

Good communicators know this well, and regularly produce short and snappy messages such as 'every 30 seconds an African child dies of malaria'.

The problem is that this approach isn't used as often as it could be – so not all potentially attention-grabbing issues

are being highlighted as well as they could be.

Groups within your organisation should identify all the key issues that they want to promote and then produce three or four of these phrases for each. These can then be used again and again – not only on posters and marketing collateral, but on the covers of policy briefs, reports, and all the other more 'information heavy' documentation usually produced by a group.

Finding an attention-grabbing channel

The issue of channelling your message is strongly linked with the need to segment your audience – as the channel you use will be dictated by your audience's likes, dislikes and interests. But there are some general rules that you can apply.

One is that it's usually useful to find an attention-grabbing channel to complement the more mundane channels that you already use (such as a regular newsletter). If you've got a sanitation message to spread as part of your next policy paper, for instance, then don't just post it in an article on in the newsletter. Why not also post a short form of the message on posters in the toilets throughout your building?

People are forced to spend time in the toilet – which is essentially a blank messaging space.

Identifying your audience

One of the major problems with development communications is our constant failure to properly identify the audiences we work with. We tend to aim our communications at large, vague groups, rather than taking the time to tailor them in a way that will mean that they have a much stronger impact.

Simply saying that our audience is 'the British public' or 'policy makers', for example, really isn't good enough. These are general audience categories which simply aren't that useful if you are trying to implement a really successful communications campaign. Instead, you need to further divide these major groupings into audience 'segments' with similar characteristics.

So if you want to communicate with the public, you need to ask yourself, 'who makes up the Nigerian public'? 'What general categories can the Nigerian public be divided into'?

One easy way to do this is by age – a technique that marketers use a lot when selling products. In the UK, for example, advertising for a particular

alcohol might be targeted at 18-25 year old females, while most of the adverts you see for cider tend to target 25-35 year old blue-collar males.

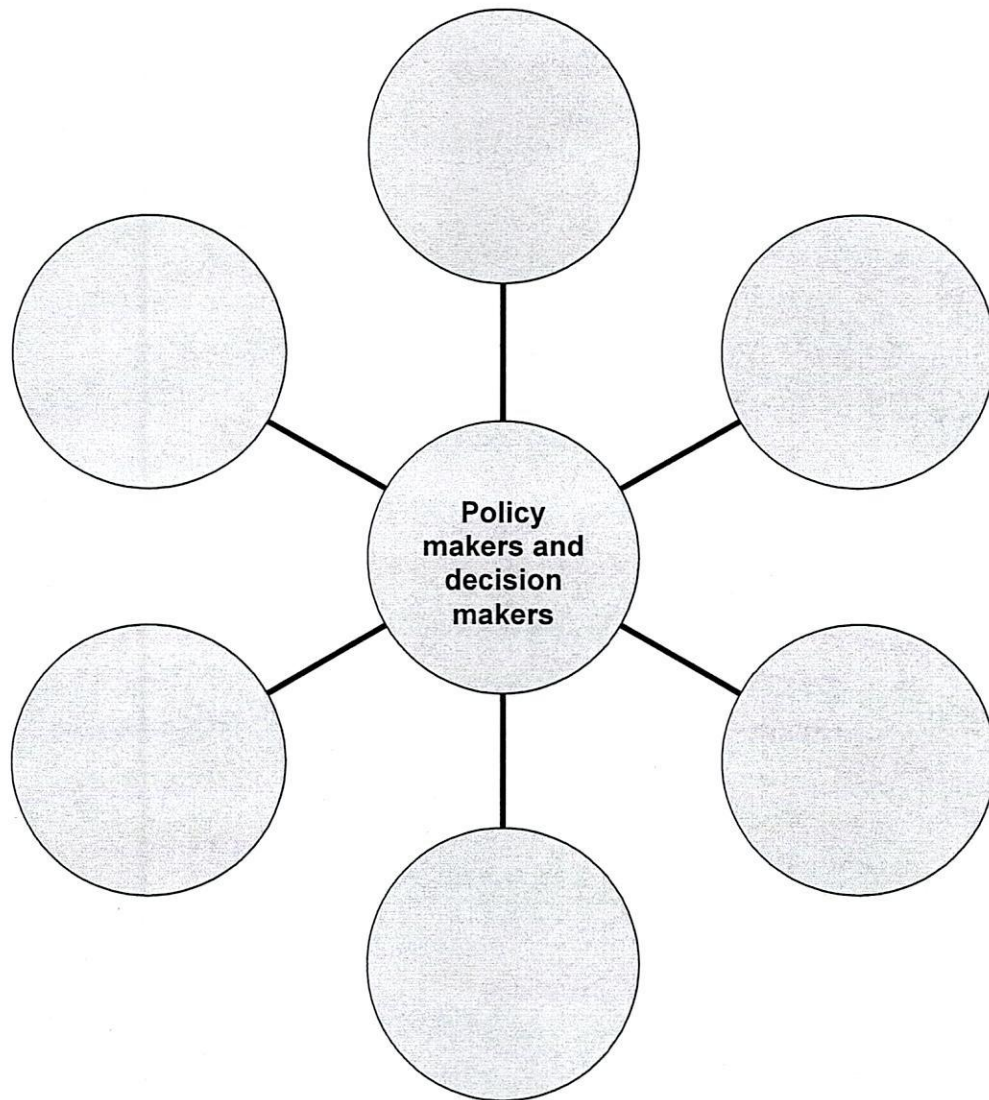
Dividing audiences up in this way is extremely useful because people within these groupings have similar characteristics (e.g. they'll like the same kind of music, attend the same sorts of venues, etc.). And, importantly, they'll react to the format in which a message is embedded in a similar way.

All of this holds true for development audiences as well. The more precisely you subdivide ('segment') your audience, the better you can target your communications products and initiatives and the more effective you will be at communicating your messages.

Useful tools

A useful tool that you can use when trying to segment your audience is the 'audience wheel' which provides a quick and dirty method for identifying who precisely makes up any one large audience grouping.

Identifying your audiences: the audience wheel



What is strategic communication?

Strategic communications are essentially communication efforts based on a strong over-arching plan which ensures that everyone is pulling in the same direction. Well-planned, strategic communications also ensure that as much use as possible is made of certain key opportunities.

- Strategic communication is planned and accomplishes a purpose.
- Strategic communication is targeted to a particular audience or audiences.
- Strategic communication is designed and delivered to produce the desired outcomes, such as changes in the policy and practices of an organisation or individual behaviour.
- Strategic communication aims to achieve results with the best possible use of time and resources.
- Strategic communications is time bound – that is, you set out the goals that you want to achieve in, for example, one year, and then identify the best ways to make that a reality.

The pathway to successful communications

It is important to distinguish between:

1. a communications *strategy* – which outlines your overall communications goals,
2. a communication *operational plan* – which details what communication activities, projects and programmes your group will carry out to achieve these communications goals in a specific period, and
3. communication *implementation plans* – detailed plans for specific projects, programmes or activities.

Strategic goals

Your strategic goals set the overall direction for what you want to achieve, and therefore how communications can help. You can think of them as sign posts on the horizon that you want to reach.

These are very wide-ranging statements of what you want to achieve. It's often useful to think of them as 'Great Big Goals'.



Operational plan

The operational plan sets out what you are going to do to reach those strategic goals (your Great Big Goals). So you can think of an operational plan as explaining the pathway you are going to use to reach those goals on the horizon. It will identify, for example, key events or opportunities for communicating your messages.

Implementation plan

Finally, your implementation plans set out in detail how you are going to make each activity identified in the operational plan a reality. So you can think of the implementation plan as detailing how much cement and how many paving slabs you need (as well as when they need to be delivered and to whom) in order to build the pathway needed to reach your strategic goals.

In reality, your implementation plan will

- assign responsibility for ensuring that an event, for example, is properly organised,
- set dates far in advance for the sign-off on key collateral like the design of displays (which will reduce print costs among other things),
- identify the key messages to be broadcast at the event and outline the different methods and resources to be used.

Tip! Develop a list of tasks, responsibilities, budget and a detailed timeline for each implementation plan

For your communication to be effective, a great deal depends on organisation. Tasks and responsibilities have to be clearly divided among the team. If this isn't done, you will risk missing vital steps and deadlines. It will not be clear how the team will operate and how their activities are to be coordinated. Briefing everyone is pivotal to having a coordinated and effective approach.

Be realistic in the amount of time needed by taking into account the time to reach the project outputs AND also the time and inputs needed for the organisational process. This is especially important when you are working with other departments (e.g. Communications Division, Minister's Office).

Developing your messages

Groups also need to take the time to develop sets of key messages for the areas in which they are working.

These are overarching messages and phrases which they will make a commitment to push out in all their products in one way or another. An example of such a key message might be 'investing in development doesn't just help the poor, it also helps us by helping to stabilise the world economy'.

Setting your messages out in this way and circulating the list to your team usually results in teams taking a much more united front to their messaging,

which quickly improves the impact of any communications work that they are doing.

In developing your messaging for your audience groups, the focus should be on:

- the impact of your work;
- value for money;
- the people whose lives are improved through your efforts;
- using clear and appropriate language for the particular audience.

Framing messages for specific audiences

Some audiences, for example those people who already regularly support a charity like Oxfam, are likely to respond well to the message that 'fighting global poverty is the morally right thing to do'.

Other audiences, for example those who wish to buy cheap fashion items, may respond more positively to a message that appeals to their self-interest.

Exercise: Developing your key messages

Working in a group of 4, develop a set of 10 key messages designed to highlight particular aspects of your work.

Once you have agreed your key messages, you will join with one of the other groups and compare their key messages with yours. You will then "throw out" the messages that you feel are least important so that at the end of the exercise you are left with only 10 key messages between you.

To do this, decide what audience your messages are aimed at and try to craft them in a way that will appeal to them.



Actually developing your messages is only half the battle, however, when you work in a large organisation. You also have to ensure that the other people who have to communicate your messages understand why they are important and why they should be

communicated. In a well organised development organisation, this is particularly relevant to the communications team, who are there to help you spread your messages but can't do this if they don't fully understand them.

Pyramiding: Developing your key messages

1. Working alone, write out what you feel are the 10 most important messages your organisation should be communicating (10 to 15 minutes),

2. Next, combine your messages with those of the person next to you and discuss them. Throw out the ten weakest messages so that at the end of 10/15 minutes you are left with only 10 messages in total.

3. Join with one of the other groups (to make a group of 4) and then repeat the process – so that at the end of 10/15 minutes you are left with only 10 messages in total.

By the end of this exercise each group should have 4 or 5 short explanations of the background to, and importance of, your different messages.

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Writing interesting documents

One useful way of judging the tone of your writing (and sometimes how much time you need to spend crafting a piece) is to ask yourself whether your audience is 'captive' or 'non-captive' (i.e., do they have to read that document or is it their choice?).

The need to capture your audience

Below are listed some of the different categories of document you come across every day in your working, and non-working, lives. How well they communicate their messages will depend directly upon whether you use the appropriate tone for the audience that will be reading them.

- Reports and other formal (work) documents—you already have a captive audience. People either have to read this for their job, or they come looking for information/new findings that are directly useful to them.
- Newsletters—you need to think about capturing your audience. The newsletter may be in a field that's relevant to your readers, or they may be interested in the subject, but they still might just be having a quick flick through the publication.

- Feature stories—you really have to capture your audience. They are browsing through a newspaper/magazine. They come across your story *by chance*.
- Press releases—you need to 'shout' to attract the attention of the news editor. If you don't, you won't have any audience, because the editor won't print your story!

Your goal is not just to communicate information, but to capture your audience and keep them reading to the end.

Technical detail

You need to think hard about how much technical detail to include. It's really important to get this right—if the person that is meant to read your publication cannot understand it, then the effect of your work is completely lost.

It's all about packaging. The same message should come across for all these different types of publication, but the degree of technical content will be different. Formal reports and journal articles etc. are of course meant to be technical, but feature stories and press releases are not. And newsletters—depending on who they are aimed at, can have some technical content, but still need to be easily digested.

Timing

Timing issues are different for the different publications that you can target.

Press releases need to be very carefully timed, especially if they are about an event that is just about to happen, or that has just happened—they are useless if they are late.

Newsletters have a regular publication schedule; so, if you are writing an article for a specific issue, you must check the submission dates carefully.

Feature stories, on the other hand, don't usually have to be timely, and you have more breathing space.

And what other timing-related issue should you consider?

Sentence lengths

Shorter sentences are, of course, easier to read. So make sure that for press releases and newsletters you make a special effort to keep sentences short and snappy.

Feature stories can contain sentences that are a bit longer. Experts say that a good average length for a sentence is 20 words (or slightly fewer) when you are writing for a general audience. A

recent sample of scientific journal articles had an average sentence length of 35 words.

The inverted pyramid

As you know, when you're writing a formal piece of work, you introduce the topic, present your evidence step-by-step, and this all leads logically on to the conclusion at the end. For press releases, news stories and newsletter articles too, the order that you present your facts in is completely different.

You hit your readers with your main conclusions in the first paragraph (the 'lead'). Then you arrange your facts in decreasing order of importance—this is called the 'inverted pyramid'. The most important paragraph is at the beginning of the story, the most important sentence is at the beginning of the first paragraph, and the most important fact is at the beginning of the sentence.

All the key facts and findings are at the beginning of the article. This has the following advantages:

- if newspaper/newsletter editors run out of space they may cut your article from the bottom up
- if readers are skimming through a newsletter/newspaper, they will at least read your conclusions before moving on to another article.

A large rectangular box containing 25 horizontal dashed lines, intended for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the box. The box is outlined with a solid black border.

The written word—tricks and tips

A) Increasing readability

Research on readers has helped us to understand how they behave, what encourages them to read, what stops them from reading, what makes things easy to understand and what blocks understanding.

The key to increasing readability is using simple language. But how can we make language simple? Four top tips are to:

1. Use short sentences

- Write only one thought per sentence.
- Ensure that your reader never stumbles mentally because your message isn't clear. You don't want your readers to have to re-read any of your sentences because they didn't understand them the first time round.

2. Use simple words

- Use short words that are concrete, not vague or abstract.
- Beware of '-ise' or '-tion' e.g. change 'utilisation' to 'use'; change

'credentialisation' to 'establishing your credentials'.

- Don't use jargon.

3. Write as if you were speaking

- It is less formal.
- Speech is more simple and straightforward than the written word.

Example: Would you say

“the male members of the community were instrumental in the enforcement of the statutory regulations”?

What could be a simpler way of saying this?

4. Cut unnecessary words

- Your message will not come across clearly if you use unnecessary words.
- Non specialists may just stop reading if they have to wade through 'waffle'.

Example: cut the underlined words in this sentence 'In so far as concise expression is concerned it is entirely the responsibility of the author.'

5. How do we know if we've succeeded in making the language simple?

Use readability tests. You can find some of these tests on your word

processing package. They are based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence. They are a very good gauge of your writing.

- **Flesch reading ease test:** The higher the score, the easier the text is to read. 'Standard writing' for a general audience should have a score of 60-70. Scientific papers: 19-27.
- **Flesch-Kincaid grade level test** (based on US school grade levels): Again, the higher the score, the easier to read. 'Standard writing' for a general audience should be 7-8 (approximate age of 12-13 years!). Scientific papers can be grade level 12.
- **Person-on-the-street test:** Would someone that you had just met on the street understand what you had written, if you read it out loud to them?

Summary: How to get your message across

- Be clear, concise and brief
- Keep your own voice
- Keep your writing simple and direct.

Remember: Writing plain English does not patronise or trivialise. What it does do is communicate what you want to say in the best possible way.

B) More tips to help non specialists understand

- Don't use jargon.
- Define terms (in an easy-to-understand way).
- Use examples! Especially if you can show what concepts mean in terms of people/their lives.
- Explain statistics, setting them in context, making them visual (and making sure they are not confusing).

Example: the amount of fish that the villagers harvested from their pond—in just one year—would have covered the area of ten football fields.

- Bring in people—focus your writing from a very general level down to the level of an individual. Don't just say 'people in developing countries have this problem'; illustrate how the problem affects a particular person and his/her family.
- Use quotations from people—even from colleagues!

Confident presentations

Think about your delivery

How you deliver a presentation is vital. Good presentation depends on a range of factors, including how loudly you speak and the body language you use.

The first 5 seconds

The first 5 seconds are vital. This is when your audience decides whether your talk is going to be interesting to listen to or hard work and boring.

When you walk on stage, people have already begun to assess you before you begin to speak. Be confident. Look at the audience, and smile to show that you are relaxed and in control (you may need to practice this if you are nervous).

Talking to your audience

Don't just walk on stage and read from your notes – it's best to memorize what you need to say and then use your slides to prompt your memory. This is because you need to interact with your audience, and you can't do this if you are reading from a notebook on the podium in front of you.

Make sure that throughout the talk you look at your audience. Meet people's eyes and use gestures to emphasise your meaning. Point at your slides when speaking (being careful not to block the projector).

Remember, do not just read what is on the slides. The slides should contain bullet points or short phrases. You should expand on these, explaining your subject to the listening audience.

You also need to remember to speak more slowly and more loudly than normal. Because you are talking to people on stage, you are likely to speak quickly because you are nervous. Make sure you speak clearly so that everyone (including the people at the back of the room can hear). Audiences always lose interest when presenters seem to be speaking to themselves.

Pitfalls

Lots of little things can ruin a good presentation. Don't have keys or change in your pockets. When people are nervous they tend to jangle they tend to rattle the change in their pockets – which looks and sounds bad. Jewellery can also cause problems. Avoid necklaces or brooches which

might interfere with a clip on microphone.

The look of your slides

Make sure that you use the same font on all your slides. You also need to ensure that the heading on every slide is in exactly the same place – otherwise when you play the slides the heading will jump about. Use the boxes PowerPoint provides for headings and text to ensure that all your text and headings stay in the same position on the slide.

Use large text to ensure that your slides are easily visible from the back of the hall or meeting room. Don't use text that is less than 15 point. Also, don't highlight or use all capital letters for large blocks of text, as this can be difficult to read.

If you use a slide with a coloured background, you'll also need to make sure that the text stands out enough against it. For example, black text won't show up very well on a blue background – white text might be better in that case.

Check the spelling of your slides. There is a spell checker in PowerPoint. Spelling errors in slides will annoy your audience. People also tend to think that, if you are careless enough to

make spelling mistakes you may have made mistakes with your data too.

Use colours that look professional. And try to use only one or two colours per slide. Avoid very bright 'luminous' colours which may look outdated and unprofessional. And don't use the fancy 'Transitions' in PowerPoint. Audiences quickly get bored of these, and just want to see your next slide, not clever graphics!

Make sure that all Tables and Figures are easily readable (by using large text, clearly labelling axes, etc).

Getting it right

The only way to give a good presentation is to practice it. Simply reading the slides and your notes is not enough. You must 'act out' the presentation, visualizing an audience in front of you. Practice looking at different people in your pretend audience.

You also need to practice 'transitions' that is moving from one slide to the next, and looking between the audience and the projection screen. Practicing this can highlight a lot of problems – for instance it's easy to get lost if you accidentally press the button too hard and skip a slide. Or, you can forget what point you are dealing with

if you are nervous. Practice will help you avoid this.

Dealing with nerves in front of an audience

When you talk to audiences it's easy to become nervous because you think people look bored. Giving a presentation and seeing someone yawn, for example, can make you lose your place. Or, you might think that people are scowling and looking displeased. But you have to remember that in all likelihood NONE OF THIS IS TRUE.

You must remember that people tend to frown and scowl when they are concentrating on what you are saying. People also tend to yawn, because yawning is the body's way of getting more oxygen - which is a natural reaction to sitting in a stuffy room for a couple of hours.

Practicing the presentation in front of friends or colleagues will help you to overcome your nerves. One good tip is to use an in-house seminar to practice your presentation. For example, if you have to give an important presentation on your work at another institution, give the same presentation in-house to your friends and colleagues beforehand.

They'll no doubt be interested, and the questions they ask will help to prepare you for the questions that other people will ask you at the actual presentation.