

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

I believe I am making an accurate statement when I say that the management has a clear understanding of the importance of communication in the efficient and effective application of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) and the implementation of the TDSP. I have seen documents about development programs elsewhere, but I must say that one document that has highlighted very well the importance of communication in program implementation is that which refers to the TDSP and the EIF. The TDSP documents that I have seen, for example, have clearly identified communication, particularly strategic communication, as an important undertaking in the Program.

I am guessing, of course, that this might be the basic reason the TDSP and EIF have hired National Communication Consultants. Such would not have been undertaken had the management of the national program as well as the executor agency did not believe in the importance of communication.

It is appropriate, however, that we begin by defining what we mean by communication. This paper is heavily oriented towards strategic communication as we would be focusing on the macro-level.

What is Communication?

For practical purposes, I would like to avoid an academic definition of communication. Instead, let us look at a very practical and simple definition. For example, most experts will simply say that communication is the sharing of information and meaning. A more focused definition depends on the over-all intention of the sharing of information and meaning. For our own purposes in this workshop, let us consider communication to have three common orientations, which are: mass communication, corporate communication and

development communication. I shall give you later the philosophical and historical grounding of these orientations, but suffice it to say for now that these orientations have their own specific definitions.

For an increasing number of communication experts, mass communication generally refers to informing and entertaining the mass audience, while corporate communication generally refers to informing and convincing the target stakeholders to accept what is being offered as an organizational given, and development communication generally refers to informing and educating audiences (Librero, 2013; 2012). We shall be discussing this in much more detail later.

Why the Need to Communicate the Development Agenda?

There are three very practical reasons why there is a need to communicate the national development agenda to the stakeholders of national development. I have discussed these elsewhere (Librero, 2012), so I quote myself here:

To seek public understanding, acceptance, and support. The public needs to understand fully why the country needs to have a national development agenda and program, and why such program must be accepted by it. Public acceptance is a function of the public's understanding of the national development agenda and program, and provides legitimacy to said development program.

To seek public commitment to the national development effort. Another feature that has very high significance in any national development program is public commitment. The public must be committed to the program so that there is strong basis for implementing it.

To seek public ownership to the development plan. Finally, the public must accept ownership to the national development program because this is an expression of absoluteness. If the public owns the program, then there is assurance that it is understood, accepted, and there is commitment to its full implementation.

A word about ownership. During the study tour of a delegation from Vanuatu (January 21-22, 2015) to Cambodia, brief observations were made about lessons learnt from previous study tours on trade and trade-related programs. The first conclusion that was mentioned was the significance of the fact that funded development programs must be owned by the beneficiary country particularly where the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) was being implemented. Briefly, the principle is that a country-beneficiary must own the development program implemented in the country rather than refer to it as donor-led program. While funding might be coming from various donor countries, these donor countries have arrived at the conclusion that they would rather not be identified as responsible for the development program. Instead, it should be the beneficiary country that must own the development program even if funding comes from elsewhere.

This principle applies in the same way for national development programs planned and implemented by the executive branch of the government. If the general public accepts and owns the development program being

implemented by the government, then it could be said that such development program is owned by the country and its people. Under such condition, it is assumed, the national development program will succeed.

What is a Communication Plan?

In most of the available literature, the concept of a plan is invariably associated with the concept of management, which is usually simplistically defined as determining where you are, where you want to be, and how you intend to get there. Communication plan follows such kind of orientation (Librero, 2013). In a book titled *Communication Planning, An Integrated Approach*, Ferguson (1999) highlighted that there are five different types of communication plans according to purpose and content. For our workshop purposes here, we shall look at communication plans in terms of the following types:

Strategic Communication Plan

The most abstract of the communication plans is the strategic communication plan, which invariably means communication planning at the top management level, where management commitment to support the plan, must originate.

Operational Communication Plan

According to Ferguson (1999), operational communication planning is also “fairly general” or broad in nature, but must specify how the organization or perhaps the program shall achieve the strategic objectives of the program. At this level, planning becomes more concrete because planners should already rank-order priority communication activities, linkages to the strategic objectives must be clearly indicated, key client groups must be identified, and indicate complimentary activities and services (Ferguson, 1990.)

Communication Work Plan

The communication work plan is usually a continuation of the operational communication plan, and it has much more details. In fact, the communication work plan, according to Ferguson (1999), identifies the following as part of it:

- Products and services to be delivered;
- Performance indicators to be applied;
- Milestones to be determined and measured;
- Evaluation methodologies to be adopted; and
- Allocation of resources to be made for specific products, services, and activities.

At this level, it is best to present the plan in matrix format, as follows:

Communication Work Plan

Specific Items/Activities	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Etc.
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

This communication work plan matrix indicates the series of activities that need to be undertaken as well as the relative time when such activities must be undertaken. In management, this is usually referred to as the PERT-CPM matrix, an engineering tool to be applied in the performance of specified tasks. It gives you at a glance what task is being done and how long it shall take to complete this task.

Support Communication Plan

Many experts say that this is the most common communication plan, and it identifies very specific activities. In brief, a support communication plan is a plan of action focused on highly specific aspects of a communication undertaking. A good example of a communication support plan refers to all the detailed communication activities and procedures that should be undertaken in the implementation of a specific project under a program, for example. It could be specific communication activities identified to be implemented in managing a press conference. It provides very specific details, even to the extent of determining the time and place where such activity must be undertaken, and sometimes including expected outcomes.

Crisis Communication Plan

Perhaps the most practical definition of the crisis communication plan is that it is a set of communication activities that must be done to rectify things that have gone wrong in the implementation of a communication plan in support of a development program. Ferguson (1999), for example cited Meyer, Books and Goes (1990) as having pointed out that life has a string of "long periods of boredom and short periods of terror." This, obviously has reference to calm and turbulent periods. Applied in the lives of organizations, or even development programs, these periods of boredom and terror would easily be equated with periods of program implementation without significant problems encountered along the way, or crises situations. In crisis communication plans, significant aspects of the plan would include the following: crisis indicators, communication team members, communication strategies, response and control mechanisms, evaluation of operations, and guidelines for all communication activities, small or large scale.

Why the Need for Communication Plan?

In past years, organization managers rarely considered communication as important in the management of organizations and development programs. In recent years, however, both the public and private sectors

have invariably relegated communicators to different levels of standards. For example, organization managers did not expect communicators to answer for their efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of programs and organization objectives. This situation has changed. Communicators are now expected to be able to document their successes. To meet this much higher level of expectation, communicators must now have clear strategic, operational, and work plans so that they are clear about their objectives.

Comprehensive planning, according to Ferguson (1999), is a critical new communication function, which must be integrated into the planning cycles of organizations.

Building the Over-All Communication Orientation

In previous papers (Librero, 2013; 2012) I have ventured into an explanation of a process of achieving communication orientation, more specifically, development communication. Let me quote myself on this, as follows:

... the guidepost for a development communicator is a process of trying to reach the level of mental preparedness, readiness, and willingness to pursue with single-minded confidence and commitment through the use of communication, of a human development purpose or end-goal. It is a mental state that predetermines how we must respond to and interpret a situation in order to be better prepared to pursue it through various means of communication.

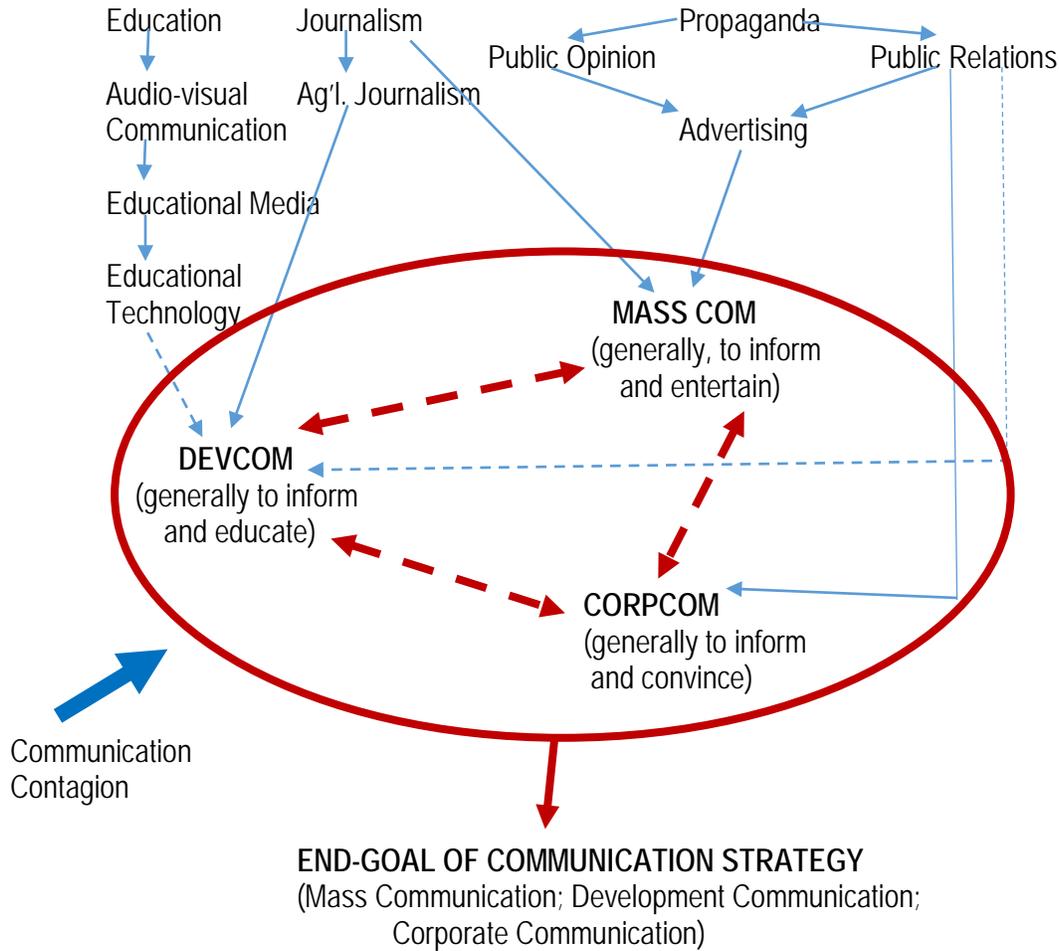
The DCM Contagion

This was how I explained what I have referred to as the Devcom-Corpcor-Masscom contagion in an earlier paper (Librero, 2013):

The fundamental assumption of the concept of contagion is that contact is provided by communication networks that serve as mechanisms or conduits to expose people and organizations to information and messages that affect behavior (Burt, 1993; Contractor and Eisenberg, 1993). As a result of this exposure to this network, it is assumed that members would develop beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and behavior similar to these networks to which they belong (Carley & Kaufer, 1993).

Contagion theory, therefore, seeks to uncover the relationships among organizational members of the network. The significance of this relationship is that all members of the organization, the network if you will, are presumed to have similar levels of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Under this condition, members of the communication organization or network would tend to influence one another into demonstrating similar levels of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

Figure 1. The D-C-M Contagion (Librero, 2013)



NOTES:

Corporate Communication and Development Communication have become independent of and more purposive than Mass Communication.

Mass Communication has been overtaken by Media Communication

The broken lines indicate direction of influence.

Everything operates within the ambit of human communication

Diagram indicates only the mediated aspects of human communication as they relate to mass communication, corporate communication, and development communication.

Communication as Tool for Development

In the past, it was customary to automatically label a set of communication activities that were designed to support or enhance the implementation of specific programs of action, particularly development programs, as communication support plan. As indicated by the DCM contagion above, we had referred to mass communication basically to inform and entertain the mass audiences, corporate communication to inform and convince the stakeholders to embrace the programs and products of organizations, and development communication to inform and educate audiences regarding the need to embrace and support the programs of development of both the private and public sectors of society.

As indicated in the DCM contagion, too, there is now a situation whereby each of mass communication, corporate communication, and development communication interact and influence one another in order to achieve the end-goal of communication. We are beginning to see now the blurring of boundaries between the three major areas of communication (mass communication, corporate communication, and development communication). What this is telling us is that we have come to a point where we no longer pay particular attention to whether or not we are doing mass communication, corporate communication, or development communication.

When we design a communication plan to facilitate the implementation of a development program, we are no longer insistent in calling it development communication. We now simply call it communication plan. This is what I have said in a previous discussion with communication specialists (Librero, 2013):

While we can always initially say that we will do development communication, for example, in actual practice we would be employing the methods and tools that are also methods and tools of both masscom and corpcom. The end-result is a blurring of the boundaries among the three communication strategies. They are differentiated mainly by the context in which they are undertaken, but they use similar procedures and similar tools, using similar measures of success or failure. The difference lies mainly in the focus of intention or context.

In order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of, say, devcom, the communicator could use entertainment as one of the techniques of making content more palatable to and enjoyable for the target audience. The same thing happens in the case of corporate communication or mass communication.

The purpose of pointing this out is to clarify to ourselves that what we are doing we may call development communication, but we ought to be aware that some if not all of the techniques and procedures that we might be employing are techniques and procedures that we also share with other strategies of communication. In other words, these are not mutually exclusive. We call our communication action devcom perhaps because our dominant intention is to educate our clientele (see communication contagion) rather than because of the tools we use.

Elements of a Communication Plan

According to various sources, most communication plans exhibit eight elements, also known as substantive content or essential characteristics. These frequently appear to be conditions that must be undertaken or processes to be performed for all communication plans. They are as follows:

1. *Goals and objectives.* What do you want to achieve by implementing a communication plan? These will help you focus your communication efforts.
2. *Audience identification and profiling.* When you know your audience well, you are able to select the most effective ways of communicating with such audience.
3. *Message development.* Your messages, of course, are very closely tied-up with your communication objectives. These messages are pieces of information that could change the audience's level of understanding, beliefs, and perhaps courses of action about the development program you are promoting.
4. *Selecting communication channels.* What channels of communication are you going to use? This may be dependent on what media are consumed by your audiences.
5. *Select the activities and materials.* What are the activities and materials that you will use in the specific channels of communication that you have identified to be used?
6. *Establish partnership.* This refers to individuals, groups, organizations or businesses that will assist you by providing specific forms of assistance such as expertise, support, funds, and other resources.
7. *Implementing the plan.* Communicating the development program is a major activity, and it will require substantial amount of resources, both human and non-human. Your ability to implement your plan will depend greatly on your work plan, expressed in a Gantt Chart.
8. *Evaluate and adjust as needed.* There are two general evaluation approaches: formative and summative. Formative evaluation is what you do midway in the implementation of the plan to find out if you are achieving your objectives and running according to your time frame as expressed in your work plan. If you are not on schedule, make the necessary adjustments and proceed again. Summative evaluation helps you determine, at the end of the implementation of your plan, the extent of your achievement of your objectives. Compare the performance standards you have set at the beginning of the activity (objectives) and the results of the implementation of the communication plan.

Components of the Communication Plan

A cursory review of the literature of communication planning would indicate that what may be referred to as elements and components of communication plans are interchangeable sometimes. For purposes of clear planning focus, however, we are separating the two. Therefore, the basic components of your communication plan refer to those that need to be present in the communication plan. In other words, your plan will not be complete without these:

1. *Event.* This is what warranted your communication plan, in the first place. The term “event” here would refer to the development plan that you would want to communicate.
2. *Message.* This is the content of your communication. It is both the development agenda of government and the development program that you want the audience to know about.
3. *Communicator.* Who or what agency or organization is responsible for communicating the development program? In the case of TDSP, for example, the unit that is responsible for communicating it is the Department of International Cooperation (DICO). Of course, when we say that the DICO is the communicator, it automatically means the communicators of the department, i.e. the communication unit. However, it should be pointed out that the DICO as communicator means that all members of this department do have a communication function. Hence, they are all responsible, individually or as a group, in communicating the TDSP.
4. *Audience.* Who are the audience of the support communication plan to promote the development program? That is to say, who need to know, or who must know and understand the development program?
5. *Timing.* Especially for the development program, there is a need to constantly inform and situate the public about the substance of the development program and what its positive effects would be on the general population.
6. *Tools and format.* These refer to how messages shall be formulated or designed so that they may be transmitted through identified media and channels that will reach the target audiences. Conceivably, message design and media formats may vary according to the preferences of the audience.
7. *Follow-through.* This aspect refers to designed activities that shall be undertaken to determine whether or not information and messages transmitted have been understood by the target audience.
8. *Maintenance.* This refers to the means of updating the communication plan and the tools that are used. It is entirely possible that the messages may be updated, even changed.
9. *Accountability.* The issue of accountability has something to do with who (individual or organization) is ultimately responsible for the implementation of the communication plan.

Writing the Communication Plan

Writing the communication plan is not difficult once the content has been decided. To facilitate the process, the steps in writing the communication plan are simplified here (www.crsprogramquality.org), as follows:

1. *Identify your objective.* For many planners, this is like asking the questions: where are you now?, where do you want to be? , and how do you want to get there? In other words, what do you want to achieve?

2. *Determine your target audience.* The audiences of national development programs are diverse in terms of interests, orientations, education, political leanings, and social status. It is always wise to analyze what comprises the over-all audience and determine whether or not a particular audience may be prioritized as target or not. Who is your priority target audience? Why? It would be helpful if you could prioritize the audience segments you wish to reach and determine what media channels and messages you would direct at them over what time period.
3. *Design your key messages.* Depending on who your audience would be, determine what kinds of messages you are going to use in your communication. Once you determine the kinds of messages you will need to communicate, you will, of course, have to design those messages in terms of how they would fit into the nature of media that you will use.
4. *Determine your communication methods.* This is really determining the communication channels you will use. Through what channels are you going to communicate to your target audiences? In today's world, multiple media channels would be most useful.
5. *Plan for two-way communication.* Communication specialists always emphasize that the process of communication must always be a two-way process. The communicator and the communicatee must constantly interact in order to achieve the intention of sharing information and meaning. In a communication plan, therefore, there must be a process whereby feedback is automatically considered so that communication participants must be able to make immediate adjustments according to the nature of the communication act.
6. *Establish your time frame.* In the realm of things, if there is a beginning, then there is an end. This condition requires that a time frame be put in place. The importance of time frame is that we should be able to easily determine whether or not we have achieved our communication objective. For practical purposes, we set to achieve our communication objective over a specific period of time so that we know when we should find out if we have succeeded or not. The obvious fact, of course, is that the time frame tells us immediately when we are supposed to have completed our task.
7. *Draft a budget.* The next important item is the budget, which is the financial expression of all activities that must be performed over a period of time. In general, the budget is expressed in terms of salaries and wages for personnel involved in the implementation of the communication plan, maintenance and operating expenses, and capital expenses, if any.
8. *Implement the plan.* This is a brief description of how the communication plan should be implemented. In general, not all activities are done simultaneously. Certain activities will have to be undertaken ahead of others precisely because some outputs of specific activities might be needed as inputs to other activities in the process.
9. *Monitor the results and look for ways to improve.* Many communication plans do not include the aspect of monitoring and evaluation. In fact, frequently, this is considered as a separate function and not part of the communication plan. From the point of view of evaluation, any communication plan may have to undergo two evaluation procedures. First, a formative evaluation may need to be undertaken to make sure that the implementation of the plan is going according to design. Second,

when the entire plan has been executed and completed, a summative evaluation is usually undertaken to make sure that the plan was correctly implemented

It must be noted that each step requires a series of questions whose answers would help in determining the most appropriate approach for the program.

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