

## **Strategical communication as a method**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a way of thinking and planning strategic communications step by step. But even though the term step is used, the process must not always follow the sequence shown here. Often it may be necessary to go backwards and forwards to adjust the steps in relation to each other. This applies not least to the choice of target groups, the determination of sub-objectives, the selection of the main procedures and the level of ambition. But regardless of the sequence, no step should be omitted. The overall focus is effectiveness in order to what extent objectives is reached. This article is based upon my experience and as responsible for exercising approximately 50 strategies primarily within the public sector, in addition to use of The Norwegian Central Government Information Policy. Which is as a fact the only public information policy in the whole world which is implemented. Of this reason this article could be interpreted rather normative than empirical theoretic.

**Key-words:** strategical communication, planning, implementation

### **Planning for strategic communication**

The word “strategy” comes originally from the Greek and means “warfare”. Earlier it was mostly used in connection with extensive military operation plans. Today the word has become almost an in-word which is used in many different connections, and it is often extremely unclear what it really means.

A strategy indicates the direction and the method of approach that can be used to reach defined objectives. *“Strategies are instruments and key result areas which have been given priority and which are to contribute to the government or organisational body achieving the desired effects for its users and for society”* (Statskonsult, 1994).

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Giving priority to key result areas and instruments means that a choice must be made between various alternatives. Many therefore describe a strategy as a method of finding the route to the objectives that have been set. Strategic communication planning can therefore be regarded as planning how communication can contribute to achieving the objectives of the government or organisational body. But to choose the correct route, it is not enough merely to know where one is going. We must know the terrain, know where the obstructions are and where there is a risk of driving off the road. And we must know something about what it is *possible* to achieve with the help of communication (White & Mazur, 1995). Unfortunately, communication cannot solve every problem.

### **Levels of strategic and tactical planning**

In a military connection, a distinction is made between strategy and tactics. Strategy is the part of the art of war which is concerned with warfare on a large scale, while tactics are the part concerned with leading smaller units. But without making a comparison with warfare, we can make the same distinction when we plan communication. After the strategy – the main route to the objectives – has been determined, tactical planning must be used to implement the strategy. We have then arrived at the measures stage, and must make the communication plan. It concerns for example choice of distribution channels to get the message out to the public. Shall we choose cinema advertising or advertisements in weekly magazines? It also concerns the formulation of the message itself. What is most suitable for the target group in question? Strict factual information, humour, or information which will arouse feelings?

Such tactical decisions are of major significance in attaining a good result, and tactical expertise is therefore extremely important in all communication activities. But the problem is that without strategic expertise, good tactics will not help much. Strategic expertise keeps the long-term objectives in view and is constantly aware of the reasons for the actions taken. The most important aspect after all is not to do things right but to do the right things. The strategic planning must be done first, and the tactical planning must be founded on the strategies to enable communication to be used as an instrument to reach objectives.

### **Renewal and development**

It must of course be possible to modify or change a strategy. Unforeseen circumstances may arise which make it necessary to take another route than the one first chosen. But one point with strategic planning is to create preparedness to meet challenges and as far as possible to try to predict development in different areas. Strategic communication planning can thus contribute to the renewal and development of communication activities.

In addition, if care is taken to ensure that the planning process has a secure foundation in the management and that the staff is involved in the planning, the process

in itself will have positive effects. These can include increased understanding of the use of communication as an instrument and more interest for this. When it has been agreed which strategies are the right ones, it is not necessary to spend more time and energy discussing what must be done each time a new communication problem arises. Strategic communication planning can thus also benefit efficiency.

### **Dilemmas of specific problems**

Underlying strategic communication planning is the actual situation that confronts us and the problems we must solve. This can apply to specific cases, problem areas, key result areas or to the whole government or organisational body. But at the same time, communication strategies must always contribute to reaching the overall goals, and these must therefore have their basis in the same framework which otherwise applies to the service.

Many wish to create one overall communication strategy for the whole of government or organisational body. But for large bodies like a ministry with many and extremely varied specialist fields, this is usually difficult to achieve. The reason for this is because, as mentioned, the point of departure must be the specific problem which is to be solved, whether this consists of a separate task or a larger specialised field. It is therefore most often only in smaller government bodies that one comprehensive communication strategy can be appropriate.

If the organization has an overall strategy where priority is given to certain key result areas, communication strategies must naturally be founded on these. But if there is *no* overall strategy document, is it then not possible to make communication strategies? Yes, it is still possible, but the basic requirement is always that there are objectives to be reached. Strategic communication planning can in principle be based on one of the following three situations (Horsle, 1998):

#### **A. The organization intends to create an overall strategy**

This is undoubtedly the most favourable foundation to work from. This actually means that management must choose key result areas and must make the main choice of routes which will lead to the goals. The use of communication as an instrument for the individual key result areas must already be discussed at this stage. After an assessment of communication as an instrument has been made, the strategic communication planning is concerned with formulating communication objectives and choosing the most appropriate procedure to reach these.

#### **B. The organization already has an overall strategy**

In this situation it is too late to say anything about communication as an instrument in the overall strategy as such. However, an overall strategy with defined key result

areas and overall goals is a good basis for strategic communication. The planning will then be based on the key result areas and will evaluate how communication can best be used as an instrument in connection with these.

### **C. The organization has no overall strategy nor immediate plans to create one**

But even though there is no overall strategy here, long-term strategic assessments may well form an integral part of the business plan or other documents. In this case, these could form the basis of a communication strategy. And of course communication strategies can always be prepared for individual areas even though the service has no collective strategy. But the prerequisite is then obviously that objectives for the desired achievements have been set. Sometimes the strategic communication planning process in such a situation can provide a foundation for assessments and key result areas, or can create requirements for these. In this way an overall strategic process can be set in motion.

### **Communication policy**

As previously mentioned, it is often difficult to create a total, overall communication strategy for an entire government body. But in all services there is the need for a document which describes the role of communication on an overall level, and which gives standards for the whole government body. Such a document I will call the *service communication policy*.

It is important to determine what the foundation for communication activities is, and it must be made quite clear what the Information Policy means for each service. As an advice the service communication policy should contain a set of guidelines which are related to the service as a whole and which should be followed by everyone in the organization. Each individual government or organisational body must decide what type of guidelines is required. For example they can cover organizational communication, media relations, crisis communication, the use of Internet, and corporate identity. In addition the document should describe how the communication activities in the service are organized, and how tasks and responsibility for communication are divided between management, specialist departments/sections and the information unit. If communication strategies have to some extent been drawn up for key result areas, these can also be included in the service communication policy (Horsle, 1998).

The Norwegian Central Government Information Policy contains of five main principles (The Ministry of Labour, 1994). The two first are professional. The third last are about organising the communication function. Each government or organisational body should ask what the information policy and its five main principles means for them, and what must be done to comply with these. The questions below (in italic) can function as a checklist for assessing the present situation in the individual government service.

**Communication.** There must be two-way communication between government administration and the public. This must satisfy both the sender's need to give information and the receiver's need to receive it. Information must be formulated and presented on the 'receivers' terms. *Do we know enough about each public? Have we gathered knowledge about them in order to be able to communicate on their terms and in line with their requirements? Do we today communicate on each public's terms? Have we procedures and systems for two-way communication with each publics?*

**Proactive communication.** Government administration must take the initiative to provide information specifically formulated for each public and based on their needs. Priority must be given to information on civic obligations and rights. *Do we cover publics' knowledge and communications needs? Do we give priority to communication on civic obligations and rights? Do we include communication aspects from the beginning of all planning processes?*

**Line management.** Each government body and each individual unit within a government service are responsible for the communication in their own areas of responsibility. *Are the roles and tasks of senior managers and line managers clearly defined with regard to communication? Is the relationship between the line management and the information unit clearly defined? Is communication an integrated part of line activities? Do subordinates services comply with the communication policy?*

**Comprehensiveness.** Information from the individual government body, from different sectors and from different levels of government administration must be coordinated so as to be perceived as a whole by the receiver. *Do we interact with other government or organisational bodies between levels and across sector boundaries in providing information to the public? Is our own communication coordinated so that it can be perceived as a comprehensive whole?*

**Communication as a management responsibility.** The management of each government body is responsible for implementing the communication policy and for ensuring that the staff has the information and communications skills required. *Has management fully accepted its responsibility for communication? Is the responsibility of management for communication incorporated in written management documents? Do senior managers take responsibility for ensuring that information is used in a professional and ethically accepted way?*

However, if the communication policy is not to be regarded as something that merely concerns the information unit, it must be made the focus of reflection and interpretation within the service and put in concrete terms in the shape of simple, practical messages. These will become an important part of the communication policy of the service. An example; The Public Roads Administration in the county of Buskerud has

placed great emphasis on providing very specific instructions as to how the five main principles are to be put into practice. The example quoted below applies to the communication principle: *Communication shall take into account the needs of both sender and receiver. Communication shall take place on the receiver's terms and there must be a two way process as regards communication both before and after decisions are made. This means that we must monitor the needs and wishes of the public as well as of the parties concerned. This can be done through meetings, opinion polls, monitoring of the media and active cooperation with organisations involved.*

### **Communication as an instrument**

Information and communications can be used for two main purposes:

1. to create a good relationship between the government body and the public
2. to influence the public

We refer here to the relationship between the government service and its surroundings, i. e. to external communication.

These two purposes differ in that the first is based on reciprocity while the second is based on a change in the receiver of the communication only. The first implies that the two parties involved in a communication process must have an accurate and updated picture of each other's position. Furthermore, they must also be willing to approach each other. Part of this is the political process where citizens put forward their viewpoints at elections and public hearings and the central administration reacts. It also entails that the central administration shows itself to be open, accessible, honest and receptive as regards questions from the public. This corresponds to *the communication principle* in The Norwegian Central Government Information Policy. The second purpose is associated with the word *instrument*, i. e. something which is employed to create a desired effect on the receiver. This is covered by the principle of *active information* in the communication policy.

Basically there are several effects one can hope to achieve through the use of communication as an instrument. Among these are knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. For instance, it is desirable to provide the public with information enabling them to claim the rights they are entitled to (behaviour). However, the link between knowledge, attitudes and behaviour is not as simple and straightforward as is often claimed. Changes in actions may just as well influence attitudes as the other way round. Legislation making the wearing of car seat belts compulsory led to their use also by people who had a negative attitude to start with, but who then adopted a positive attitude. There are also examples that behaviour can lead to a search for knowledge. People who have bought a new car are usually eager to read everything that has been written about that particular make of car in order to get confirmation that they have made the right choice.

Sometimes the purpose of communication is merely to place an issue on the agenda, and this can also be regarded as an effect of communication (Heath, 2002)

### **Five instruments at political disposal**

A public sector makes use of five basic instruments to achieve an effect. These are:

- a) laws and regulations – e. g. the prohibition against smoking in public places or regulations making the wearing of car seat belts compulsory,
- b) money, in the form of grants or duties – e. g. grants for energy saving or duties on cigarettes and alcohol,
- c) organizational instruments – e. g. the establishment of the Sami Assembly ('Sametinget') to enable the Sami population in Norway to develop their language, their culture and their community life,
- d) technical/physical instruments – e. g. bottle banks that facilitate the sorting of glass at source or road barriers that prevent cars from entering pedestrian areas, and
- e) communication – e. g. a campaign for first-aid or a campaign against graffiti.

Communication is generally considered to be the weakest of these instruments. Information about the health hazards of smoking is said to be a weaker instrument in the effort to get people to stop smoking than a duty on cigarettes, which is in turn a weaker instrument than a ban on smoking. Naturally this does not mean that communication is unimportant. Other instruments also have limitations. For instance, there are laws against drunken driving and against smoking in certain places. Even so, people still drive under the influence of alcohol and still smoke where it is forbidden.

### **What effects are to be expected from communication?**

In the 1970s and 1980s a number of public campaigns were run in the shape of full-size advertisements, for example in magazines. 'Stop smoking', 'Stop drinking', 'Eat healthier food and jog more', were familiar themes in many of these campaigns for which the Norwegian Central Information Service was awarded a number of international prizes. Today we are more reserved in the public sector when it comes to this type of campaign. For one thing, it is very difficult to pinpoint any effects other than an awareness of the campaign itself, at least in the short-term.

Communication is an instrument which is primarily suited to setting the agenda and spreading knowledge. As far as changes in behaviour are concerned, more forceful means are required if the target group does not consider the message to their advantage in the short-term. People do not cut back on electricity until it is so expensive that their pocket is affected, and in times of drought many do not turn off their garden watering system until the threat of a fine becomes a reality. This was experienced in both these cases in 1996 despite direct mail as well as full-size advertisements in newspapers.

Whether we can expect to gain other effects from communication in addition to attention and knowledge depends entirely on the point of departure for the target groups. Evaluations shows that communication as the sole instrument is best suited: a) when the target group sees the desired behaviour as being in its own interests, b) when communication is combined with social pressure for a change in behaviour, as in the case of throwing down litter in the local park, c) when we can accept that changes in behaviour or attitudes only occur over a long period of time and in response to repeated communication efforts (Statens informasjonstjeneste, 1997).

However, although there is a limit to what communication alone can achieve, in most cases it is a prerequisite for the success of other instruments. Communication as the sole instrument is not very well suited when a) talking about effects which involve drastic changes in behaviour, such as expecting someone who has smoked 60 cigarettes a day to stop smoking overnight, b) when everyone in the target group must achieve the desired behaviour. Drunken driving is dealt with through legislation, not communication campaigns.

### Short-term and long-term effects

The time dimension is important when analysing the effects of communication, and effects into short-term and long-term effects. These concepts cover both how long it takes to achieve the effects and how long the effects last. Four possible combinations of these variables are illustrated in the table below (Windahl, 1992):

Table 1. Effects – time and endurance

		TIME FOR EFFECT TO EMERGE	
		Long	Short
ENDURANCE OF EFFECT	Long	1	2
	Short	3	4

*Combination 1* illustrates a situation where it takes a long time to achieve effects, and the effects have a long duration. Examples of such effects are reductions in knowledge gaps and the alteration of values. As a rule, communication is needed over a prolonged period to bring about long-lasting changes in behaviour. Therefore, in many cases it may be effective to repeat the message over a long period of time so as to achieve permanent effects.

*Combination 2* is a situation where the effects arise after a short time, and have a long duration. Fairly powerful and dramatic stimuli will be required. A hypothetical example is information for young people about the prevention of traffic accidents where an accident victim meets the target group and describes the consequences of the traffic



accident. The strategy here is to create such a strong and realistic impression that the effects are long-lasting. It must be added that this strategy is not always successful. The use of powerful instruments or so-called ‘terror propaganda’ can cause the receivers to block the message completely.

*Combination 3* refers to communication activities where it takes a long time to achieve a short term effect. An example is activities aimed at increasing participation in a referendum. Although the effect is short-term in that it applies only to one event, namely the casting of one’s vote, it can take a long time to build up.

*Combination 4* is a situation where it takes a short time to build up effects and these effects are short-term. This might be the case if a brief communication effort succeeds in placing an issue on the agenda and the issue is short-lived. Media’s fund raising campaigns are examples of short-term efforts which have short-term effects. The communication is aimed at directing the public’s attention to a specific problem, with the intention of achieving a particular action, i. e. giving money. The communication is linked to fund raising itself and does not have the aim of achieving long-term effects.

### Intended and unintended effects

The effects of communication can be both intended and unintended, and both these can be positive or negative in relation to the aim of the communication. The following table illustrates this division (Windahl, 1992):

Table 2. Intended an unintended effects

	Intended foreseen	Unintended unforeseen
Positive	1	2
Negative	3	4

*Combination 1*; a positive, intended effect is when communication aimed at increasing election participation among young people does in fact lead to such an increase, i. e. the communications aim has been achieved.

*Combination 2*; a positive, unintended effect is when communication about the sorting of special wastes leads to decreased consumption of products which give rise to this type of waste, or to greater interest in environmental protection generally.

*Combination 3*; a negative, intended effect can arise if a campaign for less fat in people’s diet results in a lower turnover of certain kinds of agricultural produce. This might bring about the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector. When making a strategic choice, we accept the price that has to be paid to achieve the objective.

**Combination 4;** a negative, unintended effect is when a campaign against racism leads to increased hostility towards immigrants, or when communication about the prevention of cancer results in a greater fear of cancer among the general public. These are often termed ‘boomerang’ effects.

We are usually concerned with the communications effects on the target group, but effects can also occur outside this group. A hypothetical example of an unintended negative effect occurring outside the target group is when information about AIDS aimed at homosexuals results in the adoption of negative attitudes by other groups or individuals towards homosexuals. This can in turn have a negative effect on the target group and as a result they choose to reject the information.

### **Communication objectives**

The purpose of strategic communication planning is to support the overall goals of the government body. This means that the objectives for information and communication must be formulated in such a way that they do not conflict with the overall goals that already exist.

It is a well-known fact that objectives can be formulated on several levels. Moreover, a number of different concepts are generally employed in connection with strategic plans and business plans. The most common of these are overall goals, goals, primary objectives and sub-objectives. The use of these terms varies. Overall goals express the total desired effect. They are usually worded in very general terms, as in the following example: *‘To increase the knowledge of the public about child welfare services’*. Sub-objectives specify or quantify what is to be achieved over a stated period of time, making it possible to verify at a later stage whether the objectives set have been achieved. It is important to keep in mind that sub-objectives can be set both for what is to be done (performance targets) and for what it is hoped to achieve (outcome targets). The desired effect must always be stated if sub-objectives are to be strategic. It is also important to note that an effect will always be achieved among some receivers. Consequently *the target group where the effect is to be achieved* must be indicated. The overall communication goals thus express the desired effect of the communication effort as a whole, while the sub-objectives supply key results for the individual target group. A sub-objective should consist of the following components:

1. the type of effect it is wished to achieve
2. how great the effect should be, or what degree of change there should be in relation to the current situation
3. when the effect should be produced
4. who should experience the effect

An anti-smoking campaign aimed at young people may have several target groups and therefore several sub-objectives. An example of the latter might be worded as follows:

*‘By the end of 1998, 80% of pupils in upper secondary schools shall be able to name at least four serious health hazards linked to smoking.’*

The problem that arises when establishing sub-objectives is often to determine how great the effect should be. It may be helpful in this connection to distinguish between *absolute* and *relative* effects. An absolute effect means that the effect has had a full impact on everyone in the target group, for example that all heavy smokers have stopped smoking. A relative effect means that the desired planned effect is assessed against the current situation and on that basis an evaluation is made of what can be achieved within the available time frame.

The objectives set must be as realistic as possible. If a change in behaviour is the desired outcome of the communication effort, we should not formulate objectives that appear impossible for the target group to achieve. This means that in an anti-smoking campaign, the sub-objective for heavy smokers should perhaps be that they reduce their cigarette consumption by a certain amount every day instead of stopping completely, and then gradually increase that target over a period of time. The alternative is simply to set sub-objectives for communication when it comes to promoting attention or knowledge and then add other instruments in order to achieve the actual change in behaviour.

So far we have mainly dealt with objectives which indicate that we wish to bring about a particular state (of knowledge, behaviour or attitude) within the target group. This might be knowledge of rights and duties, new trends as regards diet or traffic safety and so on. However, a Swedish communications researcher, has pointed out that such objectives can quite easily hinder opportunities to achieve greater influence. Instead he proposes *activity objectives*, meaning that the objective should be to encourage people to react more critically, to reflect more, to seek more communication, to engage in discussion, to form their own opinions – in short, to react by showing increased mental and social activity (Nowak, 1971).

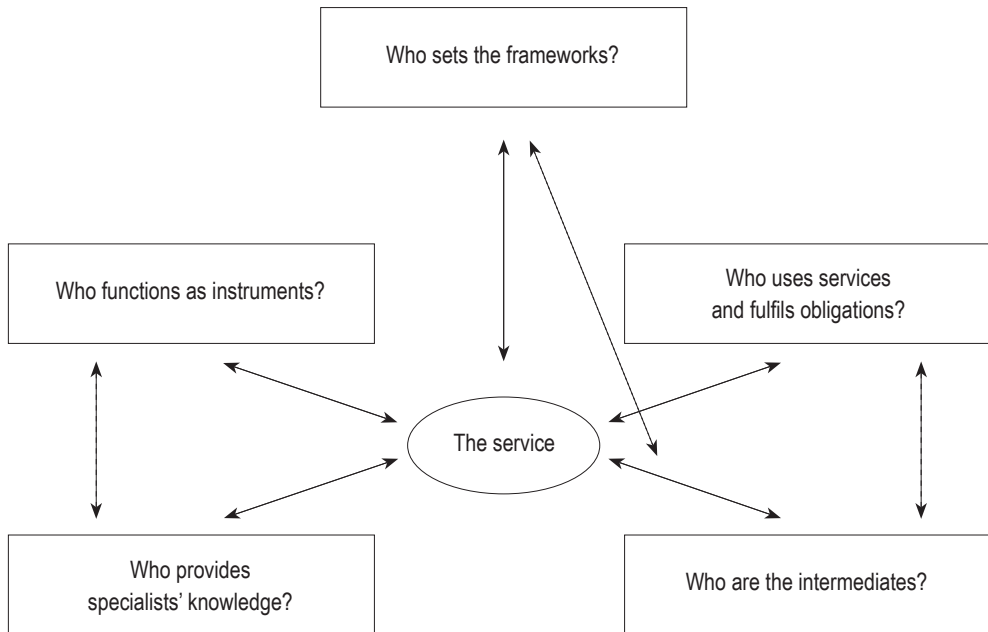
We can also set sub-objectives which are intended to improve the reciprocal relations of the government service and its publics. These sub-objectives should also indicate how publics may be able to influence their contact with the service. A very general example of this type of *relations objective* might be as follows: ‘All publics shall experience government services as credible and easily accessible, while those who are in direct contact with the government service shall feel that their problems and viewpoints are listened to with interest.’

## From publics to target groups

Analyses of stakeholders or publics and their communication needs are important elements in strategic development. I prefer in this article to use the term publics even the concept of 'public' can be rather complex because it is not always obvious who the publics are. Occasionally a distinction is drawn between users, collaborating sectors and other interested parties or players. The term 'public' is employed in this article to refer both to those influenced by communication and to those who influence it (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The various publics play different roles and fulfil different functions, so that their relations also differ. The same public can play several roles simultaneously. For example, the media and certain organizations may act both as publics and channels of communication. And on occasion, a public can also be a collaborating sector as in the case of another government service.

It is important that relations between the government service and the individual publics are as clear as possible to both parties. Although there may not necessarily be agreement in all cases, it is essential that the parties have a correct understanding of each other's position. For example a service which is unaware of the viewpoints of various interest groups can easily be taken by surprise when the interest groups ally themselves with the media or make a direct approach to a parliamentary committee. After the various publics have been identified, it may be advisable to group them according to the role they play in relation to the service. This can be done in many ways with the degree of comprehensiveness varying according to what is appropriate. This type of classification is often referred to as a communication or 'player' chart. Figure 1 presents one way of making such a modified classification (Horsle, 1998). Figure 1 shows that the various groups not only have relations with the government service in question, but also to a varying degree with each other. The dotted arrows are simply examples of relations between groups, and each individual service must scrutinize its own activities and construct its own chart. This also applies to the descriptions in the different boxes. Not all services have end users who 'use services and fulfil obligations'. An example is the National Nutrition and other similar bodies whose main task is to provide information. Such descriptions must thus be replaced by others more suited to the activities of the individual service. Most services will also discover that their publics may play several of these roles simultaneously. For instance, a subordinate service can both function as an instrument and provide specialist knowledge.

Figure 1. Classification of a communication or a relational chart



It is important to keep in mind that this model is used to describe the relationship of the government service to its surroundings (Horsle, 1998). Members of staff are not part of the surroundings but of the service itself. As a result they cannot be regarded as a publics. However, it is vital to communicate with this group, and organizational communication must be highlighted in all strategic planning.

#### *Who sets the framework?*

These are the bodies that have the formal authority to set political and economic objectives as well as framework for the government service in question. In the case of the central government administration, this is the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament), the government and other executive bodies.

#### *Who functions as instruments?*

These are the bodies and organizations that the government service has direct authority over or which it can employ as instruments in carrying out its tasks. They may be subordinate services, other state enterprises, county municipalities and local authorities, as well as voluntary organizations. For example the State Educational Loan Fund distributes loans to students through their place of study, while the Norwegian State Housing Bank uses the municipal authorities as the first liaison body in the case of loan applications.

*Who provides specialist knowledge?*

These are the organizations and players who play a major role in influencing the professional norms that form the basis for the service. They may be universities, colleges and research institutions, professional bodies and international organizations.

*Who uses services and fulfils obligations?*

These are often called end users, i. e. they are receivers of services and carry out tasks in the service's area of responsibility – in other words, those for whom the government body really exists. They can affect the achievement of objectives both positively and negatively. For instance, the labour market authorities have two groups of end users – employers and job-seekers. Whether employers can offer jobs or not and whether job-seekers choose to accept or reject job offers are decisive factors for the success of the labour market authorities in reaching their objectives.

*Who are intermediaries?*

These are the bodies and organizations which on the one hand are able to influence the agenda and priorities for the government service, while on the other hand they pass on communication from the service in their own form. They are often opinion makers. Among these are parties in the labour market, the media, different pressure groups, political parties and international organizations. For the State Educational Loan Fund, for example, important opinion makers are student organizations and the media. The former strive to get interest rates on loans reduced while the latter present the views of student organizations.

**Need of research**

The division into various publics as illustrated makes it easier to determine what users we need to know most about, and who have the greatest need for communication. Furthermore, such a classification helps the service to decide how communication should be prepared so as to satisfy the various needs of these groups. It also helps to promote a constructive dialogue between the publics and the service, as well as between the individual publics themselves (Heath, 2001). In order to plan communication in relation to each public it may be necessary to know:

- what knowledge the public in question possesses of the relevant areas
- what opinions/attitudes the public has
- what the behaviour of the public is at present
- what their interest is in the case and what communication requirements the public has.

To answer these questions for all publics would probably demand comprehensive – and costly – research. In practice it is seldom possible to survey *all*, and instead the

focus should be on the publics that have most significance for the attainment of the objectives. For example, we can adapt communication to the target group both as regards the shaping of the message and the choice of communication channels if we discover where the lack of knowledge is greatest and whether there are special attitudes that are perhaps caused by this lack of knowledge.

### **Target groups**

A target group is a public for whom we can set objectives. All government services have a number of publics, but limitations of time and resources do not as a rule allow giving priority to all publics as far as communication is concerned. The charting of publics should have told us which groups are most important for the achievement of our objectives. These groups become our target groups. Here we must not forget the groups which may play a vital role in passing on communication even though they are not the groups we wish to influence directly. This might apply, for instance, to schools, NGOs, the media or members of Parliament.

### **Main channels and ambitions**

After we have charted publics, chosen target groups and formulated sub-objectives for each of these, we should have formed an opinion about the route that can lead us to our objectives. We refer here to the main procedure. It is not the intention in business plan strategy to arrive at specific measures aimed at the individual target group. Such measure will be found in the communication plan which will be drawn up at a later stage and which will naturally be based on the strategy.

First of all we must choose the main communication channels. Should we aim our message at the target group directly or is there is a greater chance of success if we use an intermediary? We are not only thinking of the media, who of course are important intermediaries in many connections. For government departments it will often be natural to use intermediaries such as NGOs or subordinate services. Often communication through the social network can be most effective. If young people are the target group, it may also be relevant to spread the communication via schools. Are there any channels that can provide the opportunity for two-way communication? Do we have good enough systems to record feedback from users? What can be done to improve them?

After these and similar questions have been fully considered, we have chosen the procedure which is most likely to lead us to our objectives. Now we must consider how much this will cost in time and money. At this stage it is not a question of drawing up budgets or carrying out accurate cost estimates since this will be part of the detailed planning later on. But we must make a rough estimate to enable us to assess whether the resources at our disposal are compatible with what we want to do. This might apply to the question of whether we can carry out the task using our own resources

or whether we must use external assistance, which will perhaps take less time but cost more money. If it proves that we do not have sufficient resources, we must choose another course of action. Perhaps we may have to lower our level of ambition, which will mean altering our objectives.

### **To ensure a good planning process**

The communication policy and communication strategy of a government or organizational body must not become documents that only the information department are familiar with. It is therefore vital that they be drawn up in conjunction with the whole organization and with a secure foundation in the organization. The active participation of management is a prerequisite if such documents are to contribute to the use of communication as an instrument in the service.

It is often said that such processes are more important than the final document, and there is a lot of truth in this. The fact is that there is an immense volume of planning but very little about implementation. But be sure to use the process itself to create greater awareness of the use of communication as an instrument and contribution to increased communication competence (Mintzberg, 1999); (Horsle, 2002).

### **Management must be committed**

All kinds of strategic planning processes are the main responsibility of management, and the commitment and involvement of management is a necessary for the implementation. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which management can be involved: either they participate in the whole process and direct it, or they are brought in when key decisions are to be made.

If the objective is to draw up an overall communication policy or communication strategy for the service, it is essential that senior managers participate. If a communication strategy is to be drawn up for a key result area or a primary area, it is important that the managers who have overall responsibility for that area to be involved. Management must ensure that adequate resources are allocated in the shape of time and money and should also play a decisive role in the involvement of key staff. Management must also give formal approval of the completed document and how it is to be implemented. It is vital not only that the staff from different levels in the service are involved in the process but also that roles and responsibilities are clarified from the start. One person must have a clearly defined responsibility for leading the process and ensuring its momentum. It may be advisable to set up some kind of working group to provide ideas during the process. It is also important when developing a communication policy for the entire body that key staff from various departments are involved, but it is natural in such processes that the information department and the management play the leading roles. Regardless of how one chooses to organize the activities, it is necessary to draw up a written plan.



### **Communication on the process and the strategy document**

For those who work with communication it may appear obvious that it is important to prepare the way for good communication about the strategic development process. However, experience has shown that this is often neglected (Horsle, 1998). The method selected to provide information on the process is to some extent dependent on traditions and available channels for organizational communication. The person in charge should examine the available channels and assess what information shall be given and at what stage. If comprehensive surveys or other research have been carried out during the development process, a general meeting may be called to inform staff at all levels about the survey results.

Another challenge is providing good information about the strategy when it is completed (Horsle, 2002). This can also be done at a general meeting but if staff from different departments have been involved, it may be just as effective to allow them to present the result in their own departments. It is then possible to base the presentation on approaches to problems that are important for the department concerned, and specific examples can be given of how staff can use the information. A well organized process allows for creativity, participation and learning in the whole organization. These are effects which should not be underestimated. The impact of the competence transfer and sense making that takes place is that the entire service works better with communication afterwards (Choo, 1998).

### **Strategies should be evaluated**

After a certain period of time, communication strategies and measures should be evaluated. This requires that the sub-objectives for each target group have been formulated in a way that permits their assessment. Moreover, in order to be able to record changes, we must know what the situation was prior to the communication activities. It is impossible to comment generally on when the assessment should be carried out, but communication must be given time to work before we look for effects. It may also be relevant to carry out evaluations during the process so that the direction can be altered if necessary. *The strategic wheel* (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1985) illustrates the fact that this is a cyclical process which contributes continuously to the improvement of quality in communication activities. The wheel starts by 1) Defining public relations problems, 2) Planning and programming, 3) Taking action and communicating and 4) Evaluating the programme 'How did we do?'

### **Summary – a step by step**

*In the first step* I will set the overall communication goals. The point of departure is the communication policy of the service, its key result areas, strategic plan etc. Is it possible to meet challenges using communication alone or are other instruments required in addition? We then formulate the overall communication goals. *Second* I will define

the publics by making a list of drawn up of publics/collaborating sectors/interested parties/players. These are grouped according to their role (communication chart). As *the third* step I will do charting and analysis. I prefer to use chart users' knowledge, behaviour, opinions and communication needs.

*Fourth* I have to make choice of target groups. Choose the groups which are of most significance for achieving our objectives. Make sub-objectives for each target group as the *fifth* step. Formulate objectives for what we wish to achieve in each target group. Main methods of approach will be the *sixth* step. Here I choose the routes that will lead us to our objectives – main channels and main efforts. The *seventh* stage I need to consider resources and level of ambition. Do we have sufficient time and money for what we wish to accomplish? Must we select a different route? If necessary, objectives should be adjusted.

The strategy need to be adopted as the *eighth* step. Management have to approve strategies for the leading key result areas or specialist areas. Strategies for subordinate areas or for an individual case can be approved at a lower level. Communication plan is the *ninth* step. Now is the time to prepare specific communication plans. For each measure we specify target groups, time limits, costs and the person in charge. Finally as the *tenth* and last step we need assessment of the strategy. Check to what extent we have reached our objectives and achieved the desired effects. The assessment must be carried out after information has had time to have an impact.

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