

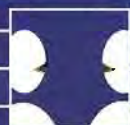


ECNC

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

COMMUNICATING NATURE CONSERVATION

A MANUAL ON USING COMMUNICATION IN SUPPORT OF NATURE CONSERVATION POLICY AND ACTION



Edited by: Sandra Rientjes

Introduction

This is a book on communication in support of nature conservation activities. It is a short introduction into communication, as well as a practical guide for people who want to develop efficient and effective communication activities.

Communication for nature conservation is a wide area of work: it ranges from educational activities for primary school children to personal negotiation skills for top-managers. This book does not cover everything. It does not deal with educational programmes or with personal skills in communication and presentation. It also does not give detailed information on the more technical and practical side of communication, such as 'how to develop a web-site' or 'how to make an attractive lay-out for a brochure.'

'Communicating nature conservation' focuses on two main topics:

- Developing effective and efficient communication campaigns in support of nature conservation policy or plans;
- Using communication in a more interactive way to establish partnerships and create consensus among different stakeholders.

These topics are covered in three chapters:

- Chapter I** Gives a general introduction into communication. It explains how the communication process works, and which problems can occur in communication. In particular it deals with the pitfalls of communicating about nature.
- Chapter II** Explains the role of communication within the process of policy making and policy implementation. It deals with communication as an instrument in support of existing policies and plans, and with the use of communication to develop policy in interaction with various stakeholder groups.
- Chapter III** Gives step by step advice on how to plan and implement effective and efficient communication activities.

The book aims to be practical and down to earth. Lengthy theoretical explanations are avoided; examples, checklists and case studies are found throughout the book to increase its utility. As the book was designed primarily for conservationists in Central and Eastern Europe – managers, policy planners and planners, working for government agencies or NGOs – many of the case studies deal with Central European examples.

Authors and editors are aware that much more can and should be said about communication. This book is presented as a first introduction into the subject in the hope that it will contribute to a more effective use of communication by conservation professionals, and ultimately, to greater support for and involvement in conservation efforts.

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Tom Koslacz – former director of operations of Parks Canada

– and Sandra Kienjies – European Centre for Nature Conservation

How to plan and manage communication. Analysing problems and setting clear communication goals. Analysing target groups. Organising and facilitating round tables, workshops and consensus building processes. Internal communication and everyday, unplanned communication. Formulating clear messages. Determining the best methods of communicating with target groups.

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Chapter 1 *Communication: the basics*

By Lawrence Jones-Walters, *English Nature*

Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss what communication is and how the communication process works. We will also explore the problems that organisations can face in communicating with the outside world. Naturally we will pay a lot of attention to the particular problems of communicating about nature. Why is it sometimes so difficult for conservation organisations to communicate successfully?

1.1 *Why do people communicate?*

Communication is an essential part of human life. Humans communicate all day and every day to get things done. Very often they communicate with written or spoken words but just as often with gestures, facial expressions, symbols such as traffic signs, colours (red for danger) or images (the skull on the bottle of poison).

Sometimes we know we are communicating, but on many occasions we are not aware of it. In fact, it is said that whatever humans do in the presence of other humans always has some element of communication in it. Someone sitting on a bus, silently staring out of the window and ignoring the other passengers is still communicating something: that he does not want to be disturbed or is deep in thought for example. If he sits slumped in his seat it may 'say' to others that he is tired. A labelled suitcase by his side will 'inform' others that he has just come from the airport.

Individual human beings can't function without communication and neither can groups. At a basic biological level, communication helps individuals to fulfil the needs for food, shelter and safety. But individuals also need communication to fully develop their human potential; through communication human beings develop and express a sense of identity. Communication plays a vital role in educating children, and in establishing and maintaining emotional relationships with other human beings.

For **groups** of every size – from the family and the football team to the office or the nation – communication is essential as well. In fact, without communication humans would not be able to function in groups or societies at all. The complicated processes through which groups try to survive and to achieve their goals all depend on communication. Like individuals groups also use communication to maintain their identity and their cohesion, to develop knowledge and transfer it to new members, and to structure their relationships with other groups.

1.2 What is communication?

Defining communication can be more complicated than it looks. Although we all use the word and think we know what it means it can be difficult to decide what communication actually is. We will all agree that talking to a neighbour about the weather is communication, and so is discussing a protected area management plan with a town council. A computer display at a visitor centre is communication, as is giving an interview to a local newspaper or listening to the news on the radio. But is a red traffic light also communication? And what about junk mail we throw away without reading, or letters that are not answered? Is information on the Internet communication if it is never accessed by anyone?

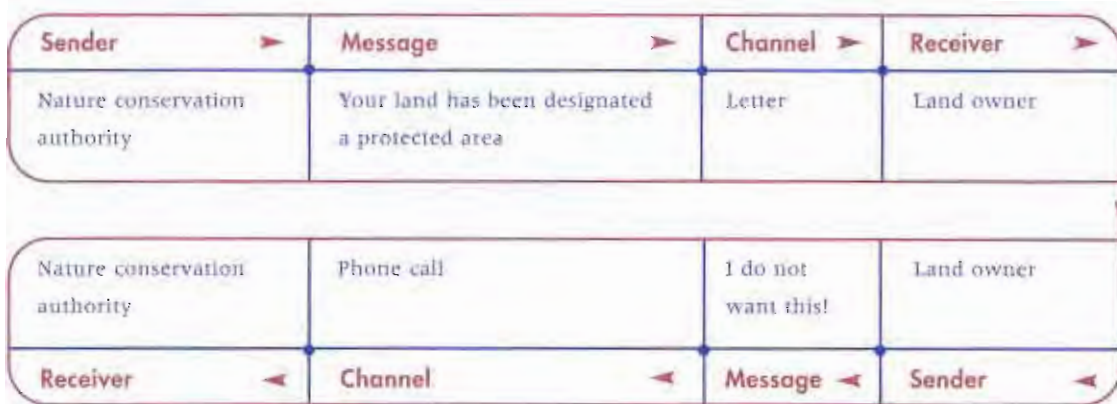
Models of communication

Traditionally communication is seen as a transmission process, not unlike a radio broadcast. In this model a sender transmits a signal (message) to a receiver via a channel.

Sender	Message	Channel	Receiver
Nature conservation authority	Your land has been designated a protected area	Letter	Land owner

Models such as these used to be found in every textbook on communication. However, we now know that this image of the communication process as a 'radio broadcast' is itself an obstacle to effective communication. It gives the idea that in communication there is an active transmitter on one end, and a passive receiver on the other. A message is passed along, but there is no indication as to how it was received, and what effects it had.

In reality, we communicate because we want something to happen: we want to transfer information, we want to convince our communication partners of our point of view, or we want someone to do something. We should at least get feedback. Feedback can be described as some sort of confirmation of receipt: a check whether the message has been received and whether anything is going to happen as a result of our communication. In reality the sender does not just get a 'receipt confirmation'. In most cases he gets a new message. The roles are reversed and the sender becomes a receiver.



Although much better than the 'transmission' model, this model still has its limitations when it comes to understanding the receivers and their actions. For instance, the model suggests that the message alone determines the effects of communication. It also gives the impression that messages are always clear and that people are predictable in their responses; if you send a specific message, you can be almost sure that the receiver will react in the way you want. In reality nothing could be further from the truth. There are many elements outside the path from sender to receiver (and back) that can have an effect on communication and influence its outcome.

1.3 Obstacles in the communication process

1.3.1 Selection

To begin with, it is by no means certain that the receiver even receives the message that is meant for him. (This is called selective exposure: receivers are only 'exposed' to a limited number of communication means. Nobody reads all the newspapers.) If he receives it, he may not notice it. (Selective perception: there may be dozens of posters displayed at a train station, but even if someone is standing in front of these posters for half an hour while waiting for a train, he may not notice all of them.) If he notices the message, he may choose not to read it (Selective attention: we don't read all of the articles in a newspaper or watch all the television programmes. We don't even open all our mail!) Even if the message is received, noticed and read, there is no certainty that the receiver will agree with it. (Selective acceptance) And finally, if someone agrees we still can not be sure that he will react in the way the sender intended.

As an example let's look at an advertisement to encourage people to stop smoking. Some smokers may never see it, because they read another newspaper. Even if they read the right newspaper they may simply not notice the advertisement. As people do not like unpleasant news, many smokers may choose not to read it even if they do see it. If they read it, they can still think it is untrue (people are very good at protecting themselves against unpleasant or upsetting information) and if they believe it is true, they still can decide to go on smoking.

1.3.2 Noise

One of the most basic disturbing elements in communication is 'noise' which prevents a message from being transmitted smoothly through the communication channel. Sometimes this is real noise (for example when a speaker cannot be understood because of heavy traffic outside the conference room), but bad quality printing that makes a text difficult to read, or incompatibility of computer systems that leads to garbled messages can also be called noise. Whatever it is, the effect is that the message does not come through as it was intended.

1.3.3 Under construction: meanings of messages

In the real world messages never go from sender to receiver in a pure and 'uncontaminated' form. Their meanings are never completely clear, not even when the communication channel is working smoothly and there is no interfering noise:

To understand why this is so we should think of an experience that is familiar to everyone: finding out that an image we had in our heads is not correct. For example, we meet someone we only knew through e-mail, and he turns out to be much older than we thought. We visit a country for the first time and discover it is quite different than we believed. Or flying turns out to be less frightening than we always thought it would be.

The ideas and images of the world that humans have in their heads are the building blocks of communication. But these ideas and images are based on very incomplete knowledge. We know some facts, and our imagination fills in (constructs) the rest. How we fill this in, depends a lot on our individual values, standards, convictions, interests and knowledge. This applies to the images we have of individuals, groups, or indeed of anything 'out there in the world'. Unfortunately, we don't know which part of our idea is based on fact, and which parts we 'constructed' ourselves. If we relate this to communication, it is easy to see that what the sender intended can be very different from what the receiver understands. What the sender believes was communicated, is not necessarily the same as what the receiver believes was communicated. The sender and the receiver both construct the meaning of a message by using their own individual values, standards, convictions, interests and knowledge. This is called their frame of reference. It affects what the sender wants to say, and how he will say it. It also affects how the receiver interprets what is being communicated. From our own experience we all know that values, standards, convictions, interests and knowledge are very personal and differ from individual to individual. This means that the meaning we give to messages will also differ.





● *An example: constructing meanings*

Even the simple question: 'would you like a cup of coffee?' can lead to confusion and surprises. 'A cup of coffee' does not mean the same thing to an American (who is used to large cups of weak coffee) and to someone from Greece where strong coffee is served in small cups.

The more complex the issue we are communicating about, the bigger the chance that such miscommunications occur. Lets look at an issue like 'forest conservation'. A word like 'forest' can for different people mean very different things. Although they all associate the word forest with a tree-covered area, the real 'meaning' they give to the word depends on their values, standards, convictions, interests and knowledge. To someone who is interested in new age philosophy it can be a sacred place for meditation and for the owner of a timber company it can be a profitable source for wood to be exploited. For ecologists it can be a complex ecosystem to be studied (and what one ecologist sees a single climax system will be a cluster of specific plant associations to another). And what is a forest to someone from the Netherlands, will merely be a small strip of trees to someone from Sweden or the Russian Federation.

1.3.4 *The culture of communication*

To make things more complex, different groups have different traditions concerning communication. This affects the words and signals that they use but it also goes further. In certain Asian cultures, for example, it is impolite to say 'no' in response to a question whereas in Western Europe people expect 'a straight answer to a straight question'. Plenty of opportunity for communication problems and confusion about meanings here!

1.4 *Communication as an interactive process*

So communication is by no means a simple transmission of messages from sender to receiver. Thinking of it in these terms will not help you (or your organisation) to communicate successfully. It is better to think of communication as an interactive process, during which the participants try to come to agreement about the meaning of the messages being communicated. This process is not a closed circuit – it is influenced by many mental, emotional, social and cultural factors. Ultimately, the meaning of a message is not determined by the words, symbols or gestures used, but by the interpretation it gets in the heads of people.

A description

Many attempts have been made to give a good definition of communication. In this book we will not try to do that. We will try to give an adequate description:

- Communication is a process during which ‘meanings’ of some kind are exchanged between two or more people. These meanings are usually hidden in messages;
- This process can be intentional – in which case at least one of the people involved has taken a conscious decision to start communication – or unintentional;
- The process can be successful – if all the people involved are aware that:
 - a) A message is being communicated, and
 - b) The meaning is (eventually) interpreted in the same way – or unsuccessful;
- Communication can be verbal – when written or spoken words are used – or non-verbal in which case gestures, symbols, sounds etc. communicate a message.

1.5 *Why do organisations communicate?*

In the introductory paragraphs we already mentioned that all groups need communication to achieve their goals and survive. All organisations are in fact groups: from government offices with a staff of five people, to NGOs with tens of thousands of members or multi-national companies.

In general, organisations communicate on two levels: externally with groups and people outside the organisation and internally with their own staff or members.



1.5.1 External communication

Whether an organisation's goal is to sell soap powder, or to protect valuable natural areas, it can't reach these goals on its own. It needs the co-operation, support and assistance of a wide variety of other organisations, groups and individuals to achieve anything at all. Such people or groups:

- Provide the basic conditions under which the organisation operates, such as funding organisations, politicians or government authorities that influence the organisation's financial or legal basis;
- Use the organisation's products, such as customers or clients;
- Have the same objectives as the organisation or work in the same field, such as colleagues or competitors;
- Are in a position to pass judgement on the organisation's performance and influence its image or reputation, such as the media and pressure groups.

Usually an organisation communicates with these groups because it wants them to do something, to know something, or because it wants to influence the attitude these groups have towards a specific issue.

1.5.2 Internal communication

Internal communication is just as crucial. It is necessary to organise the work, steer the 'production process', transfer information that staff or members need, and train staff to keep their skills up to date. But a good and open communication flow from staff to management (bottom-up), from management to staff (top-down) and between staff members (horizontal) is also vital to keep staff motivated, and to keep the organisation flexible and alert.

see also
III.4

1.5.3 Communication and nature conservation

A nature conservation organisation is just as dependent on other people to get results as any other organisation. In fact, for organisations who work in nature conservation communication is even more relevant than for others. Neither government authorities nor NGOs can successfully protect nature on their own. They depend on the co-operation of a wide group of people and organisations whose actions directly or indirectly affect nature: land owners, visitors to protected areas, hunters, farmers, government departments, local and regional authorities, foresters, tourism operators, politicians and so forth. If you think about it there is very little that conservation organisations can do on their own to protect nature. Most of the land that is of value for nature conservation is not owned by conservation organisations: in almost all cases other groups are involved when we want to maintain or improve the quality of nature and biodiversity. This means that good communication will be of vital importance.

1.5.4 *How do organisations communicate?*

Most communication activities of organisations fall into one of four categories:

- ‘One way’ information: advertising, promotion, publicity and propaganda; often through posters, brochures and the mass media;
- Information provided as part of a dialogue, usually in reply to questions of the public;
- Education: a long term process to transfer knowledge, but also attitudes and values, both to children and adults;
- Dialogue with specific groups, sometimes as part of a formal consultation process, sometimes in an effort to find acceptable solutions to complex problems involving many different groups of people.

In practice the differences are gradual. Usually a mix of activities is developed to be as effective as possible in achieving a goal.

1.5.5 *Planning communication?*

These days many organisations plan their communication. They have communication or public relations departments and develop communication strategies and plans. Still, such a planned approach to communication does not guarantee results. It is important to realise that even the best planning does not automatically mean that communication will have the effect you are hoping for. As explained earlier, communication is a complex process that is influenced by many different factors that are beyond any organisation’s control. Furthermore, organisations – and the groups they want to communicate with – operate in dynamic environments that change all the time and where a lot more is going on than just this one communication process. Let there be no mistake: good planning is important and Chapter III of this book gives advice on how to plan communication in an efficient and effective way. However, even more important than planning is a basic understanding of how communication works, and an open and flexible attitude towards the outside world.

1.6 When organisations communicate: frequently made mistakes

So the outcome of communication is not always what we anticipated or hoped for. In this section we will discuss a number of mistakes frequently made by organisations in communication.

1.6.1 Self-referentiality

The commonest mistake we make when developing communications programmes is to start with our own needs and not try to see things from the perspective of others. We identify what we want to communicate, target the audience, prepare information and send it out. When the message does not take into account (and respect!) the way other people see the world, people will ask themselves why they should care, or why they should do what the sender asks of them. Information has a much better chance of being accepted and used if it relates directly to the needs of the target audience, and can be applied by them in some way in their everyday lives.

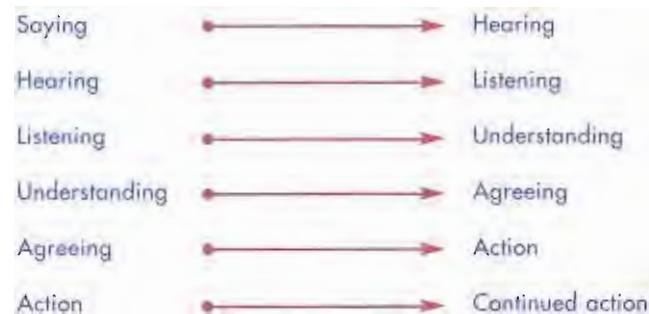
People and organisations tend to look at the world (and themselves) from their own perspective. They only see certain aspects of their environment and what they see is then interpreted in a very specific way. Although this is true for individuals, the phenomenon has an added dimension for organisations. Organisations with a fixed and inflexible organisation structure tend to see the environment as stable and structured – in accordance with their own internal structure. In reality, the environment is dynamic and changing. This is called self-referentiality. The organisation perceives the environment as it perceives itself.

1.6.2 Looking on communication as an instrument to change the world

This leads to another barrier to communication. It is called instrumental thinking: an organisation sees its environment as an object that can be influenced. The organisation sees itself as the mover and the people outside as the ones to be moved. Communication is an attempt to one-sidedly change the thinking and acting of others. There is no attempt to establish a dialogue with the others, or to understand the way they see the world. Communication is entirely transmission based, and not interactive. The others are not assumed to have interesting opinions about problems or their solutions. It is not surprising if they react to this attitude with annoyance.

● **Communication: More than a simple transmission process**

Often we communicate because we want our communication partner to change his or her behaviour. This is not a one-step process. Just sending a message is not enough. The message has to be heard, understood and agreed to, before any change in behaviour can occur. Even then it is not certain that the change will be permanent.



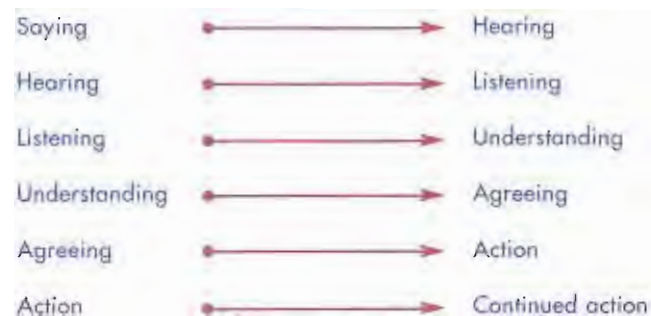
Although the first three steps are not entirely straightforward, it is still possible for a sender to check if a receiver can hear what is being said, if he is listening, and if he understands. A sender can ask for feed-back.

The next steps – from understanding to agreeing and action – are more complicated. In many cases it is clear why a receiver does not agree with the change of behaviour the sender is proposing. It could go against the interests of the receiver, could cost him money or lead to loss of prestige. But sometimes not even the receiver knows exactly why he does not agree with what the sender is saying – ‘he just does not like it’. Objections and resistance can be linked to deeply rooted fears or convictions, and difficult to put into words.

In general, people are more likely to change their behaviour if it offers some concrete benefit for themselves. These benefits do not have to be material or economic. An increase in prestige or status is also a benefit, as is feeling good about yourself because you have ‘done the right thing’. Communication that tries to change behaviour has more chance of success if it makes clear what the benefits for the receivers will be.

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1.6.3 *Selecting wrong instruments and methods*

The way you look at the communication process influences the means and methods you choose to communicate. For transmission-based communication you can choose means and methods that do not bring you into direct contact with the people you are communicating with:

- Brochures and leaflets;
- Films and video's;
- Posters;
- Signs and billboards;
- Books and reports;
- Letters;
- Cd-roms;
- Radio broadcasts;
- TV-programmes.

They are called instrumental methods.

When you assume that communication is an interactive process where people have to reach agreement about their perceptions and ideas, you need means and methods that make this possible:

- Meetings;
- Phone calls;
- (Internet) Conferences;
- Workshops;
- Round tables.

When making choices about the means of communication we still very often choose transmission-based options such as brochures, video films, posters etc. We do this perhaps because:

- They are more familiar to us;
- It may be simpler and easier to manage the communication process - sending out brochures and letters to a list of addresses is relatively straightforward;
- It may cost less time and resources in the short term than going out to meet people face to face;
- When communicating with 'outsiders' we may feel more comfortable with an approach that avoids direct contact.

We are not saying that transmission-based methods such as the ones mentioned above do not have their uses. But we should note that they are often selected in situations where interactive ones would be more effective. (More about this in Chapter III.)

see also
III.7

see also
III.8

Choosing instruments – an example

A good example might be a meeting between a farmer and a conservationist. When they first meet they may not come to a mutual understanding of beliefs and value systems. However, they will both learn something about the other. As a result this will be incorporated into their overall perceptions and their attitudes and views will inevitably change. Next time they meet they may therefore be less hostile and suspicious of each other. Further meetings may result in the conservationist gaining a greater understanding of the economics of the cultivation system, the requirements of the machinery and the habits of the farm animals. In learning about the needs of wildlife, the farmer may also see that nature conservation management does not need to conflict with, and can even be part of, his agricultural business. Finally, as a result of their increased understanding of each other's position, values and beliefs, they may be able to create a situation in which they can work together for wildlife.

A positive result was achieved through interaction and dialogue. Contrast this example with a transmission-based approach. The government, in consultation with nature conservationists, drafts a new piece of legislation to protect ditches and wet grassland for their wildlife and landscape value. The land is carefully identified and mapped out by the nature conservation agency from footpaths which cross the land, aerial photographs and maps. A package is drawn up and sent out to each farmer instructing that there is to be no more application of fertiliser, ploughing or overgrazing of the areas in question. The farmer will immediately ask: 'how was my land identified, where did the legislation come from and what was wrong with the way I was managing it anyway?' There will certainly be no mutual trust and understanding, and the first conservationist who knocks on the door will get a predictable response. Indeed, there may never be any possibility of a productive dialogue. We can probably all find our own examples of this approach. The results are rarely positive for the wildlife.

1.6.4 Them and us

We tend to divide the world into 'insiders' and 'outsiders', into 'us' and 'them'. Insiders are people that 'know' each other in some way. They have similar perceptions of the world (or of certain aspects of the world) and are therefore more predictable to each other in their reactions and behaviour. Depending on the issue, an insider group can be small (a family), or large (people with the same academic or professional training, the same nationality or the same religion). We may know something about the outsiders (or at least think we know...), but we are not part of their group, and they are not part of ours. There may, or may not be, common ideas and values but we do not see the world in quite the same way. Sometimes we literally do not even speak the same language. Many groups develop a language of their own: local dialects are a good example.

see also
III.5



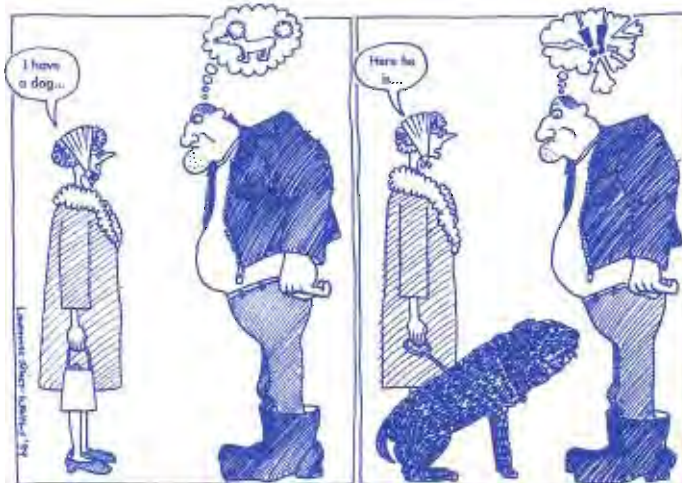
but also the technical jargon of professionals or the 'slang' of youth groups. Especially during power struggles or conflicts, groups will develop very distorted images of each other. The common procedure is that the image we have of 'them' is based on their very worst behaviour, whereas the image we have of ourselves is based on our very best behaviour. If we do not make an effort to find out what the others are really like and how they see the world, there is very little chance that communication can be successful. We should realise that their group language and our group language may be quite different, but most importantly, we should realise that what we think we know about them may be untrue.

● *Communication problems between insiders and outsiders: thinking we know 'them'*

For example, imagine somebody we meet tells us that they have just bought a dog. We probably have a picture of the kind of dog that they would buy based on our experience of 'people like them'. We might assume that a punk rocker will buy a rottweiler or a pit bull terrier and an old lady will buy a poodle. Consider our surprise when something unexpected happens. At the very least we may have to revise our values and beliefs.

1.6.5 *Intended and unintended communication*

There is another reason why communication sometimes does not have the effect we anticipated. One aspect of communication is the concrete message we want to deliver. But next to this 'intended' communication, there usually is also some unintended communication going on. Apart from the intended **messages** we also give off **signals** of which we often are totally unaware. We communicate a great deal through 'body language', through the way we dress, (or smell), the way we decorate our offices. These signals can either reinforce or contradict our message. If our verbal message is scribbled on a piece of paper with coffee stains it will convey – whatever the words say – that we do not think this communication or the receiver is very important. Unintended communication is much more likely to occur when dealing with 'outsiders' who will have a different interpretation of the car you drive, the clothes you wear, or your logo.



● *Unintended communication – some examples*

A visitor centre on a wildlife reserve owned by an NGO may be made out of wood in order to convey the impression of naturalness, conforming with the nature around it, or to illustrate to the members of the NGO that their money is being spent wisely. To visitors who have a different set of values it may look cheap, ugly or unprofessional.

1.6.6 *Conflicting communication goals*

The values, beliefs, knowledge and language of different individuals can conflict but so can their goals in communication. A first meeting between a government official and the owner of a forest may be seen by the official as an informal 'getting to know each other', an opportunity to lay a foundation for future trust and co-operation. However, the forester may see it as a formal meeting to discuss funding to support his plans for environmentally friendly forestry. Communication is likely to be difficult: they will both try to steer the conversation in a certain direction, and there is a good chance that both will feel frustrated at the end of the meeting.

1.7 *Specific problems in communicating about nature*

All the problems described in the previous section apply to communicating about nature and to communication by nature conservation organisations. However there are also some problems that occur specifically when we are trying to communicate about nature.

1.7.1 *What is nature: insiders and outsiders - experts and non-experts*

Professional nature conservationists are an 'insider group'. Despite all their personal and professional differences conservationists have a lot in common when it comes to the way they see nature. They usually have a background in ecology or another life science. They have their own jargon to communicate with each other. They speak of nature in terms of ecosystem processes, important habitats and red list species. The majority of people we as conservationists communicate with are 'outsiders' to us. We may think we understand them, but we may just be thinking in stereotypes or prejudices. Of course to groups such as hunters, foresters and farmers the conservationists are the outsiders and they will have some preconceived ideas of their own about environmentalists or government officials. They will also have their own language, their own ways of doing things and their own ways of looking at nature. This can be a major barrier to communication when a farmer and a nature conservationist come together to talk about nature. They may think that they are talking about the same thing – but in reality they are not.

● *Professional confusion about 'nature'*

Ecologists and other conservationists by no means agree about what nature is, and which elements in nature are more important than others. We will know of debates between different groups of conservationists about which habitats are worth protecting and how this should be done. Successful protection of a deer population can be damaging for the vegetation of a natural area. Reintroducing the lynx could affect the recovery of a threatened population of small mammals, such as wild hamsters. Raising the water table would be good for some plants, but bad for others. If such differences of opinion are not taken into account and discussed early on, they can easily be used as arguments against conservation plans. After all, if even the experts can't agree...

Communication problems are guaranteed if we as nature conservationists think that communication with outsider groups means that we have to explain the 'truth' to them, or even worse, to 'educate' them. The others will immediately feel that they are not taken seriously and there is a big chance that they will react in a hostile manner. The fact that other groups have another view of nature does not mean they are wrong – even when their views are not 'scientific'. The point of view of farmers, foresters, water managers, hunters and all the other outsider groups have to be taken seriously. In their world these points of view make sense! This can be a problem for nature conservationists, who sometimes tend to believe that they as 'nature experts' know the truth and have the only correct view of nature and nature conservation. It is good to remember that even within ecology there are many, sometimes conflicting ideas about the functioning of the ecosystem and the interaction between species and habitats. It is also good to remember that the knowledge farmers and others have about nature can turn out to be crucial for the management of wildlife.

● *Learning how to manage land for nature – a UK case study*

In the 1950's agricultural practice in Europe underwent a major revolution. Fertilisers and pesticides, new, larger and more efficient machinery, replaced traditional low-intensity methods of land management. At the same time, in the United Kingdom (in the late 1940's) politicians began to recognise the value of nature and wildlife as an invaluable source of pleasure and release for people. Legislation enabled the setting up of National Nature Reserves and the identification of 'areas of special scientific interest' – for wildlife.

The scientists who populated the new nature conservation organisation, that was also set up by the legislation, applied the (also relatively new) discipline of ecology to the management and maintenance of the nature reserves. With some success, they applied their scientific approach to the aim of nature conservation through the application of different management regimes.

In the wider countryside, outside the nature reserves, land of high nature conservation value continued to be lost to intensive agriculture. New legislation was introduced in the early 1980's to provide real protection to areas that still supported significant areas of valuable wildlife habitat and/or species. At this point a 'knowledge vacuum' emerged.

The scientific rigour that had been applied to nature reserve management offered some help in determining the management needs of the special sites. However, the real problem was in finding out more about the traditional agricultural practices that had originally given rise to the wildlife interest of the sites, and which were essential to their long term future. The new breed of farmers had never learned, and had no need of, these practices. Much of the knowledge about the old farming methods, in particular the subtleties of local conditions – often passed by word of mouth from generation to generation, had died with the people that held it.

Paradoxically the creation of nature conservation as a science and an institution, had resulted in a fragmentation and consequent neglect of the 'local knowledge' upon which it would ultimately depend. Much of this knowledge had to be 're-learned', pooled and pieced together from whatever information and people (with an understanding of local issues and circumstances) that still remained.

1.7.2 Language problems

Nature professionals have developed a language of their own which may be difficult to understand for others. Think of the term 'biodiversity'. Conservationists know that it means the 'variety of life, from bacteria to blue whales'; to many people ('outsiders') it may sound like a new biological washing powder! At the very least it can give others a sense of nature conservation as an elitist subject with a jargon designed to exclude 'ordinary people'. There are many more words and phrases that are understandable to conservationists, but may sound like a foreign language to others: 'ecological processes and systems', 'species recovery programmes', 'habitat action plans', 'passerines, waders and waterfowl', 'NATURA 2000 sites', 'genetically modified organisms', to name but a few. To make matters worse this jargon is often reduced to acronyms such as 'GMOs'.

Within nature conservation organisations such 'jargon' can be very useful because it can streamline the communication. But you can hear nature professionals using these words in an interview on the radio or on television, and it is very likely that they also use similar language in their day to day contacts with farmers, land managers and others. The consequences for communication can be disastrous. At one level people simply fail to understand (or misunderstand) what is being said or written – which is a problem in itself. At a deeper level, all of their ideas about 'scientists' and 'people from the government' are confirmed. Nature conservation is put in the same category as quantum physics or government tax regulations: not to be understood by normal people and very frustrating.

1.7.3 Stereotypes

This brings us to another problem in communicating about nature conservation. Some groups have such strong preconceived negative images about conservation and conservationists that they may be inclined to stop listening even before the communication has begun. We have all heard the story of the letter going into the bin, unopened, as soon as the logo of a conservation NGO is seen and of signs at the farm gate reading: 'No salesmen or government officials'. But this works both ways. When nature conservationists start communication they frequently have preconceived ideas about the receivers and their reaction to the communication. An experienced staff member of a conservation authority may advise a new colleague who is about to leave on his first visit to a local farmer to 'Park facing the gate so you can get away as quickly as possible, you don't know what their reaction is going to be when they see the logo on the side of your car'. Because of such stereotypes, conservationists may decide not to bother with communication because they 'just know' that they are wasting their time. When communication is unavoidable they may fall back on written communication to avoid a face-to-face encounter. The result of communication is the same (no success) but at least they have evidence that they tried – if it didn't work it couldn't be seen as their fault.



1.7.4 Being instrumental instead of interactive

Nature conservation organisations have a long tradition of using communication to achieve their aims. Visitor centres, brochures, posters, films, and education activities play a prominent role in communication campaigns. As we saw before these one-way means of communication allow for little or no interaction between sender and receiver. The question is whether such instrumental campaigns will actually lead to a long term and permanent change in attitudes and behaviour towards nature. We already mentioned that a permanent change in behaviour will take more than one message going from sender to receiver. This does not mean that choosing an instrumental approach is always wrong – it all depends on the situation. If rabies has been discovered in a forest, then putting up posters and advertising in the mass media may be the only way to warn people who walk their dogs there.

see also
11.2

In many circumstances more interactive approaches to communication, such as visits, phone-calls, workshops and round-table meetings could be more effective. The problems concerning nature management are too complex and involve too many groups for a single conservation agency to solve them on its own. In many countries formal consultation of 'stakeholders' (all the groups or individuals that are somehow involved in a specific problem or issue) is now part of the process of developing conservation policy and conservation action plans.

But formal consultation processes are not satisfying for anyone if the various stakeholders merely put forward their own views. Frustrations can be avoided by trying to introduce more proactive and imaginative ways of thinking and a collaborative approach to problem solving. **Consensus development through stakeholder participation** is a promising new trend that takes into account the interactive character of the communication process. In Chapter II we will go into this subject in more detail.

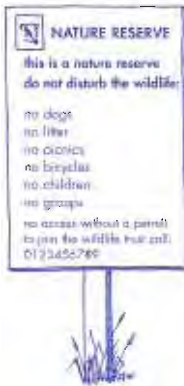
● *Bureaucracy as a barrier to communication - interaction as a solution. English Nature as a case study*

A common theme amongst critics of the UK government system for nature protection is that conservation action is slowed down and hindered by the paperwork of administration. This is seen as a result of the introduction of a new law in 1981.

However, within English Nature (the UK government authority for conservation) the view is somewhat different. It is true that the new law introduced a significantly higher level of administration. However the legislation also provided an opportunity (even: a need) to initiate dialogue with the owners of the land. Their response was, initially, extremely unfavourable. They saw the new conservation bureaucracy, and the people associated with it, as unsympathetic, constraining, inflexible and faceless. This was partly the result of a transmission based approach to communication. In many cases, letters were simply sent out to land owners informing them that in the management of their land they were now bound by the new legislation.

Things can change and this was the case in England. The solution to the problem was achieved through applying an interactive approach – of talking to farmers in groups and individually, rather than the original sender driven communication. Reviews of owner and occupier attitudes indicate that, over the years since the legislation was first introduced, more effective working relationships have been established, and that the situation has improved significantly.

(Source: Ian McIntyre Associates, 1995: Business and Market Research Plc., 1996).



1.7.5 No good news

A final problem in communicating about nature conservation is the fact that nature conservationists often have a 'negative message'. Nature conservationists spend a lot of time telling other people what they are not allowed to do. Farmers are told they can't graze their cattle in June because a protected orchid flowers that month, and road builders get to hear that they have to change the plans for a new road because there is a rare amphibian in a nearby pond. In fact nature conservation is often seen as a nuisance or a barrier to progress.

A conservation plan in itself can sometimes be seen as a form of criticism. If a conservation organisation develops a management plan for a forest, the owner can interpret this as a sign of distrust 'Are you saying that I don't take good care of my own forest?'

Communication about nature is very often bad news: about the declining quality of nature, and the loss of important natural areas. Although this is usually correct, it can make people 'switch off' and lose interest for a subject they find depressing or even frightening.

Presenting conservation as a positive message will be a theme of the chapters which follow and is a challenge for the nature communicator. We will see how effective planning of communication programmes, interactive policy making, and high-quality presentation can allow us to avoid this and other problems referred to above.

1.8

Summary

In this chapter we have taken a closer look at what communication actually is. We discussed the traditional way of seeing communication as a more or less one-way transmission process, and models that see communication as an interactive process. We looked into the effect individual frames of reference – values, beliefs and knowledge – can have on communication. We came to the conclusion that 'meanings' (of messages) are not actually found in the words or symbols used, but in the heads of people. Then we moved on to communication by organisations and came to the conclusion that for conservation organisations communication is even more necessary than for many other organisations: nature conservationists always need the help and support of other groups to achieve anything.

We identified a number of problems that can occur when organisations communicate:

- Self referentiality: the tendency of organisations to see the world as they see themselves;
- Using communication as an instrument to one-sidedly change the world while ignoring the fact that other people and organisations may have something interesting to say;
- Selecting the wrong methods to communicate – most commonly choosing one-way, transmission based methods when interactive methods would be more suitable;
- Having a distorted and biased view of 'the others' and not bothering to find out what they are really like;
- Not being aware of the unintended communication that usually accompanies the intended communication;
- Conflicting communication goals when participants in a communication process do not have the same aims and objectives.

We also discussed the specific problems that can occur in communicating about nature conservation:

- Nature means different things to different people;
- Conservationists see themselves as the experts when it comes to nature and tend to assume that the ideas other groups have about nature are wrong;
- Language problems because conservationists use a very specialised jargon;
- Thinking about the other groups involved in conservation in stereotypes;
- Choosing an instrumental approach such as education and general public campaigns when dialogue and interaction would be more useful;
- The 'no good news' factor of nature conservation.

In the next chapter we will discuss in detail the role communication can play in nature conservation policy and action. Chapter III will give advice on the best way to plan and develop communication activities.

Chapter II *Communication in nature management policy making*

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Introduction

Whatever the problem, communication will always be at least one part of the solution. This is true for nature conservation and nature management where we aim to solve nature problems (or even better: to prevent such problems from occurring). As we learned in the previous chapter, human beings communicate day in and day out to get things done. But even though communication is natural to us, it is not easy to strategically organise and plan communication in such a way that we can more or less be certain of the result beforehand.

In this chapter we will explore how communication can be applied in developing and implementing policies for nature conservation. In particular we will explain:

- The **different functions** communication can have in policy making;
- Which **other instruments** such as regulation, facilities and financial incentives can be applied in the implementation of a certain policy;
- The role of communication in **constructing an effective policy strategy**;
- What **interactive policy-making** is.

II.1 *Instrumental communication*

II.1.1 *Instruments for policy making and policy implementation*

Governments develop policy to solve problems in society. Often solving these problems means that human behaviour has to change. All nature conservationists know that the problem of declining biodiversity cannot be solved unless different groups of people change their behaviour: governments should create better legal and financial conditions for preserving nature, foresters should respect the ecology of the forest, farmers should work in a nature-friendly way (or as is the case in some regions in Europe should sell their land to nature conservation organisations).

There are several 'instruments' that policy makers can use when developing policies to solve problems and to achieve the necessary changes in behaviour. These policy instruments can be applied in many ways for nature conservation. Basically the instruments fall into two categories: instruments that make behaviour change compulsory, and instruments that aim for a voluntary change of behaviour.

see also
1.5.3



Behaviour change and policy instruments (Van Woerkum, 1999)

Regulation

Regulation often takes the form of laws or other formal and official rules. Regulation aims at a compulsory change in behaviour: through laws and statutes you can **forbid** tourists to enter vulnerable sites or **oblige** farmers to take measures to preserve nature. Regulation has the image of being a 'strong' policy instrument, but in practice we often see that rules are not followed. Sometimes it is not possible to enforce a rule: this is particularly difficult with legislation on environmental issues: you can't put a policeman behind every tree. The problem of 'non-compliance' then arises if the rules themselves are not persuasive: people see no reason or feel no motivation to stick to the rules. Sometimes they do not know that the rule exists. Apart from these limitations concerning implementation there is also the fact that the development of legislation is a time-consuming process, characterised by many and lengthy negotiations within the government and between the government and different societal groups.

Provisions

Provisions are facilities, amenities, and infrastructure that 'guide' human behaviour. Examples could be fences around sensitive bird nesting areas or rubbish bins for the disposal of waste. Provisions can be either compulsory (the fences do not give people a choice – they just can not enter that area) or voluntary (even if you provide the bins, people can still choose to throw their rubbish on the road). Provisions can be very effective in guiding the behaviour of people. With a well-designed system of roads and footpaths visitors can be steered away from the most vulnerable parts of natural areas. One of the problems of provisions is that they can negatively affect the appearance of natural areas: too many fences, parking lots, and rubbish bins do not contribute to the idea of 'naturalness'. They create a man-made environment, and decrease the experience of being 'in nature'.

Social pressure

In European democracies social pressure can not be easily mobilised as a separate policy instrument (unlike for example in Mao's China). However, social pressure should be kept in mind when developing policy because the pressure of other people's opinion can strongly influence human behaviour. In a more indirect way social pressure can still play an important role in a 'mix' of policy instruments. This is especially the case if it is combined with communication. Many social-psychological theories see the combined effect of these two instruments as the main cause of voluntary changes in human behaviour. These theories assume that when a person is considering to change his behaviour he will evaluate the arguments given in favour of this behaviour change (communication), but he will also consider 'what other people will think' (social pressure).

Money

Money theoretically is a very powerful instrument to promote a certain type of behaviour. If you want farmers to plant and maintain trees around their land, paying them for it will be a good incentive. Farmers can even be paid for every rare bird or plant that is found on their land. In that case they get a price for the nature they have 'produced'. But money has to be available for such strategies to be effective, and that is where the story mostly ends. Nevertheless, it is a promising policy instrument for nature conservation that deserves more attention.

Money can also be introduced to prevent undesirable behaviour. An entrance fee will decrease the number of tourists to an overcrowded natural area, and the government can impose a charge on the use of harmful insecticides. Effective as the financial instrument may be, it requires a lot of administration of which monitoring the money flow is most important. Therefore it can be a costly instrument to implement.

Communication

Finally we come to communication. There are three ways in which communication can be used as a policy instrument:

Communication can support other instruments, and help to improve their effectiveness. In fact no instrument can be fully effective without communication. At the very least people will have to be told that certain instruments exist; they have to be informed about laws, subsidies or facilities.

Communication is always an aspect of the other instruments whether we planned it or not.

see also
1.6.5

'Strong' regulation such as a law communicates that the sender (the government) believes an issue to be very important. Asking a high entrance fee for national parks can communicate that nature is 'only for the rich'. When developing policy it is very important to realise the communicative consequences of a specific instrument from the target group's point of view.

Communication can be an instrument on its own. Through professionally developed and well planned communication campaigns policy makers try to influence the knowledge and attitudes of the people whose behaviour they want to change. For instance: we can explain the importance of undisturbed nesting zones for birds to visitors of a natural area, and persuade them to take this into account. This strategy has its merits but as we shall see it also has severe limitations.

It is rare that a choice is made for only one policy instrument. Usually policy makers choose a combination of instruments, in which the weakness of one instrument is compensated by the strength of others. We generally talk about the best policy mix.

11.1.2 Causes of problems - solutions to problems

The choice for a mix of instruments is the outcome of a process that starts with the recognition of a societal problem. In our case the problem is the deterioration of nature. Problems concerning nature often come on the agenda of politicians and policy makers by the efforts of NGOs or by attention in the media.

Like most human beings, policy makers do not like to talk about problems for which they see no viable solutions. In other words: they will only discuss serious problems if they can see a chance to deal with them. So when policy makers accept that something is wrong and that there indeed is a problem, they usually already have an idea about what has to be done.

Solutions to problems are linked to the causes of problems. Anyone who wants to develop effective nature policy has to identify the causes of the problem he is dealing with. The next step is to define in what way this problem is caused or influenced by human behaviour. We have to know fairly precisely what the relation is between this behaviour and the deterioration of nature (or plans to improve the quality of nature), and which people or groups of people are involved. Once we know this we can formulate policy goals and decide in what way the behaviour of certain groups has to change. From that point on, we can think about an effective policy mix to achieve this change in behaviour.

● Developing policies and choosing policy instruments

- Define the problem with regard to nature quality;
- Assess if there is a general possibility for change;
- Analyse the factors that cause the problems around nature conservation and/or improvement;
- Define the role of human behaviour in these factors;
- Define the policy goals;
- Define the policy instruments;
- Define the function of communication in the policy mix.



II.1.3 *Communication as a policy instrument: when to use it and what it can achieve*

As a policy instrument communication can serve several goals.

We already mentioned that an important goal of communication is **informing about other policy instruments**. If people want to know about nature plans in their region there should be an opportunity for them to get information.

Communication about nature and nature policies can also have an important **agenda-setting** function. This means that we want an issue to catch people's attention and even initiate a public discussion. However attention or discussion does not mean that specific plans or ideas concerning this issue will be liked. Agenda-setting is functional at the beginning of a policy process when policy with respect to a problem has yet to be developed. Such wide discussion is not desirable when detailed plans have already been made and nothing can be changed.

Communication is also frequently used to **ask support** for the implementation of policy.

Communication campaigns that are developed in nature conservation usually set out to achieve one or more of these goals. Such campaigns aim to generate understanding and support for existing or planned nature policy. They can also set out to change the behaviour of specific groups (for example landowners, farmers, citizens or tourists) in support of policies or plans concerning nature conservation by persuading these groups of the benefits of the policy and of behaviour changes. This is an instrumental use of communication.

II.1.4 *Developing an instrumental communication campaign*

An effective communication campaign requires systematic thinking and balanced decision-making concerning five basic elements: setting the goal, selecting the target group, determining the message, choosing media and methods, and organizing the campaign. Once the activities have been completed, the entire process has to be evaluated. Developing a communication campaign is an ongoing process in which these elements have to be combined into a particular plan that is consistent and precise enough to guide communication activities. *(More about this will be explained in Chapter III.)*

The goal

What are the goals we wish to pursue with the help of communication? Often we would like to achieve some sort of change in human behaviour but we should be realistic in our ambitions. People will rarely change their behaviour as a result of one single communication activity. This only happens when they already had the intention to change their behaviour before the communication campaign started, but were not aware of concrete possibilities to do so. (For example: they already realised the importance of recycling glass, but did not know where they could deposit their empty bottles.) We should realise that people normally have good reasons to behave in a certain way – at least to them these reasons are very sound - and that it will take more than just one attempt at communication for them to change.

see also
III.2

Behaviour with regard to nature is connected to behaviour in many other areas of life. Changing 'nature' behaviour can therefore have wider reaching consequences. The way farmers treat nature is part of their daily farming practice. This is connected to their idea of what a good farmer does: manage his land in such a way that – now and in the future – it will produce as much as it can. This idea of good farming was developed over generations and will not change from one day to the next. Changing the way they treat nature, could mean changing their whole idea of good farming.

It is possible to change behaviour with the help of communication but we should take it step by step and not be over-ambitious. Going back to the example of farmers: we could develop a communication campaign to influence farmers to preserve at least the edges of their land for nature. These edges of fields and ditches can then develop into habitats for wild flowers or small animals, or function as ecological corridors. In cases such as these much can be achieved if we carefully consider exactly what the effects are that communication has to realise in the minds of a particular target group.

The target group

It is crucial to specify which target group we want to reach, as this determines how and what we will communicate. When it comes to communicating about nature conservation policy the general public (who are largely unaffected) will need a different approach than foresters for whom nature policies usually have much bigger consequences. By distinguishing different target groups, different communication objectives will emerge as well. We should realise that target groups are not homogenous. There can be differences of opinion, attitudes, and knowledge within a target group. It is necessary to find out whether there is such diversity. In many cases it can be useful to involve members of the target group in designing a communication activity.

see also
III.5

Determining the message

Determining the contents of the message requires careful consideration. The contents of the message should take into account the existing knowledge, the 'everyday life-world' and the experiences of the target group. If we know of resistance and objections within the target group to a proposed policy, we should seriously take this into account. If resistance and counter-arguments are ignored, the target group will simply cut itself off from further information. In such situations large-scale one-way communication campaigns will probably not be very effective. We should explore possibilities for two-way communication, for example discussion in small groups.

see also
III.6



Using Communication As a Policy Instrument, a Canadian Case Study

Eliminating the Use of Leaded Fishing Tackle in a National Park

The Problem:

This case study demonstrates the use of communication programmes as an aid in policy implementation. International research has shown that lead sinkers used by fishermen are toxic when ingested by waterfowl. Thousands of migratory game birds die or suffer from lead poisoning each year in Canada. Predators, such as eagles, also die from secondary lead poisoning because they feed on birds that contain lead shot or sinkers. Parks Canada wanted to show leadership in this environmental issue. The public was largely unaware of the problem and non-toxic alternatives were not widely available.

To eliminate the use of lead sinkers in National Parks a change in policy and regulations was required. There was a lack of public understanding of the issue. In order to help implement the new policy and fishing regulations in National Parks, a communication program was planned and delivered.

Program Goals:

- Eliminate the use of leaded tackle in Canadian National Parks;
- Develop public understanding about the hazards of lead in the environment;
- Increase the availability of alternative fishing tackle.

Message:

Divers and other water birds are being poisoned by lead fishing sinkers lost by fishermen. Non-toxic sinkers are available. Switching to producing, selling and using non-toxic fishing tackle is relatively simple and can be done at minimal cost.

Target Public:

- National Park visitors and fishers;
- Federal/Provincial Parks Council;
- Retailers and outfitters near national parks;
- Fishing tackle manufacturers and distributors.

Communication Strategy:

- Develop a national information-education program;
- Determine communication products - posters, brochures, public service announcements, press releases, letters, etc;
- Work with the Canadian Wildlife Service and agree on information cooperation, budget, scope, logistics, creative graphics and text.
- Work with regional and park staff of Parks Canada to inform them of proposed action;
- Develop with regional staff an implementation strategy for an information campaign that includes public consultations;
- Work with industry, suppliers of alternatives - send letter from the minister to inform them of the program and new regulation, find a sponsor for a giveaway or swap program;
- Visitors and fishers - provide information in park newsletters and fishing guides, distribute brochures with fishing licenses, implement tackle exchange programs;

- Federal-Provincial Parks Council - present results of the national park sinker program and encourage provincial parks to follow suit;
- Deliver communication program and introduce new regulation over a 2-year period starting in 1996;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the communication program.

The program of phasing out the use of lead sinkers in Canadian National Parks came about as a result of a policy change driven by scientific evidence that demonstrated the toxic effects of lead sinkers on water birds. Implementation of the new policy required new fishing regulations and a communication strategy in order to inform stakeholders affected by the new regulation. Public, target group, interagency, manufacturer and distributor consultations were conducted to raise awareness of the issue. Brochures, posters, public service announcements, intergovernmental meetings and press releases were used to publicize the new policy. A phase-in period and free tackle exchange programs were part of the communication strategy to gain compliance. As of 1997, only non-lead sinkers are used in Canadian National Parks. The policy was successfully implemented, using communication programs in support of the initiative.

Choosing the methods: channels and instruments

What mix of communication methods, channels and instruments do we need to use in order to be effective? To make a good choice, we should know about the possibilities and restrictions of different methods. In general, two types of methods can be distinguished: mass-medial methods and interpersonal methods.

Mass-media methods make use of radio, television, newspapers, brochures and so on. Although the costs of producing them can be high, they are relatively cheap if you consider how many people can be reached with one single activity. However, it is very difficult 'to tune' in to a certain target group. We can use mass-media:

- To stimulate people to discuss a certain issue;
- To inform a large number of people with one single message;
- To make people aware of a problem which is not solved yet;
- To create interest;
- To instruct a great number of people who already have been motivated to change their behaviour.

Interpersonal methods make use of personal conversation in larger or smaller groups. Interpersonal methods can be relatively expensive in terms of time and resources. But they make it possible to 'tune in' to the target group. We can use interpersonal methods:

- To get a direct reaction from the target group;
- To get a grasp of people's opinions and the background to these;
- To communicate delicate or sensitive issues.

see also
III.7 and
III.8

Organisation

Planning the practical organisation of the campaign also needs attention. It has to be decided what arrangements are to be made, what role different people will play and at which point in time. Naturally the amount of money and people available will have consequences for the objectives pursued, the choice of media, and the number of target groups.

Evaluating a communication activity

Finally we would like to say something about the need to evaluate a communication activity. How can we assess its effects? The number of brochures distributed does not tell us anything about the effect. It says something about activities on the part of the sender, but nothing about the receivers. We need to know how many people read the brochure and what they thought of the content. There are several methods to evaluate a communication activity. An in-depth interview with members of the target group is one. Another is to create the possibility for feedback or reactions, for example by including a telephone number or a reply-form within the brochure. To a certain extent, the number and the nature of these reactions will inform us about the effect of the communication.

see also
III.9

II.1.5 What instrumental communication can not do

Communication as a policy instrument has a positive image and an optimistic feel to it. Why not simply tell people 'the truth' and influence them towards an internally motivated, voluntary change of behaviour? The previous pages have already shown that this is not as easy as we would like. A point to remember is that if -for whatever reason- a group of people has serious objections to a specific policy or plan, communication at the end of the policy-process will not make them like it or accept it. This is illustrated by an example from the Netherlands where farmers did not accept the finalised Nature Policy Plan when it was presented to them.

● *The Nature Policy Plan of the Netherlands: a case study*

In 1990, the Dutch parliament accepted the Nature Policy Plan (NPP). This plan was designed to conserve and develop nature in the Netherlands over the next thirty years. The plan was the result of strong pressure of NGOs in the field of nature conservation, who successfully influenced the political system and the responsible authorities. A central element of the plan was the maintenance of a network of areas of outstanding natural value (the so called Ecological Main Structure). In such areas farmers are encouraged to restrict certain farm practices such as mowing and using fertilisers. They are financially compensated for the loss of production. They may also sell land to conservation organisations if that land is wanted for nature conservation. All decisions are voluntary: nobody will be forced to sell land or sign a management contract with certain restrictions.

However, in spite of the government's willingness to co-operate, farmers collectively rejected the NPP. Consequently they did not react in the way the government wanted them to: only a very few farmers did sell a part of their land or signed a contract in favour of nature. These farmers were exceptions and they only negotiated about those parts of their land which were unsuited to modern farming.

An extended study was carried out in order to understand why farmers reacted as they did. One of the main findings of this study is that most farmers have a very limited view of the seriousness of the nature problem. From their point of view, nature is everything that grows, flowers or breathes. Biological concepts, such as ecosystems, biodiversity or ecological corridors do not have much appeal to them. Nature as seen by farmers exists in spite of (and sometimes with the help of) agricultural practices. Their nature is doing fine! From the farmers' point of view, there is no need for a Nature Policy Plan at all.

Furthermore, Dutch farmers have been confronted with many restricting policy measures in the past ten years. Environmental measures have forced them to make considerable changes to their farm management and to invest in expensive buildings and machinery in order to operate in an environment friendly and recently also animal friendly way. The NPP is seen as a part of a seemingly never ending chain of restrictions and regulations. The fact that the government calls the plan voluntary does not help. Farmers feel threatened even by the existence of the plan. Moreover, most farmers did not consider the proposed measures to be realistic. Farmers who run modern agricultural enterprises prefer lower groundwater levels and different regimes for mowing than those recommended as a consequence of the NPP.

Finally, most farmers do not consider it reasonable that they alone should bear the full burden of creating a better natural environment. They believe that other citizens in comparison are not asked to contribute anything at all. In farmers' eyes, they are the ones who for generations have been responsible for creating and maintaining the beauty of landscape and nature. Now they are to be made the victims of what they themselves created.

The general problem is that farmers and nature conservationists have completely different feelings and interpretations concerning nature and nature policies. Farmers do not recognise themselves in the Dutch Nature Policy Plan. They have different experiences of living in and working with nature and they have not been involved in designing the plan. Like many policy documents for nature conservation, the NPP has been mainly based on reports of biologists and ecologists who worried about the declining quality and quantity of nature in the Netherlands. The plan itself is about plants and animals and not about farmers' perceptions and behaviour with regard to nature, but the implementation of the plan seems to be for a big part an agricultural affair. Consequently farmers' acceptance of the Nature Policy Plan is at stake, and therefore the successful implementation of the Plan.

Non-acceptance of policy

Problems concerning the acceptance (or non-acceptance) of policies have three dimensions:

- Acceptance of the problem;
- Acceptance of the role of the government with respect to the problem;
- Acceptance of the measures to solve the problems. The question is whether these measures are accepted as realistic, effective and fair (in regards to the distribution of benefits and sacrifices among different groups).

Often policy makers assume that the acceptance of the measures is what is most important. However, if there is no consensus with relevant groups about the seriousness of a problem (or whether a problem exists at all), or if the government is not accepted as the one who should solve the problem, you may not reach the stage where the measures are subject of discussion.

The problem of non-acceptance of conservation policy

We should realise that nowadays governments and government offices and staff in general do not have 'legitimacy' as a matter of course: they are no longer obeyed simply because they are the authorities, gifted with the power to regulate everything. Because citizens are more emancipated and more critical than they used to be, governments have to prove legitimacy for every single action. They have to 'earn' acceptance and trust. With regard to nature policies this may be even more true for East-European countries where the feeling of land ownership ('this is my land!') is a very strong sentiment.

With this perspective on the acceptance of nature policies, the question arises whether the Dutch government should not have started communicating with farmers about the NPP much earlier than at the moment of implementation. If farmers had been involved in the development of nature policy, they would have been more likely to understand the reasoning behind the plan. And policy makers could have profited from the farmers' knowledge of nature and their earlier experiences with nature policy. The NPP might have looked different, but support for the plan would have been more likely and its implementation more easy.

This brings us to an additional way communication can be used in policy processes. Next to the instrumental use of communication to promote plans that have already been designed, communication can play a central role in developing plans that will be acceptable to all those involved. In this approach the development and implementation of nature policies is seen as an ongoing process of communication and negotiation between different stakeholders. We call this interactive policy making.

II.2 *Interactive policy making*

II.2.1. *What is interactive policy making?*

The essence of interactive policy making is to organise and facilitate a process in which stakeholders – all those who are involved in or affected by a policy plan – negotiate and learn their way towards policies that are acceptable to all of them. For policies concerning nature, stakeholders that immediately come to mind are nature conservation directorates within governments, NGOs in the field of nature conservation, farmers, foresters, inhabitants of regions with outstanding natural values and governmental authorities at various levels. (See Chapter III for a full checklist of possible stakeholders in conservation issues.) Involving all these groups in policy making is a challenging task. The basis for interactive policy making is the recognition of mutual dependency. All stakeholders have to recognise that they need 'the others' to reach their goals. This leads to involving these others in policy development. We will elaborate on this later.

see also
III.8

● *Mutual dependency: an example*

During the implementation of the Nature Policy Plan, the Dutch government has met fierce resistance from the agricultural community. But without farmers' support the beautiful ideas of the plan will never become reality. Thus the government feels dependent on the co-operation of farmers.

Farmers, on the other hand, are increasingly aware of the great demand in society for more high quality natural areas and for a clean environment. They also feel that society is blaming them for destroying both. In response to this, local environment friendly farming co-operatives have emerged all over the Netherlands. Farmers feel the need to communicate with the government and with other relevant organisations in order to become involved in the development of environmental policy, as far as it concerns agricultural practices. Farmers have learned that if they do nothing themselves, things will be done for them and in the end their situation will be worse.

Thus the government and the farmers feel mutually dependent. Both have a problem and for both the other party is part of the problem. The result is that both parties are searching for new possibilities to communicate.



11.2.2 *Interactive policy making: possible and necessary*

A frequently heard argument against interactive policy making is that the original objectives for nature conservation will be watered down. Nature conservationists argue that the problem of declining nature will never be solved if other groups are involved in the development of nature policies. They think that by accepting other stakeholders as partners in discussion, room is created for 'a compromise' that will affect the quality of conservation policy. We should ask ourselves to what extent this fear is based on prejudices with regard to for example farmers' concern for nature. Involving farmers can make clear what their goals and interests are with regard to their daily livelihood and the way they want to farm. This could lead to a very fruitful discussion in relation to the development of nature policies.

Furthermore in many cases, and especially in cases related to land-use-planning, interactive policy making turns out to be the only possible way to achieve any real results at all. As we already remarked at the beginning of this chapter, nature problems are caused by the behaviour of a great number of different groups of people. These problems cannot be solved by biologists and ecologists alone.

● *The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority - a case study*

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA) is an organisation working in the field of nature protection and conservation in Romania. The DDBRA was established in 1990, when the Danube Delta, its adjacent water bodies and its coastline (500.000 hectares) were declared a biosphere reserve. The Danube Delta, Europe's largest freshwater wetland, includes biodiversity that is of national and international importance, and natural resources (notably fisheries) whose management supports a resident population of 15.000 people.

However, recently changes in policy have resulted in deterioration of economic conditions for many of the Delta inhabitants, and diminishing financial allocation to the DDBRA. In some cases, this has resulted in a negative appreciation by the local population of DDBRA as a managing authority, and reduced effectiveness of DDBRA as a conservation authority. If it is to be successful in achieving its primary objectives, DDBRA concludes, it must identify and demonstrate clear linkages between conservation and sustainable use of the biosphere reserve's natural resources with:

- Improved economic conditions for local communities and other stakeholders whose activities impact upon the Delta;
 - Economic, cultural and ecological benefits at the national level, and probably also global benefits.
- This will require a process of consultation and communication.

(source: the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, 1999)

II.2.3. *The advantages of interactive policy making*

There are several advantages to involving important stakeholders in policy development, especially when compared to policy making 'behind closed doors':

- The interests, goals and experiences of different stakeholders that might seriously hinder policy implementation will be clarified at an early stage, so that they can be dealt with much more effectively;
- Seemingly separated problems (such as agricultural, ecological, water problems) can be linked and solved in relation with each other. By this, the solutions of one party will not automatically become the problems of the other;
- Good ideas existing among stakeholders from 'the field' can be integrated, and will not be isolated and neglected;
- Stakeholders' support will develop during the policy making process (instead of being 'created' afterwards). Many stakeholders will learn about the value of nature, by talking about a common plan.

II.2.4 Interactive policy making – when will it work?

Interactive policy making is not the solution to every problem in policy development and policy implementation. In fact, interactive policy making has specific problems of its own, which we will come to later. Apart from the problems associated with interactive policy making as such, not every situation is suited to start an interactive policy process. Different theories with respect to communication and negotiation as well as practical experiences in the field of land-use-planning teach us that people only start communicating and negotiating under certain circumstances:

Problem awareness: as long as people are not aware of being a stakeholder in a specific problem situation or issue, nothing will happen. It will not be possible to start negotiations or discussions, because as far as they are concerned there is nothing to discuss.

Feelings of mutual dependency: in general, people only start negotiating with others if they have a specific objective and realise that they need others to reach this objective. If people think that the others have 'nothing to offer' or if they think that they have absolutely no chance of reaching their objective themselves, they will not become involved. This means that an analysis of power-relationships is needed before a process of interactive policy making is started. If power-relationships between stakeholders are seriously unequal, interactive policy making will probably fail.

Opportunities to communicate: for interactive policy making to work there have to be concrete opportunities to communicate (such as meetings, workshops, round tables. This means that enough time and money should be available to organise these events. It also means that during these events the same language has to be spoken: people should interpret important concepts in the same way. This is often a problem. Hunters for instance often have quite different feelings about concepts related to nature and nature policies (such as biodiversity or even 'nature') than nature conservationists have. Learning to speak the same language can be an objective for negotiation as well!

see also
III.8,
I.6.4 and
I.7.2

II.2.5 Creating the right conditions for interactive policy making

If these conditions for interactive policy making are not there, we should search for opportunities to 'create' them.

Promoting problem awareness

If people are not aware of being involved in a problem situation, we can try to make them aware of it with the help of communication. We should take into account that people in general do not like to be aware of problems for which they do not have a solution. It is important to convince them that it is possible to find acceptable solutions. This is by no means the same as convincing them to support one particular solution!

see also
III.8

● *Changing conditions: an example*

In some cases, realising the right conditions for interactive policymaking is just a question of timing. Circumstances change continuously. In the Netherlands, for example, farmers did not at first feel the need at all to communicate with the government or nature conservationists ('as long as we are not obliged to, we will do nothing'). However, gradually they felt increasingly uncomfortable because they saw society blaming them for 'destroying nature' and 'polluting the environment'. Since they felt more and more dependent on a good image within the society they started to organise themselves at local and regional levels in order to get involved in the process of policy-development with respect to integrating land-use planning, linking agricultural interests to ecological and environmental interests.

Stimulating feelings of mutual dependency

When the power relationships between stakeholders are unequal, we can think of possibilities for empowering the 'powerless' so that they have something to offer in the negotiation process. Individual farmers, for instance, can have more power if they organise themselves. Nature conservation organisations can empower themselves by raising funds (at the national and European level) in order to be able to organise an interesting negotiation process which implies that they have other stakeholders 'something to offer'.

Creating opportunities to communicate

Funds can be raised from national or international organisations to create the concrete opportunities to communicate and support the process of interactive policy making. Generally, the interactive approach calls for relatively frequent sessions in which not too many actors ('representatives') are involved. But these representatives have to communicate constantly with their constituency and this consultation process has to be supported financially too.

II.2.6 *Interactive policy making in the policy cycle*

The process of policy making (the policy cycle) consists of 5 phases:

- Recognising a problem;
- Analysing the problem (causes, stakeholders involved, stakeholders' interests, relationship with other problems);
- Exploring solutions (linking stakeholders' interests, looking for necessary resources, exploring the benefits of different policy instruments);
- Implementing, monitoring and evaluating the problem-solving process;
- Recognising additional or new problems.

Interactive policy making can be used at different moments during the policy making process, can involve different kinds of stakeholders and serve different goals.

see also
III.8

Recognising a problem

Societal problems are often recognised by specific sectors or disciplines: biologists and ecologists make us aware of problems with respect to nature or biodiversity; agronomists and farmers signal agricultural problems, hydrologists pinpoint water problems. Sectors often have also specific solutions in mind. However, their solutions probably cause problems for other sectors. As we noticed before, solving nature problems implies that different groups of people need to change their behaviour. Interactive policy making starts with making an inventory of relevant groups and informing them about the problem at stake. These groups have to be involved in the process from the beginning.

Analysing the problem

To analyse the problem in a wider context, a public debate can be organised, involving all interested people. This could be a public meeting or a discussion in the media. In a public debate, different points of view will be brought up for discussion. The process can help discover if the problem is linked with other problem fields and important stakeholders will be identified.

Exploring solutions

When it comes to exploring solutions, intensive communication with the stakeholder groups is needed. A number of important questions has to be discussed and answered at this stage: What kind of behaviour is desired from whom? What are the interests, goals, experiences and fears of the stakeholders and how are these related to possible solutions? What can we offer in order to stimulate stakeholders to co-operate? Do stakeholders themselves have interesting ideas with regard to solving the problem? Negotiation and consultation at different levels may have to be initiated in order to find effective and acceptable solutions. Organising communication opportunities for local or regional stakeholders in order to communicate and negotiate possible solutions for their own region is appropriate here. At this stage, it could be very useful to involve impartial professional communicators and facilitators to steer the discussions.

Implementing and monitoring the problem-solving process

Once solutions have been explored and there is consensus among the stakeholders about the way to go forward, the implementation of solutions has to be continuously monitored. Since things change all the time ('today's solutions will be tomorrow's problems'), new problems, but also unexpected opportunities will arise. Ongoing attention for what is happening in the field is needed in order to make use of the opportunities provided by chance. The process of implementation should be regularly discussed by all stakeholders in order to revise and change it if necessary.

Evaluation

Finally, results have to be evaluated. Here the difficult question arises as to what a positive result actually is. The current idea is that a policy is effective if concrete and measurable results have been obtained that were accurately and precisely defined beforehand. (For example: the number of birds nesting in a certain area has increased by 10%.) This changes if we assume that policies are gradually developed through communication and negotiation between the different stakeholders involved. It would be more realistic to consider all developments that are accepted and supported by all stakeholders as positive results in a gradual, ongoing process leading to better nature. For example: if farmers make a serious effort to protect the nature on their land, using guidelines that were developed in an interactive process, then this positive attitude towards nature is a favourable 'intermediate' result.

The 10% increase in birds nesting may not have been reached yet, but we are on the way! Such a mentality with regard to judging results will encourage people to stay involved in the process. Still the question how to interpret results is very difficult and hard to agree upon. Intensive and timely discussion with the stakeholders about the results expected is needed. (Whatever result is obtained, it is always important to 'celebrate' in some way order to encourage the participants.)

Recognising additional or new problems

Many times solutions are accompanied by new problems. Making choices often comes with the feeling of being involved in a dilemma-situation: every option brings about some disadvantages that might become new problems. These problems should not be denied, but recognised and, if necessary, solved.

● *Round-tables and workshops: the Slovenian experience - a case study*

The Ministry of the Environment in Slovenia has been experimenting over the past years with round tables and workshops to create consensus over nature conservation issues and to widen the involvement of important stakeholder groups. NGOs, representatives of other ministries and local and regional authorities sit down together to discuss a certain issue and to reach agreement about priorities and the action to be taken. The Slovenian experience shows that the round tables are very useful to get a good overview of the different opinions and perceptions of the problem. They are equally useful to agree on follow-up action. It turned out that the process moved smoothest when there was an impartial leader for the discussions. However, the round table has to be part of a wider process of co-operation. This process has to be actively supported by management and staff of all the participating organisations. If the round table is a stand-alone event, it is very likely that nothing much will change and that most of the good ideas will not be implemented.

II.2.7 *Communication, negotiation and policy making*

As mentioned several times, the basis for interactive policy making is the recognition of mutual dependency. If people recognise that they need others to reach their goals, they will feel the need to communicate. Negotiation is needed if it turns out that the different groups have conflicting interests. The aim of organising and facilitating a negotiation process is to produce a better plan or policy that is widely supported by different stakeholders. If this is achieved, implementation of the plan is likely to become much easier.

Effective negotiations result in a compromise. Different styles of negotiation exist that result in different types of compromise:

see also
III.8

- Distributive negotiating takes place on the basis that there is one cake and it has to be divided among several people. When I get more, you will get less - unless we will find an opportunity to enlarge the cake;
- Integrative negotiating takes place on the basis that several people take part in baking the cake. The cake's consumers are directly involved in producing the cake they want,

In everyday reality we will mostly meet mixes of these two types: the negotiation process has some characteristics of distributive negotiating and some of integrative negotiating.

The differences between distributive and integrative negotiation

In distributive negotiations the participants start from fixed positions which they hold on to as firmly as possible. Often they overstate their case and ask too much, because they know that they will have to give something up. In integrative negotiations the participants start from a shared interest or idea about the desired future. They do not overstate and ask for more than they need.

In distributive negotiations the negotiators keep their underlying motives and their background to themselves. They keep quiet about their own feelings. In integrative negotiations they are open, and try to share their feelings, motives, fears, beliefs and interests with the other participants. In distributive negotiations threats are used. The constituency (the people or group the negotiators represent) is kept alert, with an energetic spread of images of 'the enemy'. This ensures that if necessary the constituency can be 'mobilised' into action. In integrative negotiations such threats are minimised. Functional relationships are kept as amicable and friendly as possible.

Joint fact-finding, which refers to the creation of common knowledge that is accepted by everybody, is a common phenomenon in integrative negotiations, whereas such activities are impossible in distributive negotiation. In integrative negotiations there is a concern for the consequences of possible solutions for the others, and, most importantly, in integrative negotiations people are learning to see themselves from the position of others. They learn to be socially reflective. Such learning processes are absent in distributive negotiations.

● *Negotiation styles*

Distributive

- starting from fixed positions
- closed about motives and background
- no joint fact finding
- over-claiming
- threats
- no relationship building
- no learning effects
- no concern about the other parties

Integrative

- starting from interests and/or visions
- open
- joint fact finding
- no over-claiming
- no threats
- relationship building
- learning effects
- concern about other parties

Distributive or integrative negotiations: when to do which?

In some situations, distributive negotiations are sufficient to develop satisfactory compromises. This is especially the case in smaller problems, where no big interest-conflicts are at stake. Sometimes, the conditions for an integrative negotiation process are simply not there, for instance if one actor dominates the field. However, in situations where the stakeholders really depend on each other to get a result (as is often the case with nature conservation questions) an integrative negotiation style seems the only way to find sustainable solutions that are satisfying for all stakeholders involved. Otherwise we will face a situation whereby the solution for the one will always cause a problem for the other and so on. This implies that every solution is inherently unstable, and will be attacked by the other party immediately, if there is an opportunity for a more profitable outcome.

Representation problems

One of the main obstacles for sticking to an integrative style of negotiating is the fact that in negotiations there are always more people involved than those that actually sit at the negotiation table. The relation between representatives and their constituencies (the groups they represent) is of decisive importance for success. Representatives can play two possible roles. They can act to promote the particular interests of their constituencies, or they can act as change agents, internally for their constituency and externally for the other stakeholders. In the first role there is a strong tendency towards distributive negotiating: representatives have nothing to offer, only something to defend. In the second role representatives from the beginning try to involve everyone in the process, making sure people understand each other, and so on.

However, representatives tend to neglect that they should negotiate with their constituencies as well as with other stakeholders. This is one of the main pitfalls of negotiating as part of interactive policy making: representatives tend to act merely as spokesmen for their constituencies. They go to the negotiation table with a precisely formulated proposal, and without any room for negotiating. The point is that constituencies often hold very simplistic, stereotypical images of the 'opposite sides'. In these stereotypes, negative elements dominate ('nature conservationists prefer plants and animals to people' or 'farmers and foresters are only interested in profit'). During negotiations representatives find themselves facing a dilemma: on the one hand it is tempting to keep their constituencies satisfied, on the other hand they need some room for manoeuvre in order to reach any constructive result at the negotiation table.

Representatives should communicate and negotiate with their constituency as well as with other stakeholders. Only in that way can they maintain a good relationship with the members of the constituency, know what is important for them, develop a trustful image, and at the same time create enough space for constructive negotiations with other stakeholders.

● *Representatives in negotiations should*

- Consider their constituencies as stakeholders with whom they also need to negotiate;
- Be realistic with their constituencies (not promising too much);
- Avoid strict mandates from their constituencies;
- Not only communicate the positive results but also the process which has (or has not) led to results.

Four guidelines for good negotiations

Good and constructive negotiating is a very intensive and difficult process which needs time, patience, communication and negotiation skills, and interpersonal skills as well. This might sound discouraging. However, we should realise that the ideal negotiator does not exist. But if we try our best, results will come step-by-step. To conclude this section we will present four practical guidelines for constructive negotiations:

- **Separate the people from the problem.** This becomes easier when you get to know people personally;
- **Focus on interests, not on positions.** Be clear about what you want and, even more importantly, about what you definitely do not want. Try to get these things clear for the other stakeholders as well;
- **Invent options for mutual gain.** The best way to find such options is to search for them together with other stakeholders;
- **Insist on using objective criteria.** In order to create a clear, honest and commonly accepted climate for negotiating, these criteria should be discussed beforehand with all stakeholders involved. (Fisher and Ury, 1981).

II.3 *Looking back*

In this section we have elaborated on the different functions of communication in policy making for nature conservation, using different examples and experiences in this field.

We started with an analysis of policy instruments such as regulation, financial incentives, facilities and communication. Every instrument has its possibilities and restrictions. Therefore, a policy strategy often consists of a mix of several instruments.

We distinguished three functions of communication as a policy instrument; communication to support the working of other instruments, communication as an (often unplanned) aspect of other instruments, and communication as an instrument in itself.

Communication as an instrument in itself can serve different goals, such as: raising awareness, instructing people, informing people and agenda-setting. If communication is used this way, activities should be prepared carefully and goals should be formulated realistically.

It is important to realise that communication as a policy instrument is restricted in creating support for policies that are already developed in detail. If the policy itself is not convincing, nice words and glossy leaflets distributed afterwards will be a waste of time and money.

Thus an additional use of communication in policy processes was elaborated; next to using communication for the promotion of a plan that has already been designed, communication can play a central role in constructing an acceptable plan. We call this interactive policy making.

The essence of interactive policy making is that all important stakeholders (i.e. farmers, foresters, governmental authorities, nature conservation organisations) are involved in the process of policy making. These stakeholders will negotiate and explore a way towards viable policies that are acceptable for all of them.

The basis for interactive policy making is the recognition of mutual dependency; stakeholders have to realise that they need others to reach their goals. This makes them ready to communicate with the others. If divergent interests then appear, negotiation is likely to occur.

Although interactive policy making can be a difficult, time-consuming process, the advantages are clear enough. Support of different stakeholders for new policies will arise during the policy process instead of 'being created' afterwards which in many cases turns out to be a useless effort. It is not only the implementation of policies that will be much easier, but the quality of the policies will also increase, since stakeholders can bring in original and practical ideas.

Because of the importance of negotiation in interactive policy making, this theme was elaborated further. Different styles of negotiating were discussed, whereby with regard to nature conservation so-called integrative negotiating is preferred. In integrative negotiations people start from interests, instead of from fixed positions. They are open about their motives and background, they develop good relationships with each other and they learn to understand each others' points of view. Step-by-step they will find sustainable solutions that are satisfying for all of them.

Nature conservation is an important matter that needs to be supported by society in general and especially by stakeholders that are actively involved in nature practices. Support arises gradually by continuous and carefully organised communication throughout the policy process.

Chapter III A practical guide for communicating nature conservation

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Introduction

In the previous chapters we described how communication can be a great help in achieving your nature conservation goals. In fact, it is impossible to reach your goals without communication. In this chapter we present a practical guide to help you plan, organise and evaluate your communication activities.

Successful communication depends on knowing exactly:

- **Why** you want to communicate: what is the real problem and what is the solution you want to achieve?
- **Who** you want to communicate with: who are the people/groups that are at the heart of this problem?
- **What** you want to communicate: what is the message you are going to give?

It is essential to take the time to answer the first three questions before you decide:

- **How** you can get your message to the people you want to reach:
- **When** this message should be delivered.

Only then can you begin planning a brochure, a film, a public meeting, an internet discussion group...

We will take a step by step approach to the why, who, what, how and when of communicating for nature conservation. We will discuss how to:

- Plan and manage communication;
- Analyse problems and set clear goals for communication;
- Develop communication strategies;
- Organise communication within your organisation;
- Analyse target groups;
- Formulate clear messages;
- Determine the best methods of communicating with the target groups;
- Develop clear, understandable and effective texts, presentations, press-materials, etc.

We will deal with communication campaigns and activities that are organised to give information, raise the interest of the public, politicians or other groups for a particular issue, or generate support for policies or plans. This was described earlier as '**instrumental communication**'. But we will also pay attention to establishing active dialogue with certain groups and fully involving them in developing, implementing or evaluating policy or plans or '**interactive communication**'.

III.1 *Communication planning and management*

see also
1.5.5

The key to successful communication does not lie in knowing how to make a glossy brochure, how to give a sharp interview, or how to develop a hi-tech web-site. It is not even having lots of money and staff (although that helps). The key to success in communicating is planning and preparation. Jumping from problems to the means of solving them skips the planning steps in between. It is like trying to jump across the Danube in a single leap. It cannot be done. To get across, a bridge has to be built from one side to the other. That is planning.

● *What can happen, if you don't plan your communication?* *An example*

A Regional Conservation Authority designates a new protected area. This is a wetland area, where people hunt and fish; there is a small village near the wetlands and a few farms surrounding it. The Director of the Authority realises the importance of communication and decides to make a brochure explaining that the birds and plants occurring in this area are rare in Europe and must be protected. The brochure also explains the rules and regulations: fishing and hunting will be banned at certain times of the year, farmers may have to limit the use of pesticides or fertilisers. There are fines for non-compliance. Copies of this brochure are available at the local town hall, the library and the headquarters of the Regional Authority.

Why communicate and with whom? The real problem is that it will be impossible to really protect the wetland if the farmers, hunters and fishermen do not co-operate. Even if the wetland is legally protected, the wardens can't watch it all the time. To achieve co-operation, people who live and work around the area have to know about the restrictions, understand them, accept them and be motivated to act in a way that is good for nature.

What, how and when? Is a brochure the best way to accomplish this? Chances are a brochure will never reach the most important people, the local farmers, hunters and fishermen, because they may not go into town very often and are not likely to pick up a copy at the town hall, library or Regional Authority headquarters. Even if they do get the brochure, will they read it? They may not be interested in nature conservation at all and may throw the brochure away immediately. If they read it, will they understand and accept the message? Do they care enough about rare birds and plants to change their behaviour?

How will the target groups respond to the rules and regulations? It is likely that they will begin by reading these and will be very angry at the restrictions on their daily lives. As a result, they may dislike the Regional Authority and see nature conservation as a nuisance.

Perhaps it would have been better to involve the local population earlier in the designation process, instead of waiting until the very end before communicating with them.

In conclusion, a brochure that cost time and money to produce might not achieve much and might even make the situation worse.



What is planning?

For our purposes, the simplest way to describe planning is to think of it as a set of logical actions that will get you to the result you need. A plan identifies goals and objectives, and the systematic steps to be taken in reaching these objectives. Planning is a systematic guideline for action. It is a map that will show you how to get where you want to go, and who will do what when.

Types of communication plans

There can be three types of communication plans within an organisation:

- Strategic plans;
- Annual plans;
- Project plans.

Strategic plans

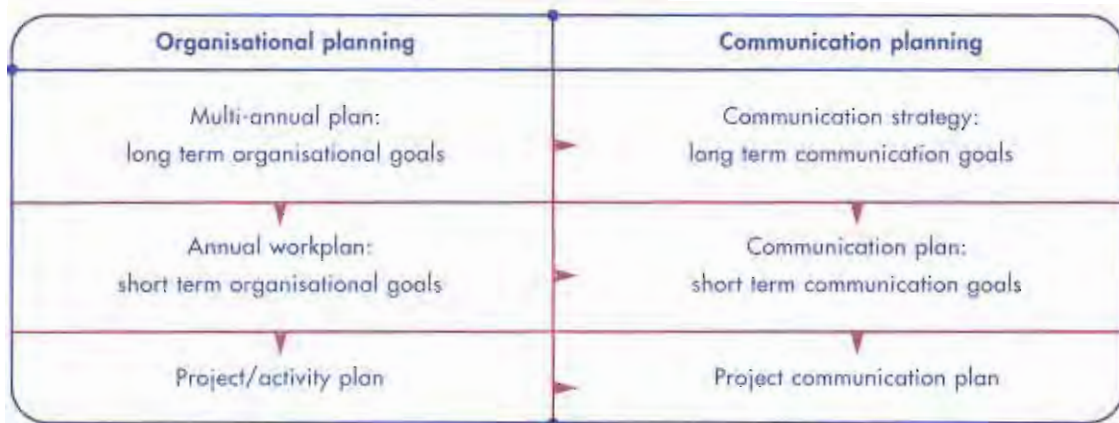
The strategic plan establishes the essential link between the main functions of the organisation and communication programmes. As such, it serves as the guideline for all communication activities and ensures co-ordination, consistency and staff awareness. A strategic communication plan is a long term plan (3 to 5 years). It can be linked to the organisation's long term vision, policies and goals. It can be a stand-alone document or form part of the Business Plan of the organisation. In any case, it serves to inform both staff and the public about the principles and procedures the organisation applies to communication. A strategic plan deals with broad principles and procedures and does not go into detail. It should be brief. It is only periodically reviewed and updated, unless major changes take place in the organisation. Having a strategic plan means that all the organisation's communication activities will be based on the same principles and will form a consistent whole. It means that the organisation has one face and speaks with one voice.

Annual plans

Annual plans are more detailed. They are based on the strategic plan and are prepared so that it is clear which communication activities will be developed that year, and what that will mean for programming and budget. An annual plan assures that there is money and time for communication activities, and that the activities will be planned over the year, so that they will not collide.

Project plans

An organisation has only one strategic plan and annual plan, but it can have many communication project plans. A project plan is prepared for each separate communication effort. Since no two situations are ever exactly alike, each communication activity will require a specific plan. A project plan sees to it that everyone knows what the communication activity is about, and that people know who is responsible for certain tasks, and when they have to be carried out.



Plans as communication tools?

In reality plans have other important uses than just planning. A plan itself can be used as a communication tool.

- It can be released to the public to promote public understanding, to show transparency and to inform the public about the process to be followed;
- It is also an important learning instrument for the organisation. After a plan has been implemented, an evaluation can show errors and successes.

What management can do to improve communication

- Include communication planning as part of the decision making process and not as an afterthought;
- Be clear about policy goals and demand clarity about objectives of communication activities;
- Set a good example by properly communicating with staff;
- Have a clear communication policy in place in the organisation;
- Support communication not only in words but also with funding;
- Give communication a place on the organisation chart;
- Clearly assign staff responsibilities for communication;
- Allocate time for communication activities;
- Provide training in communication;
- Ensure co-ordination between communication programs, public relations and management.



How to make plans

When developing a communication plan, always work down this list of questions:

Analyse the situation What is the problem that has to be solved? Why do you think communication is necessary? Describe the situation and analyse it.

Setting targets What is the goal? What do you want to achieve with communication? Which target groups go with your communication goal? Who are the people you have to communicate with to reach your communication goal? Is this realistic and feasible? Can you achieve your goal by using communication? Can you reach your target group?

Deciding on action What message do you want to give to the target group? What do you want them to know, feel, or do? Which means and channels do you choose to get this message to the target group in the most efficient and direct way? Which means of communication could you use and how can you ensure that these means actually reach the target group?

Implementation How much money is needed for each step? Calculate it. How long will each step take? Make a time-plan.

Some advice

Keep it simple Whatever kind of plan you are preparing, the general planning process is the same. It is important to make the process simple for reasons of efficiency in terms of time, cost and effort. Otherwise, the planning process can get out of control and becomes an end in itself. This is a sure way of turning management off planning in general.

Most important: setting your goals The general planning process says that your goals must be clearly and adequately stated at the beginning. It must be absolutely clear what the communication activity is supposed to achieve. Everything in the plan must contribute to achieving these goals. Poorly defined goals will lead to poorly planned communications. This will lead to confusion on the part of both the internal public - you and your colleagues within your organisation - and the external publics, the world outside with which you want to communicate.

Don't forget training! Once you have set your goals, it is important to check whether you and your staff have enough expertise to reach your goals in communication. If and where necessary, training of staff should be included in the planning process.

Keep flexible! Even with the best of planning, you will sometimes be surprised by events. Remember that you rule the plan, the plan does not rule you. When unforeseen circumstances happen, the plan may need to be changed.

● *What communication can do: communicating nature in Bulgaria* *A case study*

An interview

'My work is centred around communication: I develop and implement communication strategies and plans, and give training to National Park staff. At the moment my work is very focussed around the establishment of two new national parks.'

'At the local and regional level communication is considered to be very important and a crucial component of conservation plans. With the establishment of the new law on protected areas, communication is also more and more becoming part of policy at the national level. On the policy level we are now developing management plans for the National Parks. Communication approaches are very much integrated into this process. The plans are drafted by experts, and then the drafts are discussed with different stakeholder groups. We did research to get an impression of the attitudes and values of these groups, and to see how their values coincided with nature conservation values. The process of reaching consensus is very difficult, and sometimes it even temporarily stops, but it is never abandoned. In general these consensus building processes work well on the regional and local scale; on the national scale they are more difficult.'

'The most important actors in the NGO world also understand the working of the interactive process. There is good co-operation between various organisations that communicate for nature conservation. It happens that NGOs raise funds to initiate communication activities for the national park.'

'We use a wide variety of means in our communication programmes. We have established good relations with the press, who are regularly invited to topical briefings and are supplied with background materials. We make printed materials, such as posters and brochures. In education we co-operate with the teacher training college, whose lecturers are also often influential scientists and advisors of politicians. We have also developed lessons for primary school children, and do special projects with schools. One project was to teach children how to grow herbs in school gardens. These herbs are protected, but they are collected by the local villagers and sold. Via the children the parents were encouraged to start growing herbs themselves, using the seed from the plants grown by the children.'

'There are also good experiences with wetland management. There too a programme combining education, information and consensus approaches was developed. In one case, stakeholder groups were trained in negotiation and discussion techniques before a meeting for all stakeholders was organised. The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds organised a similar process in a mountain area.'

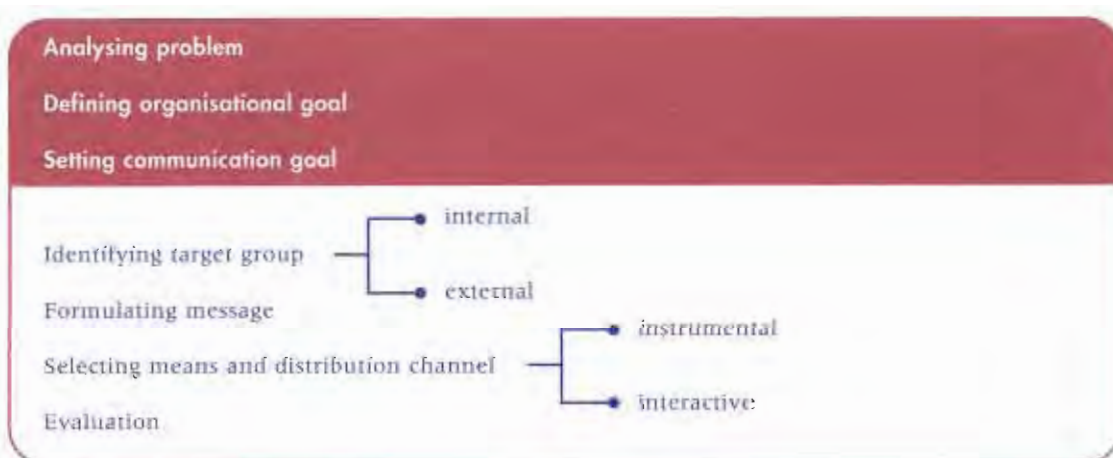
'Most communication activities are funded internationally. The national funds are limited, but we have had good success with getting funds from abroad. I am now trying to negotiate with local business to give 'in kind' contributions to communication projects.'

'One of the main problems with communication in Bulgaria is that not all people involved understand the strategic approach. Communication could be more effective. For example people develop good publications, but forget to plan for the distribution. And there is the fact that it is not always understood that communication can create the bridge between conservation and economic activities.'

● Checklist on Communication Planning

- Set organisational goals.
- Define what goals you want to communicate.
- Carry out situation analysis.
- Identify your significant stakeholders and target groups.
- Define objectives for each target group.
- Design different approaches for different audiences:
 - Message Strategies:
 - Media Strategies.
- Prepare Program Evaluation Method.
- Prepare Implementation Plans:
 - a) Assign responsibilities;
 - b) Do schedule;
 - c) Do Budget;
 - d) Design Feedback and Program Adjustment.
- Implement your plan.
- Measure the effectiveness of your communications.
- Evaluate results.

III.2 Setting goals for communication



The first and most important step you have to take in planning for successful and effective communication is setting goals. What exactly do you want to achieve? Only in this way can you develop communication activities that are well-targeted and that use money and time in the most efficient way.

see also
II.1.3 and
I.5

Communication goals and organisation goals

Communication is not a stand-alone activity. In Chapters I and II of this book, it was made clear that communication is a tool which helps an organisation to achieve its programme. Therefore, communication goals must be linked to the overall activities of your organisation. Communication projects should directly contribute to achieving the goals of your organisation. If you are responsible for communication, you should know what your organisation's goals are – both in general and for specific projects. Only when an organisation spells out in detail what it wants to achieve, can communication goals be set, and well targeted and efficient communication activities developed. If the management of the organisation want successful communication, they have to make very clear what they actually want to achieve.

● *Management and setting communication goals*

If the staff members responsible for communication are not involved or kept informed of the planning of projects, you - as manager - have a problem. Chances are, the organisational goals and policies will not be properly reflected in your organisation's communications. This does not mean that the communication department or communication officer has failed. The reason for poor communications in such situations usually is poor organisational structure and a lack of understanding of planning and of communications by management.

Management have a responsibility to ensure the communication is properly included in project planning. As the Chinese proverb says, you have to start with clean water to end up with clean laundry. In your case, starting with clean water means involving communication experts at the beginning of the planning process so that their advice is built into the plan. Then the delivery of communications has a good chance of being successful.

Setting clear goals

This means that the goals of your organisation have to be translated into communication goals. Communication goals have to be specific, and they have to contain a result. A goal should make clear: who - what - when. It is very tempting to say that the goal is 'raising awareness among farmers of the importance of protecting nature.' This is very vague. You have to be more specific, and as concrete as possible. For example, if you want to improve relations with local farmers your goal could be:

In two years time

- Day to day contacts between farmers and representatives of the conservation organisation will be more positive and friendly;
- Farmers will respond positively to invitations to attend meetings, hearings etc.;
- Farmers will occasionally take the initiative for contact;
- A number of farmers will participate in joint projects.

In some cases you can even quantify goals. For example: 'within one year, 75% of the farmers living in the vicinity of this nature reserve will be aware of the importance of this natural site, and within two years, 50% will know of and support the management plan'.

Only by setting clear and specific objectives can you decide if your goal is realistic and feasible, and determine at the end of the campaign if you have reached the goal. (And if all the time and money was well-spent; this is also very important to convince your bosses that you are doing a good and useful job.)

Organisation goals + communication goals: an example

Your organisation is responsible for implementing your country's Endangered Species Law. This means that it has to take measures to adequately protect the lapwing (*Vanellus Vanellus*) that mainly occurs in region Y. So: the **organisational goal** is to protect the lapwing in region Y. Protecting the lapwing in region Y is a vague and wide concept and can only lead to vague and wide communication activities: campaigns for the general public, posters, exhibitions etc. The wide goal: protecting the lapwing can be split into several more detailed goals, such as 'set up a ban on collecting eggs' (collecting lapwing eggs happens to be a regional tradition) or 'regional farmers take measures to protect nests during early mowing.' If the organisation goal is: achieving the co-operation of local farmers in protecting the nests of species X during mowing, you can set very concrete **communication goals** and develop communication activities that have a better chance of reaching the relevant target groups.

Organisation goals In general	1 Protect the lapwing in region Y
More specific	1.a Ban on collecting eggs established in region Y until the lapwing population has recovered.
	1.b At least a quarter of regional farmers cooperate in protecting lapwing nests during mowing.
Communication goal	Within 6 months: During routine meetings with conservation staff, most farmers - when asked - will indicate that they are aware of the problem concerning lapwing nests. (Or: 75% of farmers will be aware of problems with the lapwings in relation to mowing.)
	Within 9 months: A majority of farmers will be willing to meet with conservation staff to discuss the options to protect lapwing nests. A number of farmers will have taken the initiative to contact the conservation organisation for information on protection measures. (Or: 60% of farmers will have a positive attitude towards protecting the lapwing nests.)
	Within 12 months: 15% of farmers will actually set up measures to protect lapwing nests during mowing.
	Within 24 months: 30% of farmers have actually set up measures to protect nests during mowing.

Setting feasible goals

When translating organisation goals into communication goals, take care to be realistic. With communication, we usually try to change people's attitudes and behaviour. This takes time. It is better to take a step by step approach and set a number of smaller goals that are realistic, than to set one huge goal that can never be achieved. The step by step approach is not as spectacular, but it works! Sometimes it will not be possible to make the desired changes through communication alone; communication has its limits and cannot solve all problems. However, setting unfeasible goals and then trying to achieve them is truly a waste of everyone's time and effort.

● *An example: the limits of communication*

Communication is not always the appropriate response to every situation. Think of the case of farmers adjacent to your national park which is used by thousands of geese as a safe stopover during annual migration. The birds, a protected species and increasing in population, raid farmers' fields in search of feed for weeks on end, causing extensive crop damage. You may wish to convince farmers about the value of protecting these geese; however, no amount of communication will compensate them for the loss of income caused by the birds. In this case, in place of communication, the appropriate response may be cash payment to replace the loss of farmers' income.

Goals and target groups

The next step in the process of developing a successful and effective communication plan will be to determine which groups you must target to achieve your goals. We will deal with this in detail in section 6, but one point needs to be mentioned now. In practice, you will further define your communication goals for each individual target group. Of course, each target group will help you reach your overall goal, but they may do so in different ways.

● *An example: setting goals for individual target groups*

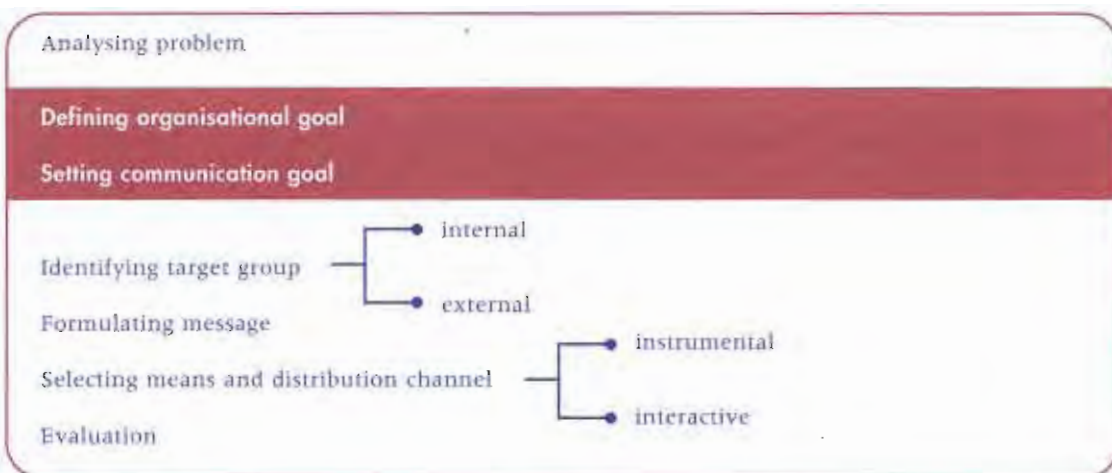
One of your communication goals is that within 6 months, most farmers will know about problems with the lapwings in relation to mowing. Your main target group will not only be the farmers themselves, but also the local newspaper because it could help you reach your goal as well. For each of these groups, you should specify exactly what you want to achieve. For the local newspaper, the goal could be: within 3 months the paper will have published two articles about the problem of the lapwing population.

When goals are not reached.

If a goal is not reached, that does not necessarily mean that the communication has failed. Remember that we live in a very complex and very dynamic world. It is impossible to predict what will happen in the future, and it is equally impossible to make a 100% adequate analysis of all the factors involved in a communication process. We cannot control the world – not even with the most carefully planned communication strategy.

And finally...

You may ask whether all this defining of organisation goals, and communication goals and target group objectives is really necessary. Yes, it is. Only in this way will it become clear what you really need to do and what communication activities really have a chance of success. As a result, you will spend your time and money efficiently.

III.3**Day to day communication**

However carefully you plan and prepare your communication strategies and plans, they will not be effective if your public is treated in a careless or impolite manner in day to day contacts with your organisation.

● *An example: the effects of inadequate day to day communication*

The managers of a nature reserve want to make the reserve better known to the local community. Articles appear in the local paper, a staff member gives a talk at a meeting of a local NGO, posters are made and distributed, etc. A local teacher becomes interested and calls the office of the nature reserve to ask for more information. The phone is not answered. When she tries again, someone does answer the phone but this person does not know the answer to her questions, and is in a hurry. Still not discouraged, the teacher takes her class to the nature reserve. They meet a ranger who is clearly not pleased to find a group of children in 'his' nature reserve and warns them not to damage anything and says they will be prosecuted if they do. The teacher returns to her school angry and decides not to pay any more attention to the nature reserve in her classes.

The official communication campaign was successful: it raised the interest of at least one person. But the day to day communication destroyed that success.

All organisations communicate with the outside world in two ways:

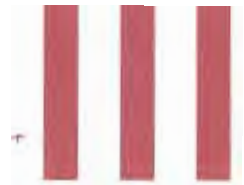
There is the **'official' programme of communication activities**. These are the communication campaigns and activities that organisations develop to help them reach their organisational goals and which we discussed in the previous section. These activities are (ideally) structured through communication plans, and carried out by designated staff trained in communications and public relations.

Then there are the **day to day, unplanned and informal communication activities**. Every organisation has (at best) only a few 'professional communicators'. But everybody else in the organisation also communicates with the outside world. Any direct or indirect contact between a staff member of an organisation and the outside world is also communication and occurs whenever staff:

- Reply to letters;
- Have telephone conversations;
- Deal with requests for information;
- Have contact with local farmers, communities, visitors;
- Attend meetings which involve representatives of other organisations.

And, don't forget:

- Talk about their work to friends, neighbours, family.



Such contacts between staff and the public are as important as the planned and carefully designed campaigns and activities. Carried out in a friendly, professional and helpful manner, these day to day contacts build a positive public image of the organisation. They support and reinforce the overall communication policy. But direct contacts between staff and the outside world undermine all the time, effort and money put into communication plans and activities if:

- Staff act in an unfriendly, uncaring, arrogant or disinterested manner;
- The messages given by staff are different from the messages communicated in other ways;
- Staff do not know what is going on and are not aware of other communication;
- Staff are openly critical about their own organisation.

Improving day to day contacts between organisation and public

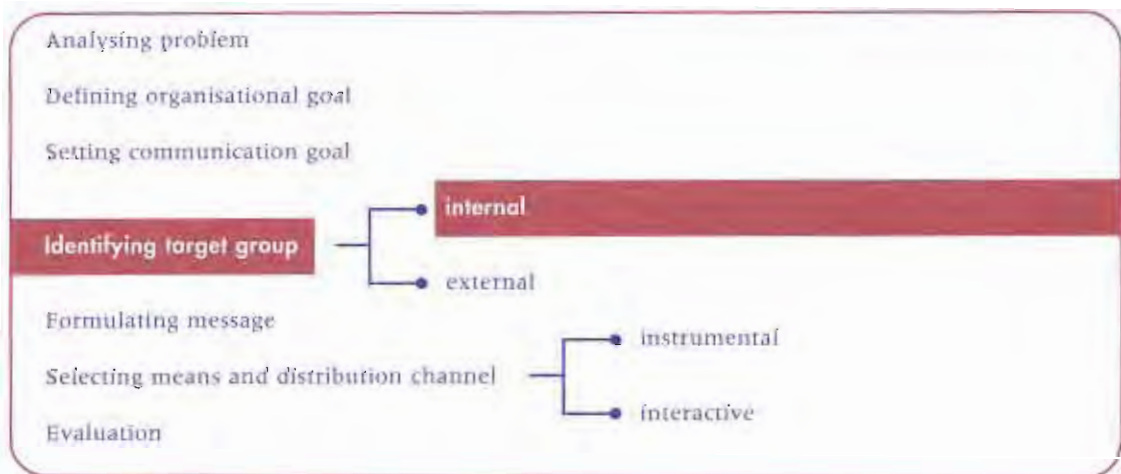
Not all the day to day communication can be planned. Indeed, it would be wrong to try. But a communication plan should at least pay attention to:

- Making polite public contact by all staff a guiding policy. This is true for government offices, national parks and protected areas that are financed by the public, as much as it is for NGOs who depend on the support of the public;
- Setting clear standards for contacts with the outside world, and training staff who regularly deal with the public (rangers, guides, telephone operators, receptionists) to follow the standards;
- Establishing procedures for dealing with letters so that they are answered quickly and correctly. Everyone who contacts the organisation should receive a response within 5 working days. The response should at least indicate when the writer's request will be dealt with;
- Setting standards for the appearance and language of letters, reports and other printed material that are produced in every day working life. They do not have to be very glossy, but they should be neat and easy to understand, and show that the organisation respects the people who will read their letters and reports;
- Establishing procedures for dealing with telephone calls. Telephone operators should know which persons within the organisation are responsible for what, and not pass callers from one staff member to another;
- Establishing a procedure to deal with the complaints of the various public groups that come into contact with the organisation;
- Creating a positive working atmosphere; this will express itself in the contacts of staff with the public.

● *Giving a Slovakian national park a friendly face: a case study*

Over the past years, the Low Tatra National Park in Slovakia has started a programme to improve the co-operation with local communities, private landowners and visitors. The Parks rangers play an important part in this process, because they are often the first to come into contact with these important groups. Therefore the National Park has started a programme to help the rangers to be 'the friendly face' of the National Park to the outside world. With the help of the British Environmental Know How Fund the rangers were trained in how to communicate in an effective and efficient way in their daily work. Key words in this training programme are quality of service to the public (give good quality on time) and a friendly, advisory approach in all contacts with the public. This is a big change from the very strict and controlling approach taken under the old regime, and it is appreciated by rangers and the public alike. The NP has also started to give support to local NGOs, for example by helping them find international funding and by assisting in the development of projects. To further improve relations, the Park has started recruiting volunteer wardens from the local communities. These volunteers are proving to be important ambassadors for the NP in their villages and towns.

III.4 *Internal communication: communicating within your own organisation*



The previous section shows successful communication is something that requires the help and support of all staff members, not just of managers and communication staff. This is something many people, including managers and communication staff, tend to forget. Unless employees support the organisation's goals, no convincing communication to the outside world can take place. Because each person views the world differently, efforts must be made in every organisation to reinforce the one thing that all employees must have in common: the goals of the organisation. An organisation's staff members are an important target group for any communication strategy. Internal communication is as important as external communication.

Planning effective internal communication

To achieve internal communication, it is also necessary to first develop a plan, identifying what the problem is, what you want to achieve, who you have to reach, what your message is and how you are going to bring that message to your (internal) target audience.

Goals of internal communication

- All staff members know, accept and support the organisation's goals and the organisation's vision about how to reach these goals;
- All staff members know, accept and support the organisation's specific activities and projects;
- Staff members know, accept and support the communication goals, for the long term as well as for specific projects.

● *The benefits of internal communication, or, how to keep organisations efficient*

The benefits of good internal communication go further than just raising the quality of external communication. Keeping people informed about what is going on in the organisation, and why things are happening will:

- Increase loyalty of staff members to the organisation;
- Increase job satisfaction;
- Increase efficient use of time and personnel.

A positive attitude, loyalty and commitment of employees to policies and programs are absolutely crucial for their success. As everywhere, communication alone cannot do the trick. Crucial are:

- Meeting the employees' needs for recognition and appreciation, status and participation;
- Good work conditions;
- Fair wages and benefits;
- Job stability and security.

Employees who are badly paid, never praised for their work, in constant fear of losing their job are usually not the most dedicated and efficient employees, not even if the internal communication is perfectly organised.

Target groups for internal communication:

- Current staff members – either all of them or the staff of specific departments;
- Current staff who are temporarily absent (because of illness, maternity leave, secondment, studies, etc.). They are easily forgotten and can lose touch with the organisation;
- Former staff members (retired or disabled). Keeping them involved creates a feeling of solidarity and ‘family’ that also positively affects the current staff members;
- Family of staff members – their support and understanding of the organisation has a positive effect on the employees.

Messages for internal communication

In general, there are four categories of information which are very important for internal communication. They provide information that the internal public wants and needs to have. If they do not know about these things, they will be frustrated and inefficient:

- Logistical information about changes in administrative procedures, organisational structure and responsibilities, addresses, telephone numbers, etc.; general information about maintenance to the buildings or equipment;
- Personnel information about changes in staff: new arrivals and people leaving. General changes affecting salaries, pension, insurance, reimbursements, working hours etc;
- Policy and technical information: Information about new and completed projects, ongoing activities, and new publications. Changes in the direct environment of the organisation: law, procedures, other organisations working in the same field. Information about important events, important visitors to the organisations, etc;
- Social information about weddings, births, etc. Announcements of excursions, office parties/celebrations and other social events.

● *Management style and internal communication*

It is said that 80% of a manager’s time is spent on communicating. Much of the communication is downward throughout the organisation and an important element in the exercise of leadership.

Organisations modelled after the military tend to have a strict ‘chain of command’ where the flow of information is primarily top down. In such a hierarchical organisation, the information flow is fast but often inaccurately understood by the recipients. Thus, it is likely to be ineffective even though it gives the appearance of being orderly and businesslike.

Two-way communication appears to be more time consuming but results in higher accuracy in terms of message sent and message received. Two-way and lateral communication thrive in flatter organisational structures where the flow of information is not hampered by too many layers of management. The freer exchange improves the quality of information, improves staff morale and productivity, and ultimately the organisation’s ability to communicate with the outside.

Means and channels for internal communication

In-house Newsletter (electronic or printed): should appear regularly and be easy to make, reproduce and distribute so that it can be prepared quickly. It will contain short, factual info about recent events.

In-house Magazine: will appear less frequently than a Newsletter and will have more in depth articles that are also interesting for relatives and former employees. Ideally, it is sent to home addresses and not distributed at work.

Employee Orientation Manual (electronic or printed): to introduce new staff to the organisation. This manual will contain practical information about the organisation (where to go if you need office supplies, computer repairs, reimbursement of travel costs, etc.). It has to be kept updated! If not, it will be entirely counterproductive.

Policy Manual: provides information about the organisation's history, mission, current policies and activities. It also must be kept updated.

Orientation Programme: an introductory programme for new staff, so that they quickly get to know the organisation and its activities. It can include meetings, guided tours, mentorships, etc.

Bulletin Boards: are a cheap and easy way to distribute information quickly. If placed at a strategic location (near lift, photo-copier, coffee room), they are usually well read. However, they will not get information to external or mobile staff and can look messy. Bulletin Boards can be digitised. A website can serve the same function.

Meetings: regular staff and work meetings are a good way to stimulate internal communication. However, they should not focus totally on the technical side of work, but also give staff the opportunity to discuss more general issues. And there should be two-way communication – staff should have as much chance to put issues on the agenda as management.

If the objective is not only to keep staff informed, but also to generate more organisational cohesion and strengthen organisational culture, the following methods should also be considered:

Social Events: excursions, dinners, celebrations. These can be small; they need not be extravagant.

Skill Development: giving staff the opportunity for training makes them feel more at ease in their work. Also communication, negotiation and co-operation skills can be developed!

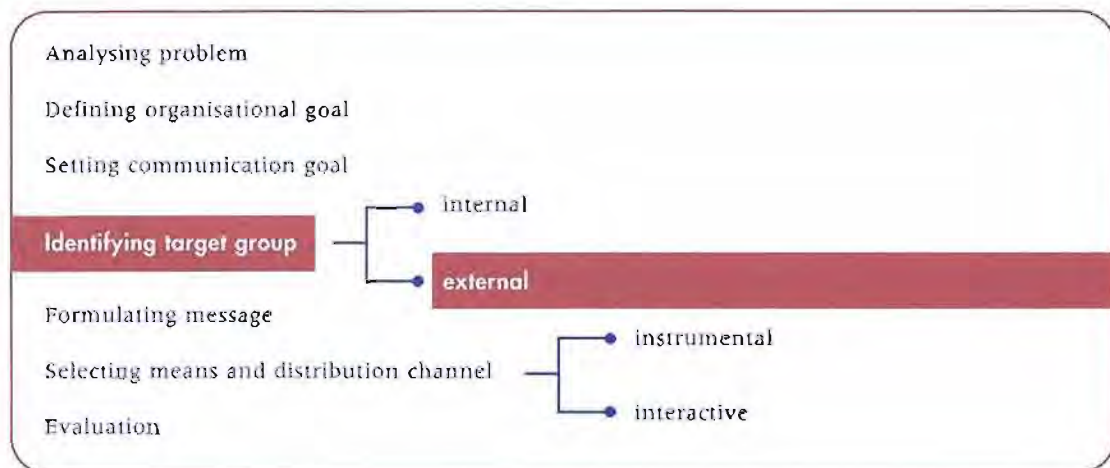
Awards: schemes like 'employee of the month' give staff recognition for important achievements, so do magazine or newsletter articles highlighting successes.

● *What managers can do for internal communication*

Internal communication will improve if:

- Management listens to employees and does not merely dictate to them. Internal communication should actively encourage feedback. It is more motivating if staff feel they have some influence;
- The content of internal communication is of concern to the workers as well as to management;
- What is communicated is understood: for example, messages about changes in pension-schemes or travel-reimbursement procedures should be brief and without jargon;
- No propaganda is communicated: the internal public is more critical than the external public; they know what goes on behind the scenes and will be insulted if management tries to manipulate the information;
- Management is honest in communication: you can not fool the internal public for long, the truth will always be found out. Loss of trust in internal communication is disastrous for any organisation.

III.5 *Target groups*



Stakeholders and target groups

People often confuse stakeholder groups with target groups. Stakeholder groups are all the groups of people or organisations that are somehow involved in a given issue or project, or have an interest in that issue. Stakeholder groups are related to an organisational goal. Target groups are those people you have selected as the target of your communication. Target groups are related to a communication goal. Usually all the target groups are stakeholders, but not all the stakeholders become target groups.

Identifying stakeholder groups

To determine the right target groups, you first have to analyse the stakeholder groups: all the people or organisations that are involved in the issue you want to communicate about. To identify stakeholder groups, you ask yourself the following questions:

- Whose permission, approval or (financial) support do I need to reach my goal?
 - Who is directly affected by the plan or activity?
 - Who will benefit? Who will suffer loss or damage?
- } primary stakeholders
- Who is indirectly affected?
- secondary
- Who is not directly involved, but can influence opinions?
- tertiary

● Example: identifying stakeholders

Goal: expand the boundaries of a protected area to include all of an important forest which presently lies partly outside.

Primary stakeholders

- Whose permission, approval or (financial) support do I need to reach my goal?
Regional authority: Ministry of Nature Conservation; Ministry of Forestry; Ministry of Regional Planning...
- Who is directly affected by the plan or activity?
Landowners/residents in the forest;
Forestry companies;
Tourism operators;
Recreational users: hunters, bird watchers, bikers, hikers, riders, photographers...

Secondary stakeholders

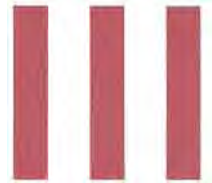
- Who is indirectly affected?
Local business;
Landowners/residents not inside the protected area, but quite near;
Environmental NGOs...

Tertiary stakeholders

- Who is not directly involved, but can influence opinions either for or against the plan or activity?
Local opinion leaders (church, business and trade union leaders, teachers, local celebrities);
Local media...
Ecology depts. of universities, ecological research institutes...

Checklist of stakeholders in nature conservation issues:

Commercial land and resource users	Non-commercial land and resource users
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • farmers • foresters • professional hunters/ fishermen/ gatherers of mushrooms, berries etc. • tourism operators • mining and quarrying companies • electricity companies • water companies • unions, associations and federations representing the above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • residents • amateur hunters, fishermen, gatherers • scientists • military
Visitors	Authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for exercise: walkers, hikers, riders, bikers, climbers, para-sailers, swimmers, sailors, rowers, canoeers... • for nature: birdwatchers, photographers, amateur botanists, zoologists... • for education: schoolchildren, students • for recreation: picnicks, barbecues, parties games, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local and regional authorities (nature, environment, water, defence, agriculture, economic affairs...) • ministries (nature, environment, water, defence agriculture, economic affairs...) • international organisations (European Union, United Nations) • politicians (local, regional and national)
Mediators and intermediaries	'Colleagues/allies'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • media • opinion leaders • celebrities • scientific organisations • educational system/teachers • women's organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national parks • protected area managers • land-managing NGOs • other NGOs • international organisations
Internal groups	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current staff • former staff • out-posted staff 	



see also
1.6.4,
1.7.1 –
1.7.3

Stakeholder characteristics

As the example shows, many different stakeholder groups can be involved in an issue. It is important to know as much about them as you can, as these groups can be powerful supporters or opponents. Try to find out at least the following about each stakeholder group:

Interest: are they interested in the issue you want to communicate about?

If a group has no interest in an issue at all, it makes it very difficult to establish communication with them. There is a good chance that they will not read the letters you send them, will not come to meetings or hearings, and will not watch the video you have made. High interest in an issue makes it easier to communicate with a group. They will be keen to read, listen to or discuss anything concerning this topic.

Knowledge: how much do they know?

It is important to determine the amount of knowledge a group has about an issue. If there is little knowledge, be prepared to provide a great deal of information before expecting that effective two-way communication can start.

Attitude: how do they feel about the issue?

Is the group in favour of or against your plan, and are their feelings strong? Communication with a group that has very strong feelings against your idea requires a lot of time and effort. Sometimes these feelings can be so strong that direct communication becomes impossible for a while. Groups that are strongly in favour of an issue require less communication effort.

How does the group look for information?

How does the group get information? Do they get it from other members of the group, or from local opinion leaders? Do they read newspapers and magazines, watch television, use the Internet? Will they actively look for information, make phone calls, go to the library, search databases? Do they attend meetings and public hearings?

What are the beliefs, norms and values of the group?

Is this a very traditional group or a very unconventional group? Are they very formal in their contacts with others, or informal? Do they have specific religious or political beliefs?

● *A warning about attitudes*

It is easy to think that on every given subject we have only one attitude, and that this attitude is very clear, consistent and stable. Our attitudes are very flexible and dynamic, and they change depending on the position we take when looking at or talking about a specific issue. When we are on holiday, we may appreciate nature and beautiful landscapes very much. But as consumers, we want to buy cheap products and don't want to pay more for nature-friendly food. If you ask people about nature, many people will say they have a positive attitude. If you ask them to choose between nature and cheap food, or nature and a well paid job in a company that clearcuts forests, their attitude towards nature may suddenly be less positive.

Choosing target groups

see also
1.7.3

Once you have made an inventory of stakeholder groups and know something about them, choose the target groups for which your communication will really make a difference. To do this, look at each one of your stakeholder groups and ask yourself the following questions:

Is communication with this group necessary?

- Can this group create a lot of trouble for me in reaching my communication goals?
- Can this group offer advice or support in reaching my communication goals?
- Can this group help me reach other groups that are essential for achieving my communication goals?

If the answer to all of these questions is no, then it may be a waste of time and effort to start a major communication effort. If the answer to one of the questions is yes, then it may be worthwhile to start communication. But is there a chance that communication will have the outcome you desire? To find that out, there is a new set of questions:

Is communication with this group possible?

- Is this group willing to communicate with me? Does this group see me or my organisation as reliable, trustworthy and honest?
- Is this group accessible for communication? Do I know who the members are and where they are? Will my communication reach them?

Is there any chance of successful communication with this group?

- Are the group's feelings about this issue neutral or positive?
- Does this group have some interest in the issue I want to communicate about?
- Does the group have some knowledge about the subject?

If the answer to a majority of these questions is 'no', then it will be very difficult to establish any form of communication with this specific group and your effort may not be productive. In that case, perhaps your goals are too ambitious. Or perhaps communication is not the best way to reach your goal. Go back to step one: setting goals, and rethink your strategy.

Don't give up on groups too quickly

see also
I.6.4

Although some groups will be difficult to reach, there are few groups that are impossible to reach. Take care not to exclude groups because you have had bad experiences with them in the past, or because they have a bad reputation.

Different roles, different goals

You select your target group with a specific communication goal in mind, but not all these groups will play the same role in achieving the goal. This also means that for every target group you will have a different communication target.

Choose your friends with care: allies and intermediaries

Usually, you know which of the stakeholders are on your side. These people can help you obtain your goal. Having allies in communication usually gives you more chance of success. However, it can also diminish your chance of success if your 'ally' has a bad reputation or a troubled relationship with one of your target groups. Always be aware of this before you begin a communication partnership and find out whether you and your ally have the same goals.

When it is very difficult to establish successful communication with a particular target group, perhaps because there have been conflicts in the past, then it is a great help if another group can serve as an intermediary (a negotiator and messenger) between you and the target group. For this to work, the intermediary:

- Has to have the trust of both you and the group you want to reach;
- Have no clear interests in the issue;
- Be prepared to undertake this role.

● *Example: selecting target groups, allies and intermediaries*

Let's go back to the example we gave earlier in this section. Your organisational goal is to expand the boundaries of your protected area to include an important forest. We'll assume that the legal process of designating this site is in motion. Now you want to create local support for this plan, so that there will not be massive opposition when the plans are put forward for public consultation. This is your communication goal. You already have a list of all the stakeholders to go with the organisational goal. Now you should determine which ones become target groups for your communication. You want to select those groups from all the stakeholders where communication will really make a difference. So you look at all the stakeholders and ask your self:

Is communication with this group necessary?

- Can this group create a lot of trouble for me in reaching my communication goals?
- Can this group offer advice or support in reaching my communication goals?
- Can this group help me reach other groups that are essential for reaching my communication goals?

Is communication with this group possible?

- Is this group willing to communicate with me? Does this group see me or my organisation as reliable, trustworthy and honest?
- Is this group accessible for communication? Do I know who the members are and where they are? Will my communication reach them?

Will communication with this group be easy?

- Are the groups feelings about this issue neutral or positive?
- Does this group have some interest in the issue I want to communicate about?
- Does the group have some knowledge about the subject?

Local foresters

Lets look at the first two questions on the list: who can cause trouble, and who can give you advice or support. Obviously, the local forestry companies could cause a lot of trouble, so that would make them an important target group. But now lets go further down the lists of questions: Attitudes: both the owners and the employees of the local forestry companies have very strong feelings about the issue of designating this forest, they feel it is an attack on their livelihood. Relations between the companies and the nature conservation organisation have been deteriorating rapidly for years now. The owners no longer respond to letters or phone calls, and your colleague was chased off one of their sites not long ago. The local foresters are very interested in the issue and know a lot about it, but communicating with them would be almost impossible. The question is whether it is worth it to invest a huge effort in communicating with the local foresters at this point, since the results will probably be disappointing. This may be a case where communication alone is not enough to get the support (or at least the acceptance) of the foresters financial and legal instruments may be necessary as well.



Local businesses

With other local businessmen - such as the owners of shops, hotels and restaurants - the situation is quite different. They, too, could cause problems for your plans, but their interest and attitude towards the plans will be more mixed than those of the foresters. Some of the local business people will not be that interested in any plans to protect a bit of forest. Others may be in favour because they think it will attract more tourism to the area. Still others may be against the plans because they are afraid the forestry company will close down and that might negatively affect their business. Some will know a little about the plans; others won't. Local business people usually have good connections in the local community and are often active in local politics, so they can also give you advice and support, or help you reach other groups. By giving local businesses information and involving them in your plans, you can make this group become your ally. They might even help you further achieve your goals, such as helping you reach the foresters. Thus, making the local businesses a priority target group is a good idea.

Local NGOs

Local environmental NGOs should definitely become a target group. They can be a major source of trouble or of support and help. In some ways, they are easy to communicate with because they will be interested in protecting forests, will know about their importance and will have a positive attitude towards the idea. However, their willingness to communicate with a government authority may be a problem. Sometimes the relationship between NGOs and conservation authorities can be troubled. So can their relationship with other stakeholder groups such as farmers or local business, and that is an aspect to keep in mind when developing a communication plan. Investing time in communication with local NGOs is certainly worthwhile and can make a difference to the success of your plans.

Communicating with the general public?

In communicating about nature, we often tend to focus on the general public - but in the actual everyday practice of communication 'the general public' is not a real stakeholder in most issues, because:

- You do not need the support of the general public, you need the support of specific authorities, organisations and individuals;
- It is not the general public that is directly or indirectly affected by your plans and ideas, but specific groups or sections of the public, such as landowners, tourists...

It is true that 'public opinion' can be a powerful support in reaching our goals, so in some cases the general public can be an intermediary. But even in those cases we will have to divide the general public up into groups in order to create target groups that we can reach and that have to be approached in different ways: children and adults, groups with different levels of education; groups with different cultural backgrounds.

Useful tools: address lists, databases, surveys etc.

Stakeholders and target groups are identified in relation to a specific issue and a specific communication goal. Every time you plan a new communication activity, you have to go through the exercise of defining stakeholders and target groups again. However, some groups will appear again and again. Whatever activity you plan in a protected area, the local residents will always be a stakeholder and almost always a target group for communication. To make your communication more efficient, having an information system on your main stakeholder groups is a very useful tool. (Beware that in many countries there are laws that deal with databases containing information on individuals!)

A stakeholder information system should at least contain:

- Names, addresses and telephone numbers of individual stakeholders;
- Names, addresses and telephone numbers of organisations representing the stakeholders (farmers' organisations, associations of hunters and fishermen, NGOs...) and of relevant contact persons;
- Information on earlier communication with stakeholders, including feedback!

Ideally, you should also have the following types of information:

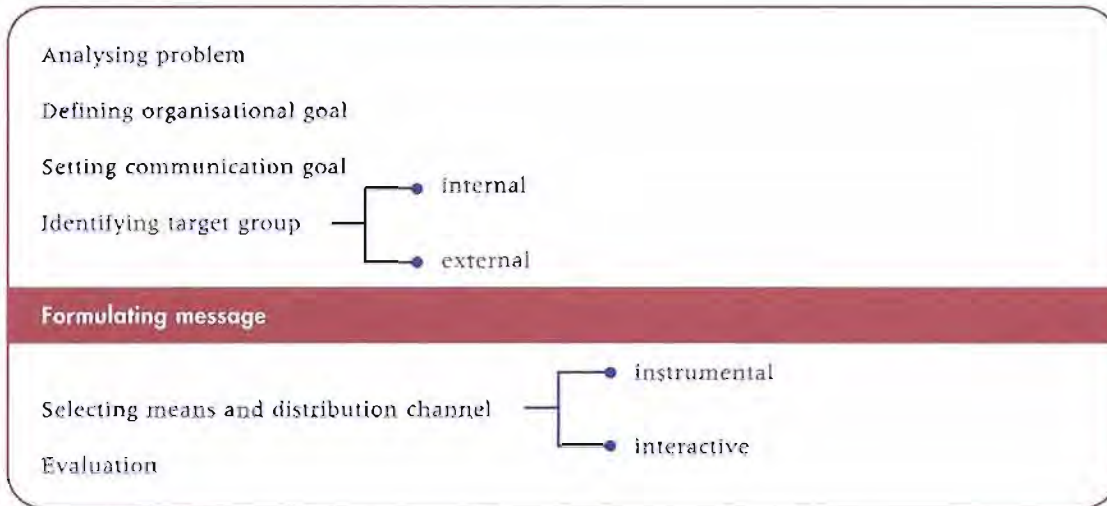
- Demographic and socio-economic information on the composition of stakeholder groups, such as age, gender, income, level of education, political preferences;
- Information on attitudes, knowledge and behaviour concerning relevant issues;
- Information on preferences for certain newspapers, magazines, radio and t.v. stations etc.

Sometimes you can find this kind of useful information on stakeholders and target groups in statistical databases, or in surveys carried out by national or local authorities. In most cases, however, you will have to carry out or commission your own surveys to find out more specific information. This can be an expensive exercise. Whatever kind of information system you make, remember that the public is constantly changing and information has to be kept updated. Not only addresses and telephone numbers change, but also attitudes and behaviour, as we all know from personal experience.

● *Checklist: defining target groups*

- Identify stakeholders affected by your plans;
 - Assess their interests and influence in terms of the outcome of your goal;
 - Determine which groups should form the target audience;
 - Involve other stakeholders in appropriate roles to assist you with the delivery of your messages;
 - Evaluate to learn lessons for future activities.
-

III.6 The message



Formulating the message

see also
1.3.3

Once you have determined the goal of your communication and the target group, you can start to work on the message. Spend some time and attention to get the message just right so that it will increase the chance that your target group interprets your message in the way you intended it.

To get any message right, you should first

- Make a rough outline of what you want to say to your target group.

Then you should find out

- How much the target group knows about the subject;
- How the target group feels about the subject;
- Whether your organisation has communicated about this topic with the target group before;
- Whether others have communicated about this topic with the target group.

Then you decide

- What information you have to give to be understood;
- Which arguments you are going to use to convince the target group.

Finally

- Write down the message – even if it will not be delivered in writing!
- Check whether it still contributes to reaching your communication goal.
If not, start again, or rethink your communication goals;
- Ask a member of the target group, or someone who knows the target group well, to read what you have written and give comments.

Honesty and truth

The key ingredients of every message you 'send out' – and of good communication in general – should be honesty and truth. Your target group will see dishonest communication as propaganda or, worse, as a cynical attempt to fool them. False communication can cause more damage than no communication.

In your messages to target groups:

- Don't lie;
- Don't exaggerate;
- Don't make promises you can't keep.

If you do, you can be sure that this will come back to haunt you and the effect will be that communication will be very difficult, if not impossible, for a long time to come.

● *Honesty in communicating: the role of management*

Only by maintaining high standards of truthfulness can trust be built up with the outside world. This will lead to public support for the organisation. As we emphasize time and again, public support is essential for any organisation's success. Managers must set the example. Honesty in communication with the outside world will only be achieved if management ensures a culture of openness and honesty within the organisation, and in all its dealings with the outside world. Honesty in communication begins with a standard of organisational honesty set by its highest officer and expressed in every policy, directive, decision, and so on.

Thinking from the perspective of others

When developing a message it is crucial that you put yourself in the position of your target group. You have to look at the issue you are communicating about through the eyes of the target group, and in your message show that you know, understand and respect their ideas, feelings, concerns and problems. The more you know about them, the more effective the message is likely to be. This means that you may have to do some homework to find out more about the target group. This can be done by:

- Talking to members of the target group;
- Talking to people who know the target group well;
- Surveys and questionnaires;
- Reports, newspaper articles, etc.

This can reveal quite surprising things about the target group. All too often we believe we know all about others, while in fact their ideas and opinions and motivations can be quite different.

see also
1.6.4

*Some advice on developing a good message:***Begin with the good news and not with the controversial issue**

see also
1.7.5

Always try to find a positive opening for your message. Begin with the things you and your target group have in common – the things you agree on. If you open your message with a list of differences of opinion, you will antagonise your target group immediately. Begin with what has already been achieved, and then mention what was not successful.

Speak in the language of others

see also
1.7.2

Whether your message will be delivered in a brochure, a video-film, a letter, a speech, a scientific journal or a face to face meeting, you have to deliver it in a way that your target group will understand and appreciate. A first step is to check whether your text is understandable to the education level of your target group. But speaking the language of others goes further. It means that ideas, examples and even the jokes you use have to be selected from the perspective of the others.

Make clear what you want

If you are communicating with a target group because you want them to do something, this should be very clear. Your target group should know what you would like them to do, and how they should go about doing it.

● ***Example: thinking from the perspective of the other***

Some conservationists dislike hunting as much as the clear cutting of forests. When hunters and tree cutters are your target audience and you, as the manager of a protected area, view them with hostility and suspicion, your communication will reveal this fact and you will not be able to bridge the gap that separates you. What do you do when working with your target audience seems impossible, yet achieving their co-operation through a harmonious relationship is desirable?

As you plan your communication, try to put yourself in the shoes of the hunters and tree cutters. Learn about their motivations, ideas and values. This approach can provide you with valuable new insights as to how people act. You will likely discover areas of common interest and gain a better understanding of the other person's views. Armed with this newly gained perspective and knowledge, you will be able to fashion your communication in a way that will be more credible in the eyes of the target audience and, thereby, have a much better chance to succeed.

Make sure you have something to communicate about

To maintain credibility with the media and the public, put out Newsletters or Press Releases only about genuine and newsworthy issues. Be selective. Remember that what is important to you may not be important to somebody else.

Feedback

Develop your message in such a way that you encourage feedback from your target group. Communication is not complete unless there is a clear reaction. Feedback provides the receiver with the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, contribute ideas or express disagreement. Opportunities for feedback make it clear to the target group that they play a meaningful role in the communication process. The organisation benefits from feedback by finding out how well its messages are received and understood. Its communication effort then has achieved its goal. Without feedback options, the communication process is flawed. It will be perceived as an exercise in public relations or propaganda.

Pre-testing

However much care you take in developing your message, you should still pre-test it before passing it to your target group. Pre-testing will make it possible for you to find out:

- Whether the target group will understand the message. This kind of pre-testing you can do yourself. For every language there are simple formulas to determine how many years of schooling somebody requires to understand a text:
- How the target group will react to the message. This you can not test yourself. The easiest and cheapest way to do this is to ask members of the target group to read your draft message and to put a plus (+) in the margin where they like, approve or agree with your message, and a minus (-) where they do not like it, disapprove or disagree. After they have finished marking the message in this way, you can discuss it with the target group members and ask them to explain. If it is difficult to ask target group members to help you pre-test the message, then ask people who know the target group well.

● *Checklist for preparing a strong message*

- Is your message clearly related to the communication objectives?
- Is it linked to the goals of your organisation?
- Is your message of interest to your audience?
- Will your language, references, anecdotes, symbols be understood?
- Have you started with points of agreement and good news before dealing with difficult issues?
- Are you providing an opportunity for feedback?
- If you are seeking action, have you made this clear?
- Are your concluding remarks reinforcing the message you want to deliver?

● Checklist for effective writing

It is said the pen is mightier than the sword, indicating the power of the written word when used effectively. Unfortunately, much written communication is too bureaucratic, formal or jargon-filled in style.

Preparation

- Determine the objective of the written communication. Answer the question, why are you writing it?
- Take notes on the ideas that answer these basic questions: What is it I am trying to communicate? Who is my audience? Why should the reader be interested?
- Prepare an outline in logical sequence of the points you want to communicate.

Structure

- Begin with a 'lead' that tells the main story in a way that grabs the reader's attention. The lead, or introduction, should provide answers to the following basic questions: who, what, where, when and why;
- Keep the words, sentences and story simple;
- After the introduction, state the details of your message in descending order of importance, beginning with the most significant details and then including other interesting, but not essential, information;
- Close your text by briefly summarising your main point.

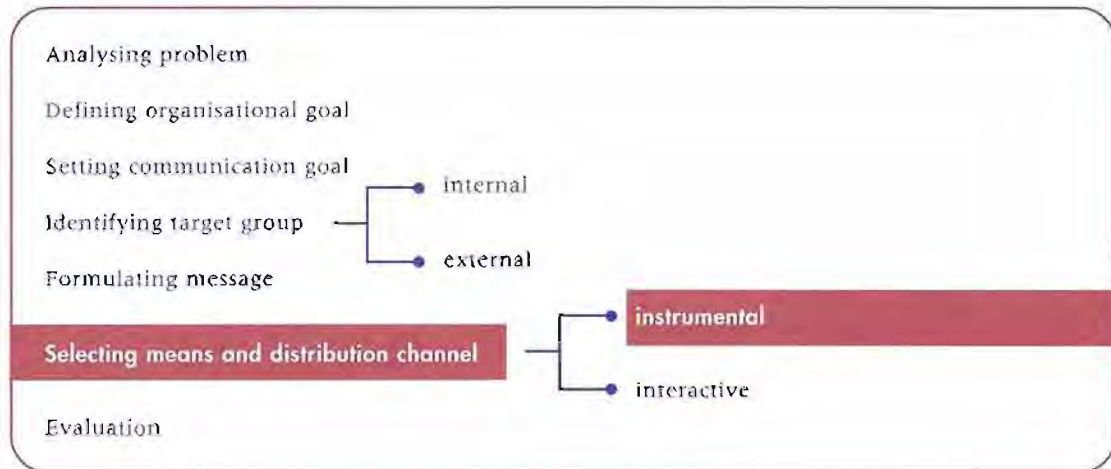
Style

- Write your text in a personal, conversational style. Use personal stories that your audience can identify with;
- Paint a picture with words. Use a clear, simple language that your audience will understand;
- Appeal for action. A message without a specific request is a wasted opportunity;
- Use a level of language appropriate for the target audience. It should match the education level and culture of the readership. However, the use of simple words and sentence structure is always preferred to a complex, 'academic' style;
- Write in a readable style. Most readable writing is technically well constructed and conversational in tone. The use of specific detail and quotes makes for lively, interesting writing that holds the reader's attention;
- Use the 'active voice' rather than the 'passive voice' in writing sentences. In an active voice sentence, the subject of the sentence performs the action of the verb. For example, saying that 'The park ranger explained to the visitors the importance of not feeding wild animals' is more forceful than saying, 'The importance of not feeding wild animals was explained to the visitors by the park ranger';
- Avoid being repetitious in sentence length and structure. Repetition is boring; varying sentence types helps maintain the interest of the reader;
- Avoid using clichés and acronyms, as well as humour containing elements that might offend.

Review

- Review and revise your text, looking for clarity, accuracy and brevity;
- Ask someone not connected to your work to critically review your text for you and suggest changes as appropriate.

III.7 Means and channels



In Chapters I and II the difference between instrumental communication and interactive communication was explained. In **instrumental communication** an organisation communicates to generate support for plans or policies, give information about its activities or specific subjects or raise the attention of certain stakeholders about an issue and stimulate discussion. The organisation starts communicating once it has decided what it wants to do. The organisation already has a very concrete organisational goal and uses communication as an instrument to influence the behaviour (or opinion) of certain groups in favour of this goal.

see also
II.1.3

Interactive communication is appropriate when an organisation wants to reach agreement between itself and relevant stakeholders about what the goal should be. This is usually done through an ongoing process of communication and negotiation. In this section we will deal with selecting means for instrumental communication. Chapter III.8 will deal with interactive communication.

see also
II.4

Means for instrumental communication

Once the communication objectives and messages have been set, it is necessary to choose what communication means and channels should be used. Too often means and channels are selected only on the basis of convenience. This is one reason for many communication failures. Means and channels of communication can be spoken, written, visual or digital. (see page 81.)

see also
I.6.3

The right means for the job

There is a natural tendency to choose the most modern or most glamorous means of communicating, such as video films, computer animations and glossy brochures. We tend to believe that those will be the most powerful and efficient. Sometimes this is the right choice. In other cases, traditional, small scale communication such as a letter or a meeting is required to achieve a specific communication objective. It all depends on:

- The purpose of the communications;
- The messages to be transmitted;
- The target group;
- Available resources (financial and staff).

Means and channels for communication

Spoken	Written/printed	Visual	Digital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetings • press conferences • training sessions • radio broadcasts • discussion groups • hearings • etcetera 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • newspapers • books • magazines • pamphlets • in-house publications • posters • brochures • letters • etcetera 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • television • slide shows • videos • etcetera 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the internet • cd-roms • pc-demo's • list servers • e-mail bulletins • discussion groups • on line conferences • etcetera

Personal communication

Even in this sophisticated electronic media age, people still prefer to meet face-to-face when there is something important to discuss. Personal communication is the most effective way of getting a message across and establishing communication. It gives the opportunity for immediate and clear feedback and allows instant modifications or elaboration of the message. This form of communication has more potential for building good understanding with target groups than any other method. Naturally, face-to-face communication is not possible in all situations. It is the right choice when:

- The target audience is small;
- The issues are complex or sensitive;
- Instant feedback is required;
- The communicator's personal presence gives credibility to the event.

It is always a good idea to go for the most personal form of communication possible. Don't make an (impersonal) brochure if it is possible to send the target group a personal letter. Don't send letters if it is possible to make a phone call or arrange a meeting. The more personal the communication, the more effective it is likely to be. (But don't think that personal communication is cheaper! If you consider the staff time involved, it can be much more expensive than other means of communicating.).

*How to select communication means***The communication pattern of the target group**

To assess whether a particular means of communication is suitable for a particular target group, you have to know where they normally get their information. There is no point making lots of information available on the Internet if your target group does not use computers. A brochure is of no use if people can only get it at your head office, a long way from where they live. This is a question of exposure to communication. But the target group must not only be exposed to the communication, they must also notice it. A small announcement in a newspaper can easily be overlooked, and even a leaflet delivered door to door can get lost among all the junk mail. This is a question of perception.

Feedback options



If you can, choose means of communication that can provide feedback. As explained before, feedback is essential for successful communication. Feedback should be possible, and actively stimulated. This can be done simply by:

- Including the names of contact persons, telephone numbers and addresses in all communications;
- Including pre-printed forms to ask for more information;
- Making available forms in which people can indicate their opinion of the communication;
- Surveys and interviews among target groups;
- Establishing an information desk or information telephone number which deals with all questions and suggestions.

Input-output

In trying to match the appropriate means with the target audience, 'input' has to be weighed against 'output'. Input is the time and cost required in developing and distributing a particular means of communication. Output is the number of people contacted and the impact of the message if it is delivered in this particular way. To do this right, you must know the advantages and disadvantages of each kind of communication means.

The ideal means of communication

- has a high chance of  reaching the target group
being noticed by the target group
- stimulates  feedback and interaction
- but also has low costs and takes little time to prepare and deliver

Intermediaries

If it is not possible to send a direct message to the target group, you can use intermediaries. Instead of approaching the local farmers directly, you can reach them through a newspaper that they read, or a radio-programme they listen to.

Ensure delivery

Developing communication means is useless if you do not know in advance how you are going to get it to the target group. A brochure has to be distributed, a video film has to be shown somewhere. This has consequences for planning and for your budget, but it is often overlooked. Make it part of your communication plan from the beginning.

Multi-media

In some cases, it may be necessary to deliver one message via a number of different means – you might organise a public meeting, but also send a letter and distribute a leaflet. This 'multi-media' approach increases the chance that the message will reach the target public. Also, messages sent through multi-media channels will be reinforced, giving them a greater impact. However, few organisations have the funds for this kind of saturation campaign, and in most cases it is not required. By carefully targeting communication, much can be achieved.

Can you use one means of communication to reach different groups and objectives?

When you have determined your target groups, the objectives you have for these groups, and the messages you want to give to them, you may see that it is possible to develop one means to reach all of them. This is not a problem if the objectives and messages are really similar, and if the groups are comparable. Limited time and budgets can make it tempting to cluster together groups that have different interests, attitudes and issues and that need to receive different messages. This may not be a smart thing to do. For example, if you want to expand a protected area, it may not be a good idea to organise one meeting for local farmers, tourism operators and bird watching organisations. There is a risk that all will be unhappy about the meeting, because there was no time to deal with their specific concerns and ideas.

'The medium is the message'

When selecting the appropriate communication means, always bear in mind that means and message cannot be separated. A computer simulation on CD-ROM promoting a new strategy to protect wetlands, communicates more than just the information on the wetlands management plan. It also communicates that the organisation responsible is modern and 'state of the art', and that nature conservation is a high-tech business. An annual report on glossy paper with many colour photographs tells your target group what your organisation did last year, but also tells them that you have some money. (So it might not be a good idea to make such an annual report, send it to your funders or members, and then one week later send them a letter asking for more money.) The way staff members dress, the way they talk, the way your offices look, the kind of car your staff drives, all of this communicates some sort of message. That the medium is part of the message certainly applies to personal presentations. A professional presentation not only aids getting the message across, it also adds to the confidence the listeners have in the presenter and the presentation, and will increase the chance that they will accept the message presented.

see also
1.6.5

Mass media

Especially for the mass media, such as television, newspapers or the Internet, contact does not mean communication and communication does not necessarily mean success in persuasion. A lot of time is often spent in getting messages into the newspapers or on television. If you are successful, you indeed have the chance of reaching thousands or millions of people. But how many will be motivated to watch or read your message, and if they do, how many will really think about it? Achieving changes in behaviour or attitude via the mass media is difficult. Usually, people select those bits of information that meet their interests and even confirm their existing attitudes and opinions. People who watch programmes about nature conservation are usually already interested in the subject, so you are preaching to the converted. Mass media are effective in spreading information, and bringing your issue to the attention of the public. They are less effective in changing attitudes or behaviour.

see also
II.1.4

Checklist for communication means and instruments

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Points to remember
Printed			
Letters	Personal mode of communication, high chance of being noticed and read by intended target group; mail-merge software makes it easier to send personalised letters to larger groups.	Unsuitable for very large groups.	Requires up to date database with names, addresses etc.
Annual report	Good opportunity to give information about organisation's operations.	Can be quite costly and time consuming to produce and distribute; often lost in the flood of annual reports that is sent out every year; little chance of feedback.	Often an annual report is required by law. If you are making one anyway, it might as well be good!
Brochures + Leaflets	Can reach large number of people; costs can be controlled - when made in bulk fairly cheap; can be kept in store to answer questions.	Little chance of feedback; if distributed in the wrong way easily overlooked; mass distribution will result in high wastage; limited space to explain details.	Also plan the distribution; always pre-test.
Reports	Can present information in detail.	Can easily be overlooked because of high number of reports published; little feedback option	Develop guidelines for language and lay-out for technical writing; plan distribution and publicity well in time.
Journals + Magazines	Good way to reach specialised audience; articles usually published without cost.	Limited circulation; little feedback.	Keep lists of specialised journals + addresses of editors etc.

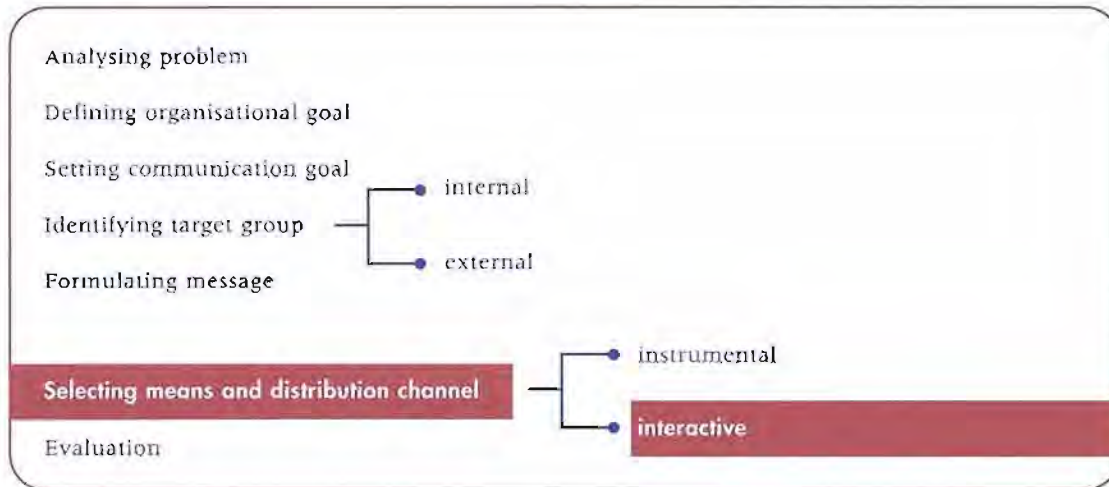


	Advantages	Disadvantages	Points to remember
Visual			
Visitor centres	Attractive way to present information; if staff available direct feed back opportunity; chance to appeal to all senses.	Will not reach those not interested; can be costly to design, build and maintain.	There is a tendency to become over – extravagant in designing visitor centres – simple but effective is what to aim for.
Displays/ exhibitions Posters	Attractive way to present information; if staff present there is a direct feed back opportunity; long life span.	Can be costly; if damaged or outdated gives a bad image of the organisation.	Go for light-weight, portable, and easily changeable systems; Don't present too much information.
Slides	Attractive, eye-catching, can have wide audience; useful as a support for other communication activities.	No feed back option; distribution can be costly; when old, faded and damaged will reflect badly on organisational image.	Don't forget to plan distribution!
	Can be used to support other forms of communication (presentations) or as communication in its own right. When used to support communication, direct feedback possible. Very durable, can be combined into new combination.	Needs special equipment and darkened room; slightly tricky in use. Tendency to put too much information on one slide.	Aim for no more than 5 lines with 5 words.
Overhead sheets	Cheap and easy to make. When used to support communication, direct feedback possible. Very durable, can be combined into new combination.	Needs special equipment. Not as readable as slides. Tendency to put too much information on one sheet.	Aim for no more than 5 lines with 5 words.
Film/video	Good to address groups of various sizes. Easy to transport and to reproduce. Can also be sent out. Can be watched at many locations.	Can be expensive. Needs professional skills. No feedback possible. Difficult to change.	

	Advantages	Disadvantages	Points to remember
Digital			
Web sites	Attractive way to present different kinds of information; interactivity possible, and direct feedback; possibility to check how many people accessed specific information.	Not accessible to everyone; needs to be kept updated; requires some technical expertise; can easily be overlooked.	Ensure linkages from other related sites to you web sites to increase chance of being found.
CD Roms	Good way to present complex information; interactivity possible; no direct feedback; can be distributed to various locations.	Requires technical expertise to develop; requires equipment to use; not accessible to everyone.	
Mass media			
Radio broadcasts	High local interest; accessible to most can be received anywhere; low production costs; audiences can be targeted.	No feedback; contact does not mean communication; lacks personal appeal; scheduling problematic sometimes.	
TV broadcasts	Wide audience, accessible to most people; very popular medium; opportunity to combine sound and vision, animation etc.; with increasing choice of channels chance to target specific audiences; can be taped for later use.	No feedback; with increasing choice of channels loses the dimension of mass contact; no control over final message, dependent on editors and journalists.	
Newspaper articles	Usually wide circulation; information can be distributed quickly.	No control over content – depends on editors and journalists; no interaction possible.	
Press conference	Chance to deliver more complex information to the media; has opportunity for feedback.	Takes some preparation, staff needs to be trained in handling media questions.	
Press releases	Cheap way to draw attention of media to newsworthy events; good for fairly straightforward issues; can be produced quickly.	Media receive dozens of press releases; requires some skill to write; no direct feedback from journalists.	Keep an updates lists of media addresses and contact persons.

Adapted from: B.S. Sadler: Communication strategies for heightening awareness of water. Unesco, 1987.

III.8 Interactive communication and negotiations



see also
II.1.3

see also
II.2.1 –
II.2.7

So far we have been discussing 'instrumental communication'. As mentioned in the introduction of section III.7, instrumental communication is appropriate when an organisation has already decided what it wants to do. The organisation already has a very concrete organisational goal and uses communication as an instrument to influence the behaviour (or opinion) of certain groups in favour of this goal. In Chapter II of this manual we discussed that communication can also be used in a different way. Through an ongoing process of communication and negotiation an organisation can try to reach agreement between itself and relevant stakeholders about what the goal should be. This is called in-teractive communication. In this section we will give practical advice for entering into interactive communication and negotiation processes.

What is interactive communication?

Interactive communication is a process of negotiation, discussion and exchange of information. It involves all the major stakeholders involved in a specific issue. During the process the participants learn from each other and about each other, and hopefully manage to come to consensus about the best way forward. In interactive communication the stakeholders involved in an issue can come together for a number of reasons:

- To analyse the exact nature of a problem;
- To make an inventory of solutions;
- To reach agreement on the best solution;
- To monitor how the process of problem solving is progressing;
- To evaluate the process.

● *An example: when to go 'interactive'.*

The ministry of nature protection wants to protect the important cultural landscape and sensitive ecosystems of an area. To do this would involve local town councils, regional authorities, water management authorities, tourism operators, farmers, foresters, hunters etc. The Ministry could develop a protection plan and start an instrumental communication campaign targeting these groups to get their support. But although all these groups care about their region, they have different interests, and different ideas about what is important in their area. The Ministry would get stuck between all the different stakeholders and the protection plan would probably not be really liked by anyone, and therefore would be very difficult to implement. But if all these stakeholders were involved at a very early stage to discuss what are the major problems in the area, and what are the most important things to protect, and the best way to protect them, then there is a good chance that a plan would be developed that would have the support of all the stakeholders and could be implemented with success.

How do you plan for interactive communication?

Basically the process starts in the same way as the development of an instrumental communication campaign. That means you:

- Analyse the problem;
- Set the goals;
- Make an inventory of stakeholders;
- Analyse the stakeholders.

At this point it could become clear that instrumental communication will not be successful.

Possible causes can be:

- The problem is too complex;
- The goals are controversial;
- There are major differences in interests, opinion, attitude, knowledge among the stakeholders.

Whatever the causes, you decide that it will be no use to develop an instrumental campaign whereby you deliver messages to stakeholders via specific channels and means. The only way to make progress is to bring all the stakeholders together to discuss and negotiate.

When can you successfully start a process of interactive communication?

For interactive processes to have a chance of success:

- People should have reason to participate in the process. There has to be a goal which they share with you; they should realise they are involved in a problem;
- All stakeholders with significant interest in the issue should have the opportunity to be involved. Particular attention is needed to involve those groups traditionally excluded in the past;
- Participation should be voluntary. People should be there because they want to, not because they are threatened with sanctions if they do not participate;
- All stakeholders should have equal access to relevant information. Nothing is more damaging to a process based on trust than withholding information from certain groups;
- All stakeholders should have the opportunity to participate effectively. Sometimes this requires the provision of funds to support participants lacking resources;
- Acceptance of diverse values, interests and knowledge of the parties in the negotiations is essential. All participants should be willing to accept that their view is one of many possible views, and that it is only logical that people in a different position have different ideas.

(adapted from the Canadian Round Tables, 1993)

What methods are there for interactive communication?

There are several methods that can be used in interactive processes. We tend to think mainly of meetings, hearing, round-tables etc. But printed material also plays an important role – provided there is a good opportunity for feedback and the reactions received are taken seriously. When selecting the appropriate methods to start a process of interactive communication, you have to consider a number of issues:

- **Reach.** Will an instrument or channel reach the most involved stakeholder groups?
- **Costs.** Obviously, budgets are always limited;
- **Interactivity.** Does the channel or instrument offer the possibility for direct interactive communication?
- **'Internal speed'.** Here we do not mean the speed with which a certain instrument or channel transfers information. What we mean is whether or not an instrument gives the stakeholders a chance to determine for themselves at what speed they will digest the information. During a face to face meeting, there is very little time to think about what is being said. You often need to react immediately. With printed text or with Internet information, you can decide to read a text two or three times, or skip it if you think it is not relevant.

see also
II.2.4 and
II.2.5

Checklist for interactive communication means and instruments

	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
Hearings	Usually a formal consultation of the public. Often required by law. Purpose to discuss proposed plans.	Suitable for two way communication. Good opportunity for stakeholder to voice opinions and ask questions. Can reach fairly large groups.	Less suitable to reach consensus. People sometimes afraid to speak in public. Requires preparation. Usually limited time available. Difficult when atmosphere is hostile.
Round table meetings	Informal process to discuss or explore a specific issue, involving different stakeholder on a basis of equality.	Suitable for more in depth discussion with smaller groups. Can be used to reach consensus.	Needs skilled facilitators/discussion leaders.
Focus group	Small group of citizens/stakeholder representatives that an organisation can use to assess reaction to plans, ideas etc. It has no formal advisory role.	Useful for organisation to get insight into stakeholder/public ideas, wishes and perceptions.	
Workshops	Meeting of different stakeholders to actively work on analysing issues and finding solutions.	Good opportunity for two-way communication; will provide chance for obtaining insight into each other's motivation, ideas and knowledge.	Needs careful preparation and good facilitation; purpose of workshop has to be very clear to all participants; clarity needed about way results will be used
Electronic discussion groups	Different stakeholders discuss issues using the internet.	Deals with problem of people being afraid to speak in public. Discussion can be reread later, to see how arguments developed and locate misunderstandings. People do not have to travel to a central location. Discussion can be either open to the public or private.	No direct personal contact. Non-verbal aspects of communication are lost. No sense of being a real group. Needs technical skills and facilities not available to all.
Telephone	Information numbers which stakeholders can ring to get information, give their opinion etc.	Establishes direct contact with stakeholders; easily accessible to many people.	Can be quite costly to set up and run; service has to be made known.



	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
Live radio shows	Stakeholders can ring radio studio and talk 'live' with experts, give their opinion, ask questions etc.	Establishes direct contact; reaches wide audience; low costs.	People will be afraid to go 'live' on radio; requires considerable personal communication skills.
Internet	Web sites.	Offer the possibility to give a lot of information, and via e-mail feedback is possible.	No direct personal contact. Needs technical skills and facilities not available to all.
Site visits	Visits to locations/sites that are at the heart of the problem under discussion.	Provides opportunity to make participants aware of dimension of the problems.	Can be expensive.

Adapted from: B.S. Sadler: Communication strategies for heightend awareness of water. Unesco, 1987

Timing and mixing

In an interactive communication process you will probably have to select several of these possible methods and combine them. Always keep in mind that the methods should not just be good for you – they should also be efficient and easy to use for the other stakeholders.

Which instrument is chosen also depends on the stage the process is in. The first step of an interactive process is introducing the issue to the stakeholders. You will have to identify which stakeholders are involved in the process, assess their attitudes, knowledge and interest in the subject, and then decide on the right channels and means to introduce the subject you want to communicate about. Your aim will be to draw their attention to the subject, give them information and convince them that a discussion would be a good thing. You will also indicate how you believe the further interactive process might take shape. In this phase you can still use many of the means of instrumental communication (brochures, letters, newspapers, radio and t.v.), provided they have good feedback options.

In the next phase, exchange of knowledge about the issue under discussion will be very important. This should be a two-way process – all participants should be willing to learn from each other and should respect each others knowledge and interpretation of facts. For the exchange of knowledge, printed material is very useful, but the Internet is also becoming increasingly important.

When it comes to developing shared opinions and consensus about the issue and the action to be taken, you will need to organise meetings and face to face discussions. In this phase of the interactive process negotiation skills will become very important.

see also
11.2.6

see also
II.2.7

How do you create successful negotiations and interactive processes?

In Chapter II we already went into the conditions for good negotiations and successful interactive communication. Here we will just summarise the main points:

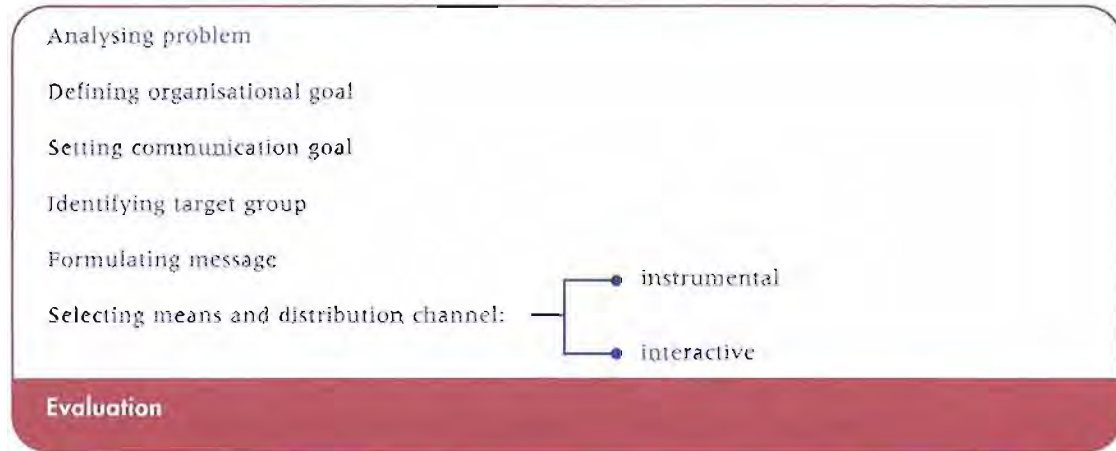
- Focus on shared needs and issues - create a feeling of mutual dependency. The stakeholders should realise that they all need each other;
- Clarify perceptions – spend some time on finding out what people think, what certain words or ideas mean to them. This will avoid confusion later on;
- Create and maintain positive power sharing among all participants. None of the stakeholders should dominate the process. All should take part on an equal basis;
- Separate the people from the problems. Do not blame people for the problems they have or the problems they want to discuss;
- Understand the difference between interests and positions;
- Pursue fairness;
- Generate options that bear the support of participants;
- Make agreements that are mutually beneficial;
- Make it clear what can and what cannot be changed. From the beginning all the stakeholders should be aware of the 'limits' of the process. No group of stakeholders has the power to change to law or spend money that is not available.
- All participants should have room to negotiate;
- There should be a chance to experiment with new solutions.

(Adapted from Dudley Weeks, Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. 1992 and from the Negotiations Skills Company, P.O. B. 172 Ride's Crossing, MA 01965, USA.)

Outside help

In an interactive process it can be very useful to involve neutral outsiders to guide discussions and steer the process. However they should be really neutral and not in any way associated to one of the stakeholders.

III.9 Evaluation



Once you completed your communication activity, you should take the time to look back and evaluate the process.

The most important question of course is whether or not your communication activity brought you nearer to achieving your (organisational or communication) goal. But your evaluation should look at other issues as well. For the entire process from setting your goals, to choosing the media and channels you should look back at the decisions you made and decide whether you would do anything different next time.

It is worth while to write a small report (if only for yourself) after you have finished an activity, listing mistakes as well as successes, and the reasons for them. This is an important learning process, and will help you make your next communication activity easier to organise and even more successful

Where possible – but certainly for interactive processes – involve the various stakeholders that were part of the communication activity in the evaluation process. Their experience may be quite different from your own.

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