

# Communication as a Strategic Approach

- A prime objective of communication and dissemination is to share knowledge, findings, ideas and research outcomes. This is entirely deserving. Sometimes there is much analysis and evidence that for lack of a commensurate effort in communication does not get out to a large community. Those are opportunities wasted. Forcing ourselves to communicate moreover helps us to be clear and have a coherent story to tell.

## What Strategic communication can do

- 1** Create a place in the world. By sharing what we know and present it in a clear manner we become a visible part of a larger community of persons and organizations.
- 2** Do redistributive justice to truth. Much of what is in the news follows set patterns and mind-sets. By sharing what we know, we can give space to those that do not have a voice anymore and show the world as a bigger place. Diversity matters
- 3** Create a coalition of like-minded persons and organisations. By communicating as a broad alliance and not as individual organizations, we all position ourselves as champions for the ideas within the alliance.
- 4** Encourage our selves to be open and clear. By focussing on having to communicate we encourage make ourselves to be more clear and take a position. This is better.

- Communication at the same time is more than sharing. It is a strategic approach that serves several other goals. We should be aware of those other goals and use communication as such.

- The beauty of present day is that there are so many tools that can help us to present our case. We live in a time of fast learning but also need to make sure that whatever we say is backed up by evidence and not casual or superficial.

## Important do's

- 1** Create jointness: communicate through joint statements, under many logos and names, have strategic contributions and quotes (for instance in prefaces or joint statements).
- 2** Visualize in images or in clear words – this makes a hidden world tangible and achievable.
- 3** Focus on solutions not on problems– once we know the solutions our responsibility and willingness to act increases.
- 4** Use power writing and power communication: do not shy away from the confidence of what we know – avoid hiding behind professional doubt, dissonance and call for more research, but tell at least what we know.

# A Practical Theory of Knowledge

- We want to advocate a practical theory of knowledge: that knowledge should be used to serve others and that if knowledge is power, that we use this power ethically and wisely.
- Here are 10 points to reflect up on:

## 1 Knowledge as a command

If we know, we should do. Once we are enlightened we cannot close our eyes or ignore. What Goethe wrote:

*“Knowing is not enough we must apply, wanting is not enough we must do.”*

Then also all our knowledge has to be practical – ideas and insight should translate in what can be done and what we can do. Knowledge is not an end pursuit – praxis is. The main way to see whether a theory works is when it can make things happen.

## 2 Truth is simple and all around us

There is the idea that truth is a secret that can only be uncovered by special persons and special efforts: elaborate modelling, years of reading, complex reasoning. This is the idea of truth as a secret, revealed only to an elite group of scientists. This may be wrong, at least most of the time. The truth is all around us and is simple, and if we want we just see.

## 3 Challenge our own perceptions

Our perceptions are powerful but in their power dangerous. Perceptions define our understanding and in turn this defines our action. We often take comfort in our perceptions and worldviews, but they are not more and not less than a personal attribute. We should be aware of their existence and influence. We should challenge our own perceptions – by visiting a raw place, understanding outliers and engage with persons different from ourselves. It is good to never let our perception ‘settle down’.

## 4 Knowledge comes in different shapes

Some say: “What you cannot measure, you cannot manage.” Most of the times this is not true. Knowledge comes in different shapes – early ideas, notions, intuitions, correlations, inferences, theories, models that work, clues and numerical evidence. Some things cannot be caught in one particular type of knowledge. In fact, by focussing on one shape of knowledge we focus on one type of knowledge holders and that is wrong. It is also important to be weary of those that want to define what is true and not true and impose their rules of the game.

## 5 Knowledge can be energy

Knowledge can drive us, inspire us, make us eager to do and to learn better. Finding out a new thing gives us a jolt, a small burst of energy and determination. There is a special feeling in our hearts when we discover something and see a way forward. Moreover the knowledge we have gives confidence – it is a resource, a buffer, a strength, the basis for resilience.

There is a lesson here – we should not deny any body the opportunity to learn and discover. Submitting a detailed report for someone to follow up hence will often not work. Co-creation is better.

## 6 How to encourage and not discourage

Knowledge can be a source of encouragement and empowerment – but it can also be used to discourage and make people insecure. Practical ideas and insights belong to the first inspirational track – showing what and how can be done, opening a range of options to relate to our innate capacity and will to do and act. If we know what to do, we have the responsibility to do as well.

In the discouragement track people are told that nothing can happen unless detailed study takes place. Such study is often the behold of a self-selected elite: boring writing, modelling, expert panels, etcetera – all trying to push common sense and intuition that belong to all of us to the background. Better to get 10 ideas in an hour than spending it reading a complex and non-conclusive treatise.

## 7 Be aware of distractions

There are so many things that can distract us. One is to be mesmerized by knowledge that is ‘interesting’ or ‘fascinating’. Yet a question to always ask is what our knowledge will serve and what added value our efforts have. Some things do not require thinking or study: observing and admiring them, as they are, is enough. Some things have been studied and best to appreciate what is there already rather than adding another layer to a tower that is high enough.

## 8 Take responsibility for casting doubt

It is surprising that often good things create more doubt in our minds than adverse news, pain and misery. Sometimes we are not able to just believe that good things are happening – things seem to be ‘too good to be true’. It may lead us to disbelief and cast big or small doubts. Casting doubt however, is not something to do lightly: it can spoil a good thing, slow it down or undermine the support base and the motivation. We should not cast doubt easily and take responsibility for the effect it may have.

## 9 Realize our source of knowledge

We should be modest. Our knowledge is always building on others – and talent is something vien to us, Nothing perfect was created in one go, by one group. Sharing is the name of the game. As with all things it is better to give than to keep. It is also important to respect all that went before us – and who in one way gave to us. Do not monopolize and keep secret what we know. In the end we will all be anonymous and we may just as well start to share immediately.

## 10 Keep thinking

Finally, never stop thinking – and there many ways to do – in talking with others, in writing, in presenting. Thinking and reflecting helps us to get sharper but also realize there is no abosolute finished start. Be fired up with curiosity till the very end.

# Power Writing

- Words are incredibly powerful – they change the way we see things, they can give us the energy of a battle cry and the peace of a contemplation.
- How to write a text that is convincing, gives the essence, and inspires and stays with the reader? Any text is a matter of personal style – that is the beauty. Yet there are also certain do's and don'ts that make a text more forceful and easy to digest. Here are some pointers for 'power writing'.

**1** Keep it to the minimum. Leave out all the unnecessary bits. Usually anything you can take out without losing the message makes a text more powerful.

**4** Facts rather than personal observations. When a fact is a fact write it down as such. Do not present it as an observation or opinion what can count as a fact. Avoid sentence as 'in our view' or 'it seems'. Write things as they are.

**6** Avoid irrelevant points. Do not use sentences that leave room for questions or doubt or that are utterly meaningless and general. Like: "it is important that policies are relevant and coherent" or "Climate change is affecting many"

**2** Have a title that captures the thought and can be remembered.

**5** Create pace in the text. There are several ways to create rhythm and speed in a text so that the reader go with the flow and is not diverted. Consider using these:

- » The first 2-3 sentence are essential: they create the tone, they capture the reader: a good way to start is to describe what the text is all about: "This text will explain..."
- » Take the reader along, have a modulating tone, – create pace and steps.
- » Use breaks in the flow of the text.
- » In general, ask questions and give answers in the same text.
- » Use markers to keep the overview – first, second, third - etc.
- » If you repeat, do it to create coherence and have the main point coming back.

**3** Be direct. We may have a tendency to use a lot of clutter phrases that do not add value and that in fact rather annoy. Typical examples are: 'It is considered that..' 'We can observe that..' Also often we use 'will' when we can just as well say 'is'.

# Coaching for Leadership Mandates

- We all have a mandate, but we may not live up to it.
- We have a position, we have a responsibility, we have power to convene and we have power to make things happen or not. Yet we may be unaware, bogged down, distracted, blind, occupied, pre-occupied, or plainly too tired. It is sometimes those of us closest to make a change that are most blocked, most ruled by distractions or unaware of our own requirement and ability to change. In Coaching on Leadership Mandate there are six circles to work in:

## 1 Mapping the mandate

What is the responsibility we have been given and sometimes have worked hard to achieve? What is our power to bring together, to convene, to make happen? How this our mandate connect to larger issues? The well-being of others? Global challenges?

## 2 Choice making

What are the choices at hand and what to do we prioritize? The short term, the long term aims? Current reality, ultimate vision? Our own reach or the reach of others? Our balance between virtue and comfort – for ourselves, for others?

## 4 Recognize the distractions

What are the distractions that pre-occupy us? The 'no' words, the 'yes' words, the 'but' words? What concerns or worries that cloud our mind, fill our days, keep us busy?

## 3 Discover our virtues and strengths

What virtue and strength is closest to us? Humility? Perseverance? Respect? Honour? Sacrifice? Love? Truth? Compassion? Bravery? Fortitude? Generosity? Wisdom?

## 5 Identify our sources of support

We have a mandate to lead what is in our realm but we need to be heroic. What are sources of support and confidence: family, friends, colleagues, partners? How do we respect our sources of strength?

## 6 Get inspired and fuelled up

What fuels us up and keeps in track? Is there a word, a verb, an image, a memory, a pledge, a token? Can we hold that near to us?

# Water rights and water distribution systems

- In comparison to land rights, water rights are often ill defined, fuzzy or even when recorded not observed. Yet water rights and water distribution systems are at the heart of water governance.
- At one level they define who gets what and how and what is allowed and what: they are the basis for environmental justice. At a second level water rights and water distribution systems are the backbone of water management – determining If water is used efficiently and not creating environmental damage.
- Clear water distribution rules are also the basis for cooperation, predictability, respect and in general good relations. They set the basis for the management of a shared resource and maintenance of water systems.
- Settling water rights and coming to better and water distribution systems is an issue all over the world.

## Examples:

- » In peri-urban areas they define the rights of people that live around the cities and but also serve to securing water for a growing urban population
- » In groundwater based economies access to groundwater needs to be defined to prevent the new resource from being overused with all negative effects of such
- » In mega-irrigation systems (> 500,000 hectares) water rights and distribution rules should set the basis for multi-functional use, fair allocation and avoiding environmental disaster such as water logging
- » Between countries and between regions within countries water rights can prevent conflicts and convert tension into mutual cooperation
- » Traditional water rights – of often the most vulnerable groups – need to be respected without becoming stagnant
- » Protocols to protect people and their water resources systems from pollution will go a long way to respect long standing entitlements and rights

The ‘human right to water’ has been recognized by the United Nations in 2014 but it needs to be operationalized in ensuring access to basic services and in resource protection.



## Instruments to make it work

To support the development of water rights we need to practical and help set in place systems that work. Here are some of the instruments:

- » Settling of new rights or updating existing water rights:
- » Resolving conflicts through mediation and guided negotiation
- » Codifying rights and water distribution rules: creating traceable records
- » Setting in place enforcement mechanisms – arbitration and (mobile) courts
- » Monitoring of actual water distribution: water accounting and interpretation of data sets
- » Creating institutions that work – understanding the human resource dimension of governance.

## Services that can be provided

Services that are provided are the following:

- » Pro-active engagement with problematic water rights and water distribution systems
- » Process support in mediation, negotiation and setting up new water rights systems
- » Advise on codifying, enforcement systems and human resources in water rights administration and management
- » Research services
- » Expert legal advise

*This household makes sure that others in the community can make use of their family well. A fence separates the private half of the well from the other, public, half. Such is the custom in Matondani, Kenya.*