

Communication – dissemination - impact

- a white paper on the role of strategic communication in EC projects

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Communication is the building and maintenance of good and sustainable relations, directed by the goals and visions of the organisation. The aim is to create the best possible breeding ground for the exchange of facts, ideas and statements. Using professional communication concepts will help businesses, organisations and R&D groups to achieve their goals.

Introduction

Why professional strategic communication is vital in Horizon 2020 projects

One of the conditions for obtaining funds from the EU is that the project ideas and results achieve impact among relevant stakeholders, e.g. politicians, civil servants and the public. But unfortunately, many research projects suffer from communication parts of poor quality. The lack of impact implies among other things that the EU Commission (and hence taxpayers) do not get value for money.

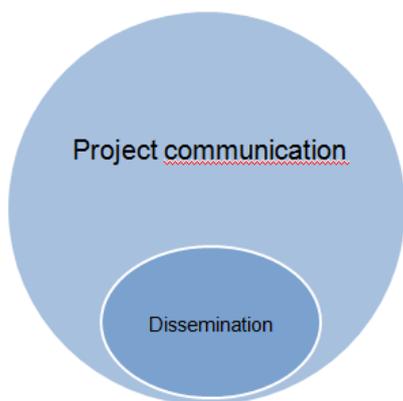
But there is no reason to lose ground because of poor communication - neither during the application phase nor when the project gets underway.

By the launch of Horizon 2020, it seems that communication/impact is moving up one step, compared to FP7. This is the evaluation model, weighted equally:

1. Scientific & technological excellence
- 2. Impact (communication/dissemination/exploitation)**
3. Implementation (management, etc.)

This means that successful communication weighs as heavily as e.g. the scientific part. Unfortunately, many choose to focus on professional resources within part 1 and 3, while 2 is being "handled" through formulations about a website and a person to popularize the results and send them to the press. This is where the project risks losing points - and also those who slip through the eye of the needle, will run into problems when the project is underway.

There is no reason for this. One only has to remember that part 2 requires professional approach and competencies at the same level as those necessary for the project in areas such as administration and science/technology. Therefore, communication expertise should be involved in parallel, from the application stage.



The relationship between dissemination and communication

Get a good start

In order to achieve optimal quality and impact of project communication, it is important to address the communication aspects as soon as you possess an overview of your project goals and concept. Then you will decide at which stage a communication professional should be involved.

The process could be like this:

- a. Idea development
- b. Preliminary project goals and plan
- c. Partner research**
- d. Constitution of consortium
- e. Composing application**
- f. The "Go" from the EC
- g. Implementation of project plan (DOW)**

c:

Depending on the size and concept of the project, you might want to involve a communication business as a SME partner, in order to ensure in-house competency. Alternatively, you could consult a communication expert to clarify the proportions of communicational needs.

e:

At this stage, involving a communication professional is mandatory. The application should include a comprehensive communication strategy, not only "we will hire a webdesigner and a journalist". On the basis of the strategy, communication facilities and working hours for the entire project can be calculated and included in the budget.

g:

At this point, the coordinator and the communication manager can start implementing the communication strategy. To ensure optimal working conditions, the structure (don't forget this in the application) should be like this: The communication manager should be leader of the Work Package "communication and dissemination", the coordinator should be a member of this Work Package, and the communication manager should be a member of the management group.

Memo list for coordinators

1. The mindset
 - a. Learn from the business community (corporate communication)
 - b. Communication is a professional competency

2. The application, planning and budgeting
 - a. Communication strategy is mandatory.
 - b. Communication expert on board from day one
 - c. Communication facilities and working hours to be calculated

3. The organisation
 - a. Communication expert as Work Package leader of communication & dissemination
 - b. Work Package leader working close together with coordinator
 - c. Consider different working traditions and cultures among the participating countries

4. The manpower
 - a. Involve communication professionals (just like skilled researchers/engineers)
 - b. Relevant skills at relevant tasks/stages
 - c. Calculate in-house/outourcing
 - d. Clear decisions regarding division of work

5. The implementation of the communication strategy
 - a. In the entire project organisation
 - b. In day-to-day management
 - c. In external communication
 - d. In internal communication

Myths and facts about communication

The three main myths are:

1. *Communication is the mere use of tools like websites, email and print.*
2. *Communication is the dissemination & popularising of project results via the media.*
3. *The dynamics of communication do not apply for R&D projects.*

1.

Communication is a well documented professional field, taught at universities throughout the world, including models, terms and theories. Communication is more than a toolbox - it is a way of thinking and planning, a way of systemizing the handling of relations.

Successful project communication requires solid competencies in strategic communication, not only knowledge within e.g. advertising or journalism.

The toolbox contains tools like e.g. communication strategy, stakeholder management, newsletters, articles, website, social media, events, press releases, etc.

2.

Strategic communication includes a lot of processes and elements. Dissemination (e.g. of project results) is only a subset of communication. The media are not the only communication channels, neither the only stakeholders. A lot of stakeholders are involved, and maintaining relations with those is a two-way process.

If a project focuses on dissemination only, they will miss a lot of opportunities and might not during the project period obtain the necessary goodwill among the stakeholders, including media. This will affect the final impact and exploitation of project results.

If Nokia was only communicating every time a new telephone hit the market, they would be dead by now.

3.

There is no substance for believing that R&D projects and their stakeholders should interact beyond communication theories and dynamics.

For decades, the field of communication has been an essential element in the business world. In the scientific research communities, this is not the case. They do not sell merchandise - they produce knowledge, experience and data, they say. Speaking of their relations to the outside world, though, this does not make any difference. The "natural laws" of communication work the same way in research communities as in business life.

Tasks and consultancy

A project will need consultancy within three areas:

- Preparation of application with regard to the communication part.
- Budgeting and planning of project communication.
- Performance of communication during the project period.

Typical tasks include for example:

- Coaching and counseling of coordinator/management.
- Development of a communication strategy.
- Stakeholder communication during the project period.
- Issues management (media, public debate, etc)
- Press contact, press releases, press events.
- Newsletters, website, social media.
- Media Production (print, radio/video, flyers, brochures, posters).
- Policy brief (often required by the EC).
- Events and PR at fairs and conferences.

Do you want to know more? Please check [this website](#).

RESCOMMs mission:

The creation and maintenance of good relations, directed by the goals and visions of the organisation.