4 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND PLANNING

4.1 GETTING STARTED

N2000 managers need to learn or "relearn" communications if the acceptance and management of sites is to be improved, nature conservation enhanced and biodiversity loss reversed. N2000 managers need to enter the **learning cycle!**

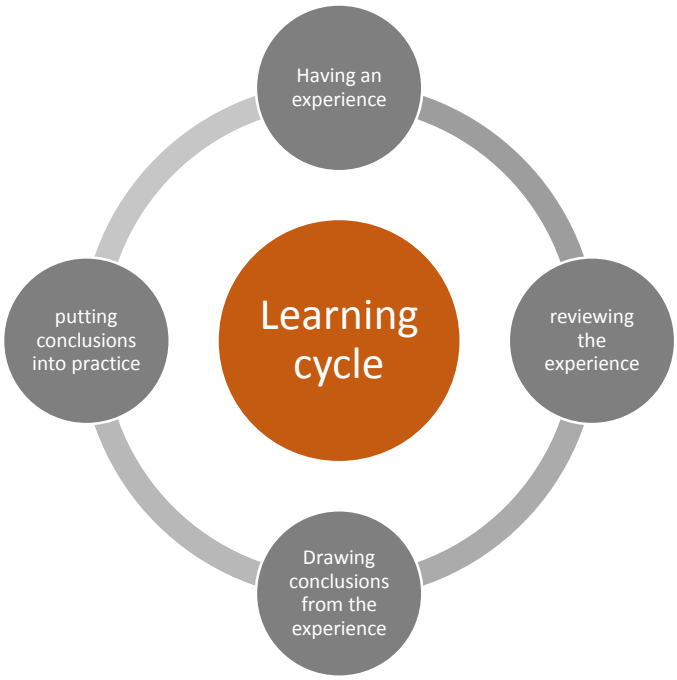


Figure 2 Learning Cycle

The learning cycle is a recognised pattern for how we learn. We all start by having an experience (could be the course, could be a session on the course), and then reflecting on it (maybe that evening). We then draw conclusions from that and put those conclusions into practice (maybe back at work). This is then giving us a new experience, which we need to reflect on. We will draw new conclusions and, hopefully, put them into practice… and so it goes on. So learning is not just confined to this course.

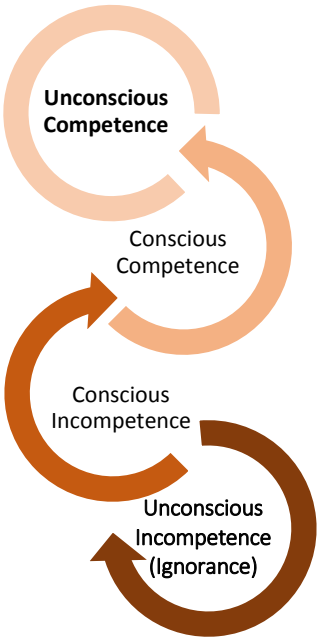


Figure 3 Spiral of Understanding Skills

*The **Spiral of Understanding Skills** explains how our learning develops. We start from the bottom at a stage of Unconscious Incompetence, also known as Ignorance. Whenever we learn a new skill we start at this point and move up the spiral from there. A good analogy is learning to drive a car or ride a bike. At the start we don't know what we are ignorant of, then we learn what we are ignorant of (Conscious Incompetence). Eventually we are able to do the task, but it takes a lot of effort to do it (Conscious Competence). As when we first learnt to drive – we couldn't have music on at the same time as dealing with a complicated junction.*

In time, we can successfully deal with complicated things automatically (Unconscious Competence), such as driving with music on while talking to your passenger. But this is where we start to make mistakes.

This may be where you are now with your communication skills – we all think we can do it, but unless we take time out to re-learn and practice we could be getting it wrong. Think how many car accidents there are – probably every driver involved thinks they're a good driver and it was the other person's fault. Communication is the same really. **We make mistakes, but they can be corrected and amended.**

4.2 WHAT IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

According to the **Collins Essential English Dictionary** *(2006, 2nd edition)*, communication is a noun meaning:

The exchange of information, ideas, or feelings
Something communicated, such as a message
Communications means of travelling or sending messages

To be effective means that a message given and received has the desired or intended result. So what is being communicated is clear, relevant and reaches the intended audience or person through the appropriate channels, using the right tool and is understood and acted upon!

It's an art as much as a science, but does need to be practiced!

In reality there are many potential influences that make communications more or lese effective including:

- Body Language/ Non-Verbal Communication
- Language used
- Existing knowledge
- Assumptions
- Context
- Memory
- Attitudes
- Stress
- Clarity
- Culture
- Listening skills
- Writing skills

This manual and course will look at a number of these issues and, hopefully, develop your skills.

4.3 COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Effective and successful achievement of the mission and goals of a N2000 site requires bringing together the best available resources enhancing the N2000 human capabilities, building capacity and investing in people and constantly measuring and managing the results delivered .

To fulfil the aims and objectives across all management of the N2000 site, needs effective communications throughout the entire organisation not just the communications officer! To deliver effective communications needs a well thought through communications strategy and a detailed plan.



Figure 4 Strategy, by Monica Taher - http://www.monicataher.com/

A good communication strategy will relate the N2000 site's image, mission, values, and goals to all who work for the N2000 site be they employees, volunteers or stakeholders. A strategy should consider informing what the N2000 site has been designated for, the benefits the N2000 site offers and the issues it solves. A good strategy describes communication channels that facilitate the exchange of information and ideas among all stakeholders. It is a strategic discussion about the very core of a what the N2000 is there for, how it functions , what it stands for and what it delivers. This discussion must be robust enough so that everyone related to the N2000 site management speaks with one voice, one mind, one purpose: a focused, clear, consistent articulate message.

Does it matter what we say? To whom? When? How?

Yes! So it's important organisations have Communication Strategies. Problems can arise when communication within an organisation is not co-ordinated. Co-ordinating what you say, to whom, when and how you say it are all part of a communication strategy. It is ineffective for different people within an organisation to give inconsistent message.

There are lots of documents on the internet to help you write a communication strategy. Some are clearer and more straightforward than others. Have a look at the **TOOLKIT** for some links to different versions.

4.4 PLANNING A STRATEGY

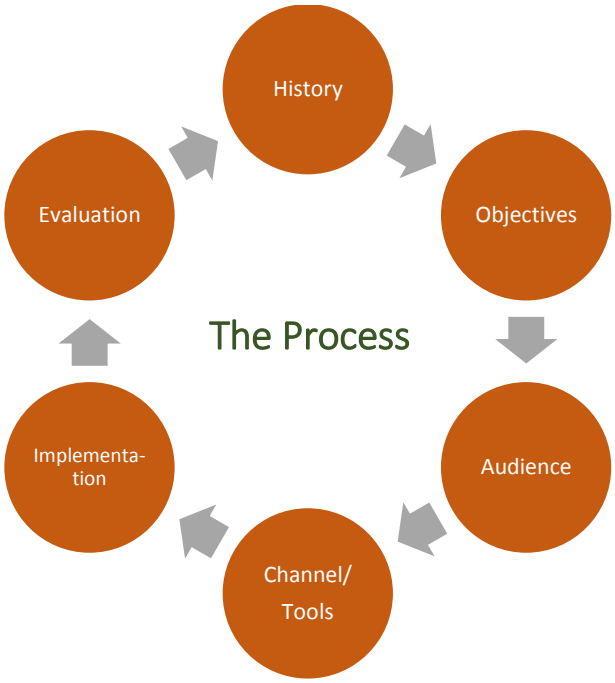


Figure 5 The process of a Strategy Plan

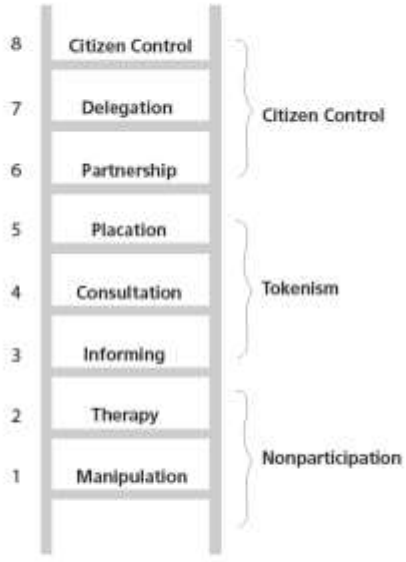


Figure 6 Arnstein's Ladder (1969) – Degrees of Citizenship Participation,

Is the communication part of a project, the development of a strategy, a campaign or an ongoing programme etc? In each case the objectives you consider for the communication will be affected and related to a wider set of objectives.

1) History – Examing where you are now

Have a look at what has been achieved so far. How effective were those communications?

Really examining what has been successful and what has not is useful in planning a campaign and to draw up an overall strategy for the N2000 site.

2) Objectives – What do you want to achieve?

Establish your objectives and message.Consider ***Arnstein's Ladder of Participation.***

Are you trying to inform, educate, change behavior or consult? What are the reasons behind your communications and what degree of involvement does the intended audience have. (e.g. are you merely informing a local community of some news from the N2000 site or is this a participatory consultation in order to decide on a management action?)

It is important to consider this as this will inform the choices you make of message, audience, channels, tools and off course the skills needed to ensure the communication is effective.



Figure 7 SMARTER Objectives

Yet it remains important to be clear what your communication is about, for whom, when and how and writing clearer objectives will help construct your thinking. Some additional input on how to write better objectives is given in the written communication part of the course and manual.

*Create SMARTER objectives (also see **TOOLKIT**)*

This should help you work out how you will actually achieve each of them. All your goals/objectives should link back to your organizational, N2000 site management objectives.

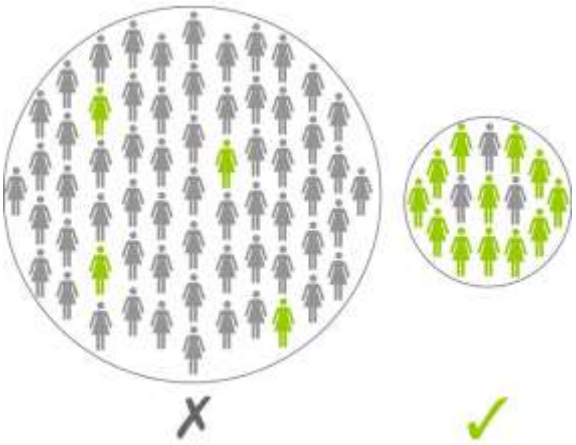
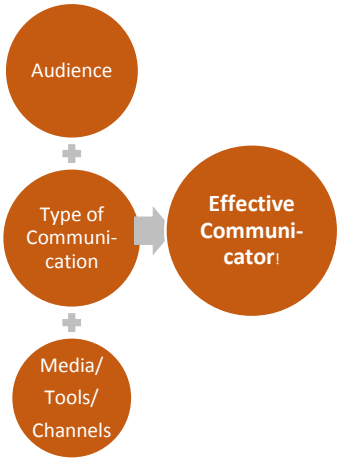


Figure 8 Targeting your Audience - by http://app-economy.com/

3) Audience – Who am I talking to?

Ask yourself, specifically - Who is the message aimed at? What do you know about this target audience?

For example, children would be one audience and we know that many of them are familiar with using technology. This may influence for example the Channel/Tools you use. Use online research to gain some insights into how marketing executives understand the audiences they are speaking to. See toolkit for examples



Public speaker
Report writer
Children's entertainer
Facilitator
Blogger Interpreter
Website designer

… or indeed all of the above …

4) Channels/ Tools - How do I Communicate?

These must be appropriate for the audience. Consider what kinds of communication media, channels or tools you think there are?

Your Skills

Being able to target your audience, defining the typoe of communication needed and then selecting the media, tools and channels according to your audience and objectives makes you an effective Communicator!



5) Management/Implementation

Your next step is to consider the practicalities of your chosen technique depending off course on the message and audience. You will also have to consider how this communication fits into the overall objectives of the project or N2000 site management plan.

For example a prime-time TV advert may work well, but do you have the budget? Do you also have the time and human resources needed, and if not what alternatives can be considered. And bear in mind your timescales (as identified in your SMARTER objectives).



6) Measurement & Evaluation

Has the communication worked? How do you know? What does success look like? It is a colourful well written brochure, that none reads, or a well attended meeting that generates a positive image of the N2000 site? And how are all the communication objectives contributing to the overall goals of nature conservation of the N2000 site. Differing evaluation techniques and measurements will need to be devised and undertaken. ***Your objectives should have been written so you can check this.***

And finally…

There is lots of information on the internet and in **the toolkit.** This is just a brief outline. Some strategy examples have more detailed stages or place them in slightly different order. Use whichever ones suit your purposes. There is no hard and fast rule, except that a strategy and plan will provide an important fundamental to all N2000 communications contributing to the effectiveness of the work done.