

Tool 10 – Communication Plan

Communication

Good communication is needed for several reasons. For example it ensures a better morale; it is demoralizing to hear what is happening in the group from someone not involved. ([NSBA96](#)) Good communication is needed with other parts of an organization. In order to get effective communication in larger organizations a plan is needed to define it.

Frank Dance ([1970](#)) identified 126 published definitions of the word [communication](#). So there is no single definition of communication, likewise there is also not a single definition of a communication plan. Only outcomes, stakeholders, shared information and communication methods are common elements in communication plans.

Communication plan defined

A communication plan describes the mechanisms of communication that have to be used in order to communicate plans and to keep the processes living ([Salm02](#)). In the communication plan are stakeholders, communication needs, and methods of communication identified. Examples are reports produced for meetings ([BCB03](#)) or a description of the communication objectives, policy issues and communication within and outside the organization. ([FER99](#))

This tool is part of the first cycle “agreement on planning objectives and stakeholders”, positioned in the theme “selecting participants and planning approach”. Because it is part of the first cycle of the four cycles method ([Salm02](#)) the communication plan can be written each time this cycle is done. Also a communication plan can be written each year.

Starting point are the [objectives](#) and perspective of the business or functional unit. The plan is written from the perspective of the larger organization. The plan should be brief, concise, focused and readable. Detailed explanation may be unnecessary, because the average reader is an expert in the business of the company. It has to be within 10 pages in order to let others read and use it on a daily basis.

Content

Ferguson ([1999](#)) claims that there are up to 13 sections in a communication plan:

- Background Statement
- [Policy issues](#)
- [External environment](#)
- [Internal environment](#)
- Corporate or [business objectives](#)
- [Windows of opportunity](#)
- [Communication objectives](#)
- Themes and messages
- Communication priorities
- Strategic considerations
- Requirements of consultation

- [Partnership](#)
- [Negotiation](#)

Of course the way and extend these are treated depends on the size of the organization. The first four of the above are now defined more specifically.

Section	Definition
<i>Background statement</i>	The positioning of the unit into the larger organization. This section is not needed when the communication plan is part of a larger business plan.
<i>Policy issues</i>	Search for policy decisions or strategies with a (potential) impact on the communication planning activities of the organization.
<i>External environment</i>	Defining the climate of opinion and knowledge about the organization outside its boundaries.
<i>Internal environment</i>	Outlining positive and negative factors within the organization. Information for this comes from communication audits.

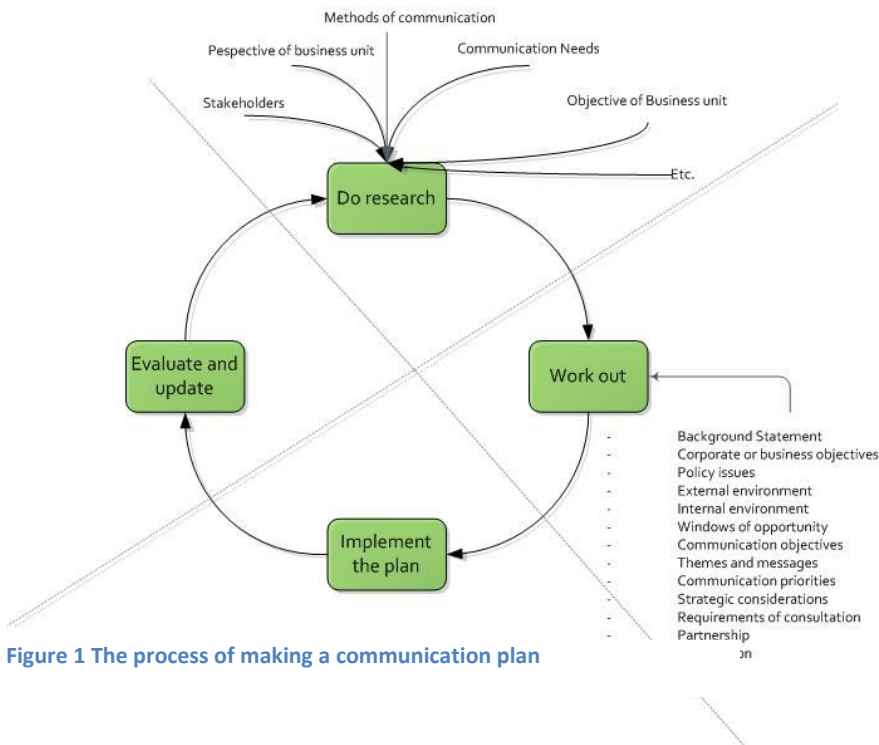


Figure 1 The process of making a communication plan

Responsibility

For making this plan a person is needed who is familiar with procedures and processes of the larger organization, and also its strengths and weaknesses. The head of communication normally oversees the process of generating a communication plan. Within a project the project manager will be responsible for identifying whether a communication plan is needed. ([WAS02](#))