

COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: SELDOM A STAND ALONE, AND RARELY VERIFIED.

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Communication for Social Change: Seldom a Stand Alone, and Rarely Verified

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Background: Communication for social change is rarely a stand-alone initiative. More often it is combined with several communication purposes such as networking, organizational visibility, information dissemination, or behavioural change.

Purpose: This article reports on an inter-disciplinary, capacity building experiment that combines communication strategy development with Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE).

Setting: The analysis stems from close to a dozen case studies where we tested a hybrid approach of UFE and communication strategy development. Our partners were research teams in a variety of areas including open education, open and collaborative science, Internet privacy, cybersecurity, and open data. The Networked Economies Program of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Ottawa) funded each one of the research teams. The partners were based in different countries and had a global reach.

Intervention: The authors are members of a research project entitled "Designing Evaluation and Communication for Impact" (DECI) that provides mentoring in evaluation and communication to partners. This article focuses mainly on lessons from DECI-2, the second phase of the project that was operational from 2012-2017. DECI is led by a team in Canada and has engaged regional mentors based in Latin America, Asia and East Africa, who have provided much of the capacity building support to partners in their regions. At the end of each mentoring cycle, the DECI team produced a case study summarizing the experience. The collection of these case studies is the basis for this article.

Research Design: This article is a meta-evaluation of the experiences gained from the mentoring. It brings the findings from the grounded work and seeks to find theoretical insights from the evaluation and communication literature. Existing family trees in evaluation and communication are reviewed in search for commonalities that underlie the hybrid decision-making framework.

Data Collection and Analysis: The article leans on the findings of the case studies and the hybrid framework. Our analysis builds on earlier work by the authors in communication for social change. In particular, we analyze a common pattern where communication strategies tend to encompass several purposes in tandem. We refer to the planning steps in utilization-focused evaluation as a structured decision-making process that can help organize communication planning. Finally, we reflect on the benefits of formulating communication objectives that can be tracked or measured.

Findings: The hybrid decision-making framework allows communication planners to add some rigor to their strategies. At the same time, it invites evaluators to introduce evaluation questions about the outcomes of a communication intervention. An external evaluation of the DECI-2 project concluded that the combined decision-making process enabled partners to become better at adaptive management. The process introduced reflection spaces and helped teams adjust their projects as research findings emerged, and as conditions shifted in the policy arenas that they sought to influence.

Keywords: *decision-making framework; communication functions; outcomes; audience research.*

Introduction

There are several different definitions of communication for social change (CSC). For some, it is interchangeable with the earlier broad concept of Communication for Development (C4D) while others tend to be ideological and point to an overall participatory driven purpose of community-based social change. Whatever the vision (label or specific intervention), CSC is rarely a stand-alone initiative but sits amongst other communication purposes such as organizational visibility, awareness raising, and information and/or behavioural change.

Overall, the Communication for Development community has long emphasized the dichotomy between participatory communication and a more top-down information/public relations-oriented approach. This divide comes from a major schism within international development itself:

William Easterly (2006) divides the development world into Planners and Searchers. The Planners, he maintains, think they can come up with the Big Plan to end world poverty. In contrast to this, Searchers try to find small ideas that might actually work in small pockets to alleviate a specific problem. Searchers, he maintains, will know if something works only if the people at the bottom can give feedback – that is why successful searchers must be close to the customers at the bottom, rather than surveying the world from the top. Conversely, Planners set the big goals. Setting goals, he agrees may be good for motivation but are counterproductive for implementation. The complexity of ground reality dooms any attempt to achieve the end of poverty through a plan, and no rich society has ended poverty in this way. Planners are accountable upwards. They are always looking over their shoulders back to the office at headquarters (promotion central) rather than forward to the ground at their feet. However, Easterly points out - the big plans at the top keep the rich people happy because “something is being done”. But (and here is the caveat) if ineffective big plans take the pressure off the rich to help the poor, the tragedy is that then the effective piecemeal actions will not happen (Quarry & Ramírez, 2009, p. 39).

The field of communication has followed each of these trends: for those who favor the planners, communication efforts have tended to be top-down, emphasizing behavior change through social marketing. In contrast, those who favor the searching perspective see communication as a way to engage people, to listen to their views, and use it as part of the participatory process.

While some practitioners have firmly understood that both participation and public relations belong on a spectrum of different functions and uses for communication, some of us have been guilty of contributing to the divide. As practitioners we have now determined that finding clarity of purpose around any communication intervention has turned out to be the most important starting point. It is disappointing to note how many conversations begin with excitement about methodologies before stepping back to consider the purpose of the intervention and most importantly, consider what it hopes to achieve. In many cases the specific intentions remain broad and the outcomes of the communication strategies are seldom confirmed.

As stated elsewhere, in development cooperation, most decision-makers, whether they are in large bilateral or multi-lateral organizations or in the governments they are meant to serve, simply do not want participation (Quarry, 2006). In reality, listening to what people might actually want turns out to be messy; it takes time and likely won't result in what the decision-makers often want or plan to do: staking out territory, expanding influence and maintaining political profile. These motivations have long “eclipsed” the more listening side of communication (Quarry & Ramírez, 2009).

Despite this lack of real support for participatory development so evident in the 80s and early 90s, there were some stalwart individuals that personally believed in the value of long-term investments in people and ideas. These were people prepared to stay the course and adapt to local circumstances as the needs arose. This was recognition that there is no sure-fire direct path to success in any participatory endeavour. This is especially the case when success in the eyes of the funder may well not constitute positive change for stakeholders on the ground.

The willingness and ability to risk failure in any timeframe is an essential ingredient of any development initiative. However, in the mid 90s at least two factors led to changes in this respect: an economic downturn saw the larger aid agencies rein in their more open approach to experimentation in development, and the notion of Results Based Management (RBM) came to the fore. This pushed development agencies to move from experimentation and participation onto a new focus on results. These changes marked the end of the openness for participatory communication. It brought forward a shift from a “community” focus to one of service delivery that could be measured by numbers within tight timeframes.

In many ways, the original thinking behind RBM is not flawed. There is merit in calling for clearer thinking around any initiative by basically asking: “what do you hope to do, and how and how will you know when you get there?” However, what became problematic is that the thinking went from a notion of evaluation into a straightjacket of plotting the arrival of results within a prescribed timeframe. As noted above, achieving the initial targets just about never happens, particularly when dealing with human behavior.

When thinking in communication terms, it is important to be ask questions around what is hoped to be achieved, with whom, and how. Answers to these questions cannot be found within the office walls of an agency. They come from listening to the people for whom the initiative is intended. They also emerge as project managers adjust to unexpected situations, which are a constant in this kind of work.

It is not surprising that the 90s also gave rise to discussions amongst development communicators focused on the need for evaluation. Much attention was given to finding indicators to measure the impact of the development communication approach (Figueroa, Kincaid, Rani, & Lewis, 2002; Inagaki, 2007). In part, this was an effort at accommodating donors who wanted to see proof of impact. A survey of decision makers in the 90s indicated that evaluations had not “adequately brought out the measurable contribution of communication to development objectives” (McCall, 2009). The fact that this was a topic of concern for every United Nations Inter-Agency Roundtable on Communication for Development from the 5th to the 11th indicates the difficulty with coming to grips with this dilemma. Moreover, discussions at the 11th Roundtable (McCall, 2009) focused on an assessment of the extent to which UN agencies had developed indicators capable of measuring the impact of C4D initiatives.

The community of development communication practitioners currently grapples within a context in which attention to participatory communication has waned, and communication is mostly perceived to be synonymous with public relations and social media. This coincides with a time when quick and visible impact is expected; especially as development assistance itself is increasingly challenged politically. It follows that conventional funders expect evaluation to show results in the short term, thus providing evidence of linear cause-effect connections between project activities and impact. This has created a somewhat bipolar approach adopted by some development agencies forced to count numbers to appease a

funder while searching for different methods to understand change.

The evaluation field has risen to this challenge and experimented with new methods to address a terrain unable to fit inside a predictable planning mindset. It is within this context that the experiment reported in this paper arose, with a focus on hybridizing evaluation with communication to reframe some of the challenges described above. The experimentation took place in the context of the Developing Evaluation Capacity in Information and Communication for Development (DECI) project, funded by the IDRC, and is the focus of this chapter.

Finding Common Ground Between Evaluation and Communication in the Literature

The DECI project began in 2009, when IDRC contracted the New Economy Development Group to both mentor and ‘test-drive’ the utilization focused evaluation (UFE) approach with IDRC’s Networked Economy partners in the field. A few years later (2012) the mentoring was widened to include both evaluation and communication to explore the synergy between the two components. The DECI project was a research endeavor that allowed for action learning through practice. The team had experience in both areas and felt that there could well be complementarities between them. A review of the literature yielded little in terms of existing hybrid approaches, and yet there seemed to be the potential for bringing them together. The literature review presented here was focused on this possibility.

It is common for the communication and evaluation components of projects or initiatives to be developed independently or at least sequentially: the communication of evaluation findings - or the evaluation of communication activities or programs. Nevertheless, both disciplines share common elements at a theoretical and practical level. For starters, both can be combined with action-research (Argyris & Schön, 1997) and participatory inquiry (Bessette, 2010; Chambers, 1997; White, 1999).

In Waisbord’s (2001) genealogical tree of theories, methods, and strategies of communication for development (Figure 1), two large branches of communication are compared: the dominant paradigm (social marketing, entertainment-education) in contrast with the critical response based on the dependency theory (participatory approaches, social mobilization).

This dichotomy can be described in the following ways:

- An analysis of underdevelopment based on cultural explanations versus one based on contextual explanations.
- Psychological theories and interventions versus socio-political theories and interventions.
- Attitude and behaviour models versus structural and social models.
- Individual interventions versus community-based interventions.
- Message-focused hierarchical models versus horizontal and participatory communication models.
- Passive audiences and population concepts versus active audiences and population concepts.
- Approaches that perceive participation as a means versus approaches that embrace participation as an end (Waisbord, 2001, p. 2).

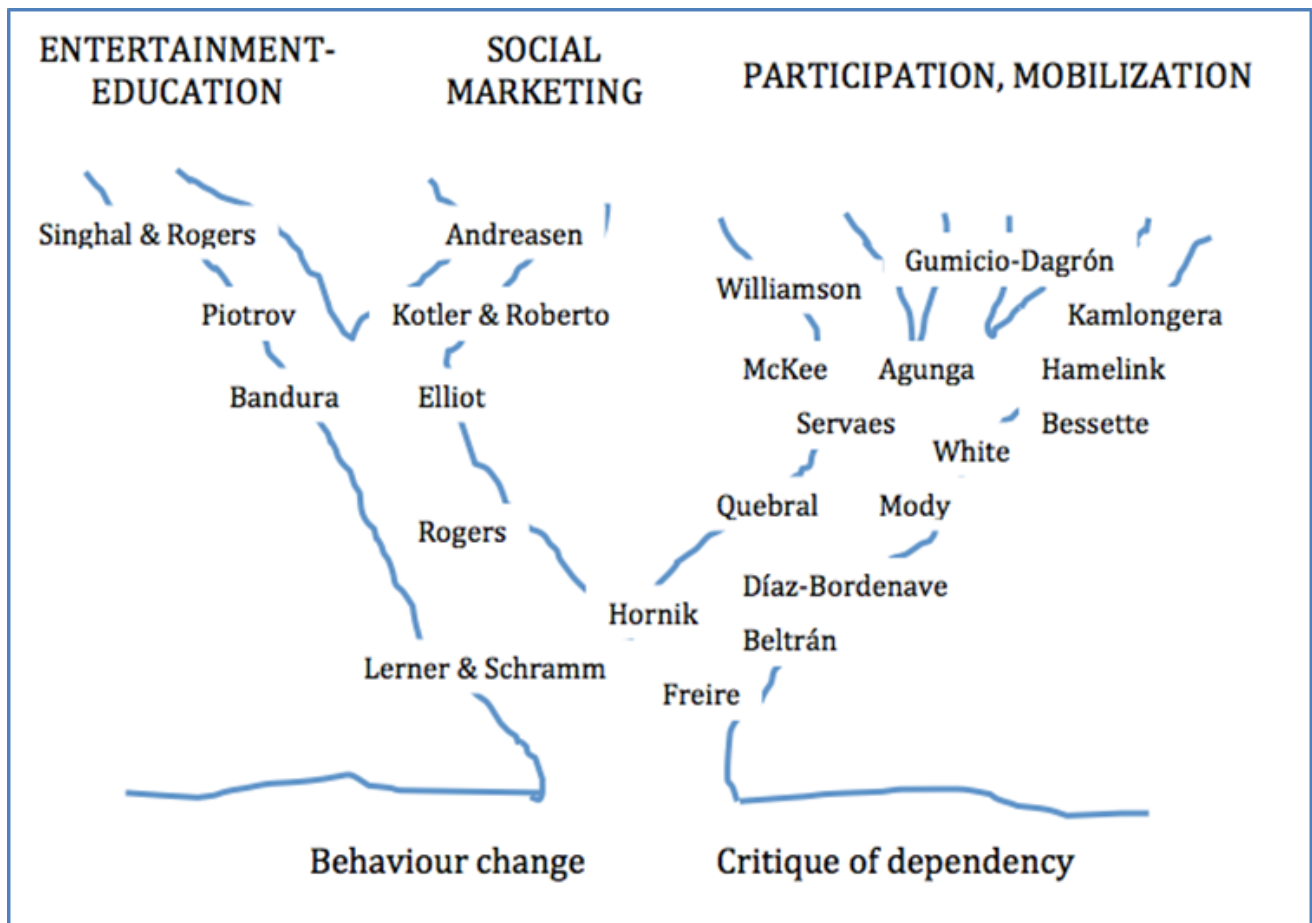


Figure 1. The Communication Tree (based on Waisbord, 2001).

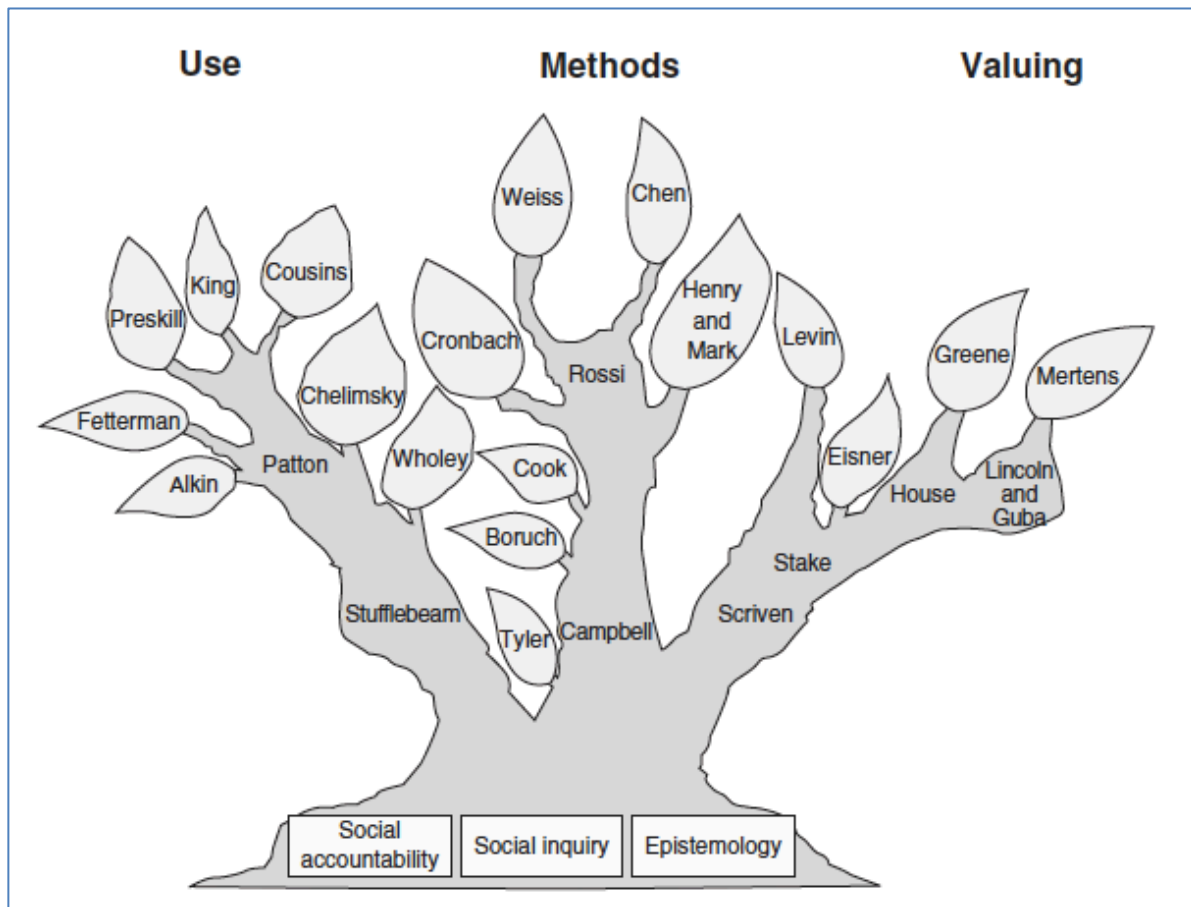


Figure 2. Evaluation Tree (Christie & Alkin, 2012, p. 12)

In a parallel fashion, Christie and Alkin (2012) summarize an evaluation theory tree (Figure 2) based on two foundational and contrasting themes: accountability and control versus social inquiry; which in turn leads to three dominant branches of evaluation: valuing, methods, and use (Christie & Alkin, 2012, p. 12). Our scan across this tree emphasizes the difference among the branches with attention to who is involved in the design of an evaluation, with special attention to its practical use.

The right-hand side branch under the “values” label privileges evidence, which is about verifying the achievements of a project and often relates to accountability. It is a means to ensuring that funds have been managed responsibly and that the project has attained the intended goals. This conventional approach is traditionally followed by many funding agencies and comes from the advent of results-based management practices. It is based

on the assumption that the results of a project are to a large extent measurable, predictable and can be attributed to the project’s activities. In other words, this branch represents an approach where the evaluation design is mainly concerned with accountability.

Some of the proponents suggest that the evaluator is responsible for coming up with a judgement or a value-based conclusion. The evaluator is perceived as the person who sets the evaluation objectives, or who decides what is worth evaluating. Scriven argues that since the original objectives of the project may have evolved, the evaluator should focus on what is relevant on the ground. This is also known as ‘goal-free evaluation’ (Scriven, 1991). Others in contrast (e.g. Guba & Lincoln) argue that the project beneficiaries should be the ones who render judgement or draw conclusions over the results. Here they adopt a constructivist paradigm through which the

stakeholders share insights and build shared perspectives about what constitutes reality. For a communication professional steeped in the participatory approach, this language will sound familiar.

The middle branch emphasizes the investigative aspect of evaluation and focuses on knowledge generation. The focus is on methodologies, especially in regard to experimental or semi-experimental designs. Christie and Alkin (2012) refer to Carol Weiss's work and emphasize the political implications of evaluation. This perspective contrasts with the perspectives of many of the other authors in this branch who favour hard science with data-extractive methods; and with some distancing from natural sciences.

The left-hand side branch promotes the use of evaluation for decision-making, with special attention paid to the people who will be the actual users of the evaluation findings. One of the proponents (Stufflebeam) suggests an evaluation model that requires choices about context, inputs, processes and products. From this perspective, evaluation is described more as a process than as a product. The authors who belong to this branch support these concepts in favour of an evaluation that generates practical outputs. They also highlight the fact that the evaluator's responsibility should include a duty that goes beyond writing a report, as it should include ensuring that the intended use takes place.

In this same branch, other proponents (e.g. Alkin and Patton) open up the spectrum to assign the role of designing the evaluation to a diverse group of stakeholders. Patton, in particular, highlights the importance of systematically identifying the evaluation 'primary intended users' so they can gain a sense of ownership over the evaluation and become interested in the use of the findings. Fetterman goes further by suggesting that evaluation should be a process of empowerment. Cousins and other authors refer to participatory and practical evaluation, underlining the importance of organizational learning as the axis of this branch. Preskill reinforces this theme by referring to transformational learning.

In summary, the following are salient themes: the importance of stakeholder participation; collaborative work among the different stakeholders; the flexibility to suit each context; and the opportunity for reflection and empowerment by those who receive the evaluation results. To a great degree, these themes coincide with the ones Waisbord includes under the 'participatory branch' of his own communication for development tree. This begins to show the

linkages between both fields; somewhat like lianas between two neighboring trees. The elements of this meeting point are compatible with the components of Lennie and Tacchi's (2013) framework on the evaluation of communication for development projects that includes: participation, a holistic approach, complexity, a critical approach, emergence, being realistic, and a learning orientation. This language is also compatible with principles of communication that emphasize that planning take place from the beginning of any development effort and with stakeholder involvement (Anyaeibunam, Mefalopulos, & Moetsabi, 2004; Food and Agriculture Organization, 1989; Mefalopulos & Kamlongera, 2004).

The literature referring to evaluation and communication in an integrated manner is scarce. There are approaches to evaluating communication for development as a specific component of development cooperation work (Hanley, 2014; Lennie & Tacchi, 2013, 2015; Myers, 2004; Parks, Gray-Felder, Hunt, & Byrne, 2005; Balit, 2005) or for the evaluation of advocacy (Beer & Reed, 2009; Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network & Roper Lyv Consulting, 2016; Lynn, 2014; Teles & Schmitt, 2011). In addition, there are communication strategies to enhance the uptake of research outcomes, be they to track the outcomes of networks (Albrecht, Elbe, Elbe, & Meyer, 2014; Horelli, 2009; Taylor, Plastrik, Coffman, & Whatley, 2014) or to enhance policy influence (Carden, 2004; Lynn, 2014). Furthermore, there is also an emphasis on the knowledge translation value of evaluation (Donnelly, Letts, Klinger, & Shulha, 2014).

The similarities between a collaborative approach to evaluation, such as utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) and participatory communication is illustrated in the quote below:

A couple of principles of UFE [...] have emerged as most relevant from our action-research project. The first one is about the ownership of the process: Patton emphasizes this principle and we have lived it in our project experience. Having control over every component of the evaluation has led the projects to assume a learning process that is reflexive and committed. The second is about facilitation vs. external measurement: as evaluators, we have become facilitators, as opposed to external judges. [...] our coaching role shifted to a mentoring one: we were learning as peers. In my communication experience, this role is also the most effective. (Ramírez, 2011)

The Experiment: A Hybrid Decision-Making Framework

As noted, the experiences reported in this chapter have emerged through two action-research projects funded by the IDRC. The first one was known as “Developing Evaluation Capacity in Information Society Research” (or DECI-1), an action research experiment to test the efficacy of utilization-focused evaluation (UFE). UFE has been in use in development cooperation for several decades and is essentially a decision-making framework that allows project implementers to take ownership over the design, implementation and reporting of their own evaluations.

Therefore, the evolution of the hybrid began with a foundation in UFE as it offered a sequence of planning steps and guiding principles. For instance, the emphasis in UFE is on the utilization of the evaluation findings and process, enabling project teams to learn to use evidence and gain reflection and learning skills. UFE isn’t just one more methodology, but a process that begins by establishing who the stakeholders are that can take part in designing the evaluation. UFE provides the ‘users’ with a decision-making framework. As is explained below, these attributes appeared to be just as relevant in communication planning.

DECI-1 provided mentoring in evaluation to research projects funded by IDRC’s Information & Networks program (now renamed Networked Economies). Researchers were coached in developing their own evaluation designs; a form of collaborative evaluation based on the UFE approach. A unique feature of DECI-1 was the conscious attempt by IDRC officials not to interfere with the project’s evaluation designs. The projects had the liberty of owning the design of their evaluations, something that is not common in funder-grantee relations elsewhere. In the end, five evaluation reports were produced and used. Based on summaries of the five experiences prepared by the DECI-1 team, a short UFE Primer was published in 2013, targeted mainly for evaluation professionals (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2013). As a result of this positive experience, a second project (DECI-2) incorporated communication mentoring side-by-side with evaluation.

In the original framework two sets of parallel steps were drafted: one for evaluation based on UFE, and one for communication based on a number of existing communication planning methods. This initial effort at hybridization was tentative, and the DECI team expected it would require fine-tuning through practice. During

implementation, a confluence of the two areas emerged: evaluation findings could generate content to be communicated and communication activities could become a use or purpose for evaluation. This thinking is consistent with other writers who comment on the value of integrating evaluation and communication from the start (Glass, 2017).

Naturally the DECI-2 hybrid has evolved as the team gained more experience. While the starting point was a hybrid framework consisting of 12 steps for evaluation and 12 for communication, it soon became incumbent to simplify it down to the essential elements of both approaches that matter most: understanding context; defining evaluation users and uses; defining communication purposes and learning about each stakeholder group’s views and media preference through audience research. Figure 3 (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2017) summarizes the steps that are covered during the mentorship process. The circular arrows highlight the iterative nature of the process.

Based on experience, defining the ‘primary intended users of the evaluation’ has been an indispensable step that has unveiled power patterns. In some of our partner projects, there have been donors that have not agreed to give up the control over the evaluation design, and this is not unusual. However, when there is openness regarding the selection of ‘primary intended users’, the evaluation process can include those who implement or manage the projects. Through this they become the owners of the process.

DECI-2 provided support to those who are willing to take on this role and help them determine the purposes and intended uses of the evaluation. This decision is a key moment because it challenges the users to reflect on the ‘why’ and the ‘what for’ of the evaluation. It is not a simple process because it requires that the primary users take control of the process, which differs from many conventional evaluations in which project implementers become passive subjects or information providers.

Beyond defining the evaluation’s primary intended uses, formulating ‘key evaluation questions’ demands clarity about processes, expected changes, non-verbalized assumptions and expected causality chains. This step constitutes a moment of empowerment and it brings along the challenge of clearly verbalizing what the project intendeds to accomplish, the ‘how’, and the ‘what for’. In other words, it invites a project team to draw out its theory or trajectory of change.

The process of defining the UFE stakeholders is compatible with the process of defining the target audiences during the design phase of a

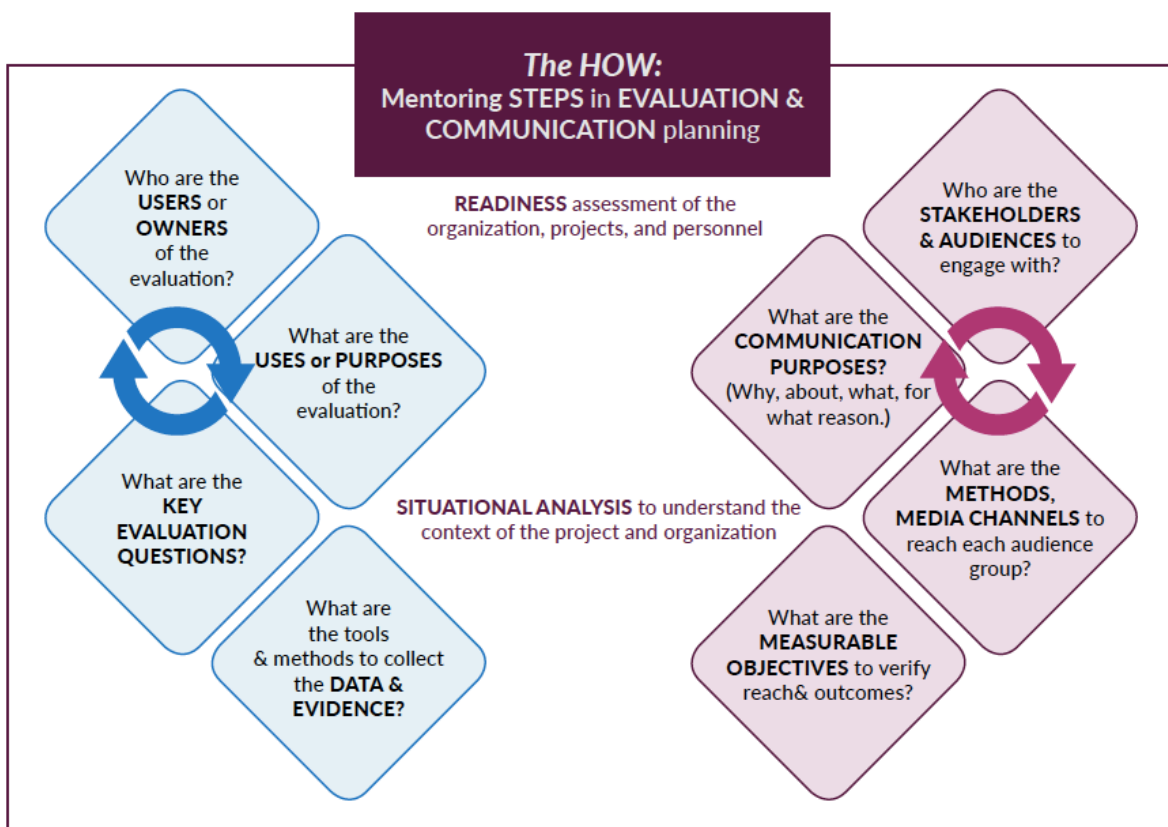


Figure 3. The Steps of Integrated Planning (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2017)

communication strategy. This coincidence opens up the possibility of developing both steps at the same time.

This integration, in turn, provides a pause to review the project's context, reality, location, goals, institutional setting, linkages with other actors, duration, and historical and political background. As the 'primary intended users' start suggesting evaluation uses or purposes, it is common that the communication purposes also start emerging. Within this approach, communication can aim at one or more of the following purposes: engaging stakeholders to understand their needs and hopes; exchanging knowledge among stakeholders who come from different realities; disseminating project findings; influencing policies through evidence; promoting the initiative, etc.

In parallel to the formulation of 'key evaluation questions', this process demands clarity about expected changes from each communication activity. Both steps share the challenge of describing a process of change, which can be challenging in the context of innovative research projects. However, developing these plans helps establishing baselines that allow users to later

verify emerging adjustments and learning on the go.

The verification of the different audience groups' preferred channels and media is one of the communication planning steps – also known as audience analysis. Policymakers are often one of the target audiences of research projects, and as such, they get included in the analysis – normally programmed during the project's early stages. Engaging policymakers with this inquiry as a mere instrumental excuse [to confirm their preferred media channels and decision-making events] has proven to be an important step to begin creating a relationship that would otherwise not be possible.

For example, in a small DECI-supported project in Assam, India, a research group working with female tea plantation workers, tried to understand the barriers to their access to health care. The project introduced a phone App that allowed volunteers to flag cases where health care had been denied. The project team assumed that the local health authorities would be willing to respond to the evidence, but there was a history of antagonism between the NGO and the local officials. As part of the audience research, the team

members met with local authorities (policy makers) to discuss with them their preferred channels of communication. This non-threatening activity opened the door to further interaction between the project and the authorities such that when data was collected revealing gross inadequacies, it was possible to bring this information to their attention. Change did happen.

Figure 3 does not include a very important step that happens towards the end of the UFE process: facilitating the use of the findings, which ensures ownership over the results. Based on most of our partnerships, we have developed case studies that summarize the process; an exercise known as meta-evaluation. The partner projects have had the chance to review and make contributions to improve such documents. This process has resulted in significant reflection and learning for both mentors and partners.

It is best to illustrate these findings with a few examples. The first presents a case where the synergy between the evaluation and communication team resulted in strengthened initiatives from both:

Example: A Global Research Network on Open Education

The DECI-2 team supported a research network based in Cape Town, South Africa known as ROER4D: Research on Open Education Resources for Development. The project aimed to provide evidence-based research from 18 sub-projects spread throughout South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. The primary objective of the project was to improve educational policy, practice, and research in developing countries by better understanding the use and impact of Open Educational Resources (OER). To address this overall purpose, the specific objectives of the program were to:

1. Build an empirical knowledge base on the use and impact of OER focusing on post-secondary education
2. Develop the capacity of OER researchers
3. Build a network of OER scholars
4. Communicate research to inform education policy and practice.
5. Curate output as open content.

The project management team included a communication lead and an evaluator who became the contact for the DECI-2 mentoring process. In

this instance, the communication and evaluation strategies developed in tandem, with close interactions within the team and the project's principal investigator. This allowed for an agile and well-connected interaction between the evaluation purposes and the communication ones.

On the evaluation side, three main evaluation uses were formulated:

- To analyze the effectiveness of the communication strategy
- To analyze the effectiveness of the capacity building strategies
- To analyze the effectiveness of the networking models

In parallel, the communication element evolved, with a strong emphasis on audience research early on. The first evaluation use referred to the effectiveness of the communication strategy thus constituting a natural connection between both fields. It also meant that some effort was needed into establishing what the communications strategy aimed to achieve, and how it could be measured.

The following are the communication objectives [numbered items], organized around and based on the following four, broad project **PURPOSES** [in bold capitals]:

Visibility

1. To establish ROER4D as a significant OER Research project using the website, Social Media (mainly Twitter & Facebook), SlideShare, publications and external press among global OER networks, organizations and programs to the extent that the project receives invitations for dialogue and participation from external OER network members.
2. To establish credibility and receptivity (as research develops and findings can be communicated) through physical and online participation at key conferences in 2014-2016 with OER researchers and policy makers to the extent that positive feedback is received, and the project receives invitations for further dialogue and participation at other events.
3. To engage those in the educational field including publishers, MOOC providers and related research projects globally through the newsletter, website, social media, and face-to-face events, to expand reach of

project beyond the immediate partner networks.

Knowledge Generation

1. To share our research process openly with both internal researchers in the ROER4D network and external OER researchers, to contribute to the field of ‘open research’, using Website, SlideShare, publications, social media, webinars to the extent that other networks acknowledge and draw on the practices.
2. To share and communicate research findings that relate to use, adoption and impact of OER in the Global South with both internal researchers in ROER4D network and external OER researchers, using the Website, OpenUCT/open repositories, Slideshare, publications, social media, webinars, blog posts and external press to discuss findings to the extent that ROER4D becomes a “reference point” in the OER field (increase # of papers and Slideshare downloads, increase in citations, increase in conference engagements and Twitter traffic).

Networking (Internal)

1. To build links among researchers within the ROER4D network by sharing information via email announcement, website, newsletter and social media (especially when organizing face-to-face events and online interactions) to the extent that researchers report feeling part of the ROER4D network (in end-of-event evaluation forms and social network analysis).

Research Capacity Building

1. To share resources with ROER4D researchers using Email announcements, the Website, Newsletter and OpenUCT/open repository to the extent that website, Newsletter, Email announcements and OpenUCT downloads show increased and sustained reach; requests for more information are received; and researchers share relevant new resources email and web links.
2. To support and build research skills of researchers in ROER4D network using live

webinars, recorded webinars, presentations available via ROER4D website, workshop sessions to the extent that self-reporting of capacity building via surveys and interviews confirms the extent of skills gained.

The above illustrates a combination of multiple communication purposes, very much in line with the notion in UFE of integrating multiple evaluation purposes. In this instance, the fact that one of the evaluation uses is dedicated to measuring the effectiveness of the communication strategy sets the foundation for a more targeted and specific set of communication purposes and objectives.

There was much evidence of course correction around communication activities based on ongoing audience research. In other words, the evaluation process was developmental, helping the project team adjust their actions and their timing. The communication specialist presented a paper at a conference entitled “Open, ready and agile: Developing a communications strategy for Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D) in the Global South” (Walji, 2015) that emphasized this interaction and continuous learning process. The combined work in evaluation and communication culminated in ROER4D’s visualization of its theory of change, which in itself evolved during the second phase of the project. The following summarizes the enabling factors behind these achievements:

- ROER4D had a communication lead and an evaluation staff person, both willing to work in tandem to learn from one another
- ROER4D management was open to the idea and extremely supportive right from the beginning
- ROER4D was able to course correct based on evaluation findings as the program progressed

The next example illustrates a variation where the evaluation and communication mentoring happened in parallel with fewer linkages during their design. This illustrates how the hybrid process can manifest itself differently, depending on the existing conditions and readiness.

Example: Privacy International and the Concept of ‘Readiness’

In contrast to ROER4D, the process for mentoring the team of Privacy International (PI), a London-based organization focused on advocacy around

Internet Privacy issues, took off in a slightly different direction. Initially, Privacy management only wanted to focus on evaluation, thinking that their role as an advocacy group meant they were steeped in communication know-how. Later, and for a multitude of reasons (rapid staff growth, change in directorship, etc.) it was agreed that the staff person responsible for evaluation and the newly hired head of communication would both be open to DECI support. The DECI team was pleased about this and assumed that the work would be done in tandem. That this was not the case opened up new levels of insight: not only is it important that communication and evaluation staff be in place, but it is equally important that senior management and all staff members understand their individual roles and be on board with how both evaluation and communication is progressing.

As it turned out, Privacy had grown so quickly as an organization that a small unit that had operated by instinct now had individual departments working in silos, scrambling to keep up with the rapidly growing list of issues. The communication component that had focused on campaigns, social media and the press needed to keep continually agile and essentially involved every member of the organization. It was time to consider an overarching strategy, but no one had the time to sit down and sort it all out. In the end, Privacy's new communication manager worked well with the DECI communication support but mainly through Skype conversations after a busy workday. This meant that work was carried on in isolation. The communication and evaluation components did not connect nor share evidence that could trigger course correction.

This taught the DECI team that readiness (as a concept) is much more than ensuring that both a communication and evaluation staff person are in place. Readiness includes senior management 'buy-in' and space to reflect on findings to course correct if need be as the work unfolds. This is now referred to as 'organizational readiness.' At that time, Privacy was an organization in such flux and with so much forward-moving drive, that it was literally impossible for anyone to pause and reflect and make adjustments (Ramírez, Brodhead, & Quarry, 2018)

The DECI team feared that this meant that a great deal of organizational 'buy-in' got lost in the "disconnect." Nevertheless, upon producing the case study to review the process, unexpected gains were reported:

...in a final interview with the Executive Director, he stated that the fact that PI wasn't

ready shouldn't be a reason to not do the process: had the evaluations not been taking place it is possible that the strategic prioritisation of the work would not have occurred. So the process of readying the organisation, with all the bumps and bruises, is essential particularly as the 'ready' status fluctuates over time. (Quarry, Ramirez, & Brodhead, 2016, p. 16).

The third example below reports on a case in which the evaluation led to a clarification of the communication strategy, illustrating a situation where one led to the other, as opposed to working together.

Example: Research Internet Africa – Making the Implicit Explicit

Research Internet Africa (RIA), another IDRC funded research initiative based in Cape Town, South Africa, focuses on bridging policy and technical research on Internet measures across Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2013, RIA contracted the DECI team to help them evaluate their program in anticipation of a new funding opportunity. The DECI team managed the evaluation through a UFE approach involving the RIA team in deciding who would be the primary users of the evaluation and how it would be used. In a sense this kept them intimately involved in the progress of the work while data collection was carried out by the DECI team. This was an instance in which the DECI team designed, implemented, and produced the evaluation report, as opposed to the mentoring approach used with all other IDRC project partners.

While RIA did not have a communication strategy in hand, the evaluation revealed that RIA had an innate sensibility related to communication. The team had instinctively adopted the ODI RAPID Framework in their communication work (Overseas Development Institute, 2006). Namely: they built relationships with policy makers (the head of RIA had been a policy maker herself); they kept abreast of the political situation to be able to access windows of opportunity, and they harnessed the media to raise awareness around issues about to be addressed. The DECI evaluation took note of this and described the RIA communication work. This led to RIA assembling their Theory of Change and realizing the importance of their communication intuition. RIA has since engaged a communication person on their team to manage and update their communication strategy, and they continue to promote the Theory of Change.

Benefits of the Hybrid

The authors of this paper are familiar with the challenges that the development sector faces: pressure to show results in the short term; evaluation requirements that expect evidence of linear cause-effect connections between project activities and impact; and communication often perceived to be synonymous with public relations. Working in this context while trying to introduce more nuanced, grounded, and participatory approaches —has been referred to as ‘working in the grey zone’ (Quarry & Ramirez, 2009).

With regards to the communication tree (Figure 1) and the evaluation tree (Figure 2), the hybrid provides a connection between both that emphasizes a participatory learning oriented approach. It is essentially a decision-making framework that encourages stakeholders closest to the project to take ownership over the evolution of their work in a manner that can be tracked systematically (evaluation) and shared with interested parties (communication) (Ramírez & Brodhead, 2017).

The DECI-2 research project, with its unusual combination of objectives, has provided a wider space, brighter than many ‘grey zones’ of the past, and possibly quite unique. The external evaluation of DECI-2 that was completed in the spring of 2017 confirmed the value of this combination (Hearn & Batchelor, 2017). The evidence demonstrated that the research partners gained capacities in terms of both evaluative thinking and communication planning and design. Moreover, the hybrid approach had also enhanced their confidence to become adaptive.

The combination of evaluation and communication planning steps create a space to stop and reflect. They force a project team to express assumptions, clarify what and how they expect their actions to lead to the objectives set. In doing so, they are given a change to adapt strategy as conditions evolve.

It is important, however, to remind us of the conditions that can make this possible:

- Staff persons in place to handle both communication and evaluation and a dedicated budget for both
- Senior management on board and supportive of the roles for each
- Organizational ‘readiness’ in so far as a relatively stable staff in place and past any sudden growth or other changes within the organization

And finally, the DECI experience has underscored the importance of taking a pause right from the start of any initiative to be very clear as to what it is a project is trying to do – what is the purpose or the intent. Then, and only then is it possible to go from there, to figure out how to get there.

“What matters most is to have clarity as to the purpose of the communication initiative —the overall intent. What is it that we want the communication initiative to do and what do we hope to achieve.” (Quarry and Ramírez, 2009, p. 18)

Conclusions

In the context of DECI-1, UFE was the starting point as a decision-making framework for evaluation (Patton, 2008). This approach prioritizes an initial evaluation-readiness assessment, which specifically seeks to answer the following question: Is there enough space and power balance to incorporate additional evaluation users beyond funders and decision-makers? If the answer is positive, the next step is to engage those users to explore the intended uses and purposes of the evaluation. This move is a typical participatory research step that requires reflection and resembles the foundations of participatory communication.

Patton’s UFE (2008, 2012) does not promote a ‘participatory’ terminology, *per se*. However, it has great potential for becoming a participatory approach when there are enough conditions for the stakeholders of a process or project to be part of the evaluation’s primary user group. According to our experience, when this happens, they become participants and owners of the process and results (Brodhead & Ramírez, 2014; Ramirez & Brodhead, 2013).

Evaluation designs often address several uses in tandem: the verification of achievements, a reflection on processes or methods, the verification of network operability, and/or the extent to which outcomes or results were accomplished. Communication can also address complementary purposes, such as stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange through networks, promoting a given initiative, dissemination of findings among diverse audiences, knowledge management for influencing policies, etc. Immediate opportunities emerge to weave together both fields.

Beyond the shared agendas of both disciplines, there is scope for a deeper integration. The notion of utilization-focused communication proposes a

shared vision of both fields (Ramírez, 2011). For instance, UFE offers methodological contributions that would be useful in communication for development. One of the final steps of UFE is about investing time and effort in facilitating the use of the evaluation's findings and process. In the communication area, this step calls for a systematic reflection on the extent to which the communication objectives were achieved, the validity of the social and media processes that were used, and/or on the assessment of the internal systems and roles of the communication teams within the partner project or organizations. While this point constitutes an important moment of reflection that offers learning opportunities and awareness (Schön, 1991), in reality a systematic review of what was done or how and what worked is rarely included when communication strategies are completed.

Through these years of action research, the DECI team has come up with the following guiding principles and practices that now inform our strategy:

- UFE is a decision-making framework that enables the use of an array of evaluation methods, which are defined according to the uses/purposes and key evaluation questions identified.
- The communication strategies of research projects often privilege the use of findings for influencing public policies. Such communication processes are complex because there is no linear or predictable logic in the political world. While DECI supported research projects, the same can be said about other social change projects where the authors have introduced this hybrid.
- Public relations is an important communication function for a multitude of initiatives, projects, and programs. It is important that it not be the main function, but only one among many. In some instances, sharing achievements for the purpose of knowledge sharing may include a public relations function.
- The high interest in verifying the level of availability or readiness from the early stages of a potential partner project implies that DECI-2 only collaborates with those organizations that prove to have enough readiness conditions and commitment. If such conditions do not exist at the very beginning, DECI-2 provides support to help potential partners achieve them.

(There have been three instances where the initial readiness waned, and the collaboration was discontinued.) Some key factors are having the time, the resources, and staff that is keen to learn about evaluation and communication. The DECI-2 team has learned not to force the pace of a relationship when the conditions do not allow it. A major advantage has been that the DECI-2 funding was longer in duration than that of the partners. This provided the opportunity to work with the partners to increase their readiness.

- Mentorship provides 'just-in-time' support and contributes to concrete learning because the partner project receives tailored support as opposed to pre-planned generic support, which is what happens with pre-packaged training workshops.
- As communication and evaluation steps become routine, a 'practical wisdom' emerges and empowers project implementers by providing them with tools for fine-tuning their strategies along the way (Ramírez, Quarry, & Guerin, 2015). This process enables them to adapt to circumstances and move away from initial practices or implementation strategies that stop making sense as time goes on. This aspect is particularly important given the complexity of the research projects that DECI-2 has supported.
- The evaluation uses and the necessary planning are both defined at the beginning of the project and not as an improvised idea at the end of it.

Capacity development emerges as another dimension of integration. The DECI-2 project experience highlights the fact that skill development in both disciplines is effectively achieved through experiential learning. The authors have confirmed that workshops and manuals yield limited outcomes. In the evaluation field, workshops often focus on explaining methods (such as designing a questionnaire). In the communication field, they also often cover methods and tools (such as making videos or using social media for mobilization). In contrast, UFE and participatory communication are learned through practice (Ramírez et al., 2015). Learning by doing and reflection allows pacing evaluation and communication at the right moments to fit the timing of each project and requires timely follow-up according to the project pace (Brodhead & Ramírez, 2014).

As people learn by doing, the mentors reinforce their capacity to act, adjust, improvise and avoid following blueprint recipes. Their confidence develops as the partner project adopts evaluation and communication principles and practices as part of its everyday practice/knowledge, and it constitutes an important outcome or achievement for the mentor. In order to attain such 'practical wisdom', it is necessary to explore, learn from mistakes, and acquire confidence for adapting processes and designs according to each project's context (Ramírez et al., 2015). In other words, the linkages between these evaluation and communication branches show similar theoretical and methodological foundations that come together in the capacity development approach.

Mentoring plays an important role in helping projects learn to work with evaluation and communication and adapt their programs if needed. The idea of mentoring has been around for generations and it is a word much bandied about – however the kind of mentoring referred to here is about the ability to be there for the mentee when they actually need the service rather than adhering to the mentor's schedule. In this experiment we were able to intervene, make suggestions or simply listen while the mentee worked things out when needed and apply the new thinking and adopt or adapt the new practice themselves. While this can be referred to as 'just-in-time' mentoring, it is a rare commodity and one that few agencies are willing and/or able to support.

The integration that has been developing through the DECI-2 project is coherent with the work of other authors who have pointed out the challenges of evaluation and communication for development. Lennie and Tacchi (2015) highlight the importance of acknowledging creative and innovative approaches, using mixed and rigorous methods, respecting the long-term timing of holistic processes that are necessary to evaluate capacity development, among other elements.

This integrated process has been relevant to researchers of both disciplines who have appreciated the theoretical and practical coincidences between communication and participatory evaluation. The methodological components have been of interest to managers of projects that seek social change, allowing them to integrate their communication campaigns and their action research processes. Finally, this effort has offered project managers and funders an evaluation and communication decision-making framework that allows them to adjust their intervention strategies in complex and dynamic scenarios.

Probably of most importance is that the experiment reported in this paper has been a laboratory for testing a multi-disciplinary approach. Few institutions have the opportunity to bring together two fields of applied work as they are so often embedded in different parts of an organization or project. The lessons from this experiment provide new empirical and theoretical insights, with a renewed acknowledgement about the value of participatory and learning-oriented principles. They have been demonstrated once again to be the foundation for good development.

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