10 POSTULATES OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

Contents

Transparency should be built into the foundation of communication because it is the core of a successful society. Any communication should begin with transparency: it should be built into the work at the value level and should be a part of the and should be a part of the implementation of not only practical but also philosophical and ideological principles. Transparency is the key to success in creating a synergy effect in the interaction between the government and society.

Communication based on transparency:

✳ provides people with the information they need to understand in time what is being discussed, when, why and how;

✳ creates high-quality feedback;

✳ builds trust;

✳ prevents unpleasant surprises;

✳ smooths out conflicts and confrontations in society;

✳ creates a strong horizontal of internal communication;

✳ strengthens the image and reputation of both the government and society.

How to avoid reputational risks through transparency is well illustrated by the appointment of Vitaliy Deynega, founder of the Come Back Alive charity foundation, to the position of Deputy Minister of Defense for Digital Transformation. In February 2023, he posted on Facebook that he was close to being appointed to this position and said that this was not his first employment offer in the ministry. The author also explained why he agreed to take the job right now.

At the same time, he described in detail all the potential reputational risks that the ministry might face if he were appointed. He said that while working as a deputy head of the IT department at a defence company, to keep the team together, he paid "in envelopes" and allowed earnings "on the side" provided that it did not affect the result at his main place of work. In addition, Vitaliy Deynega had projects that were mostly paid for in cash. And he received his first compensation for his work in NGOs from his friends in cash, which can also be formally considered a "cash in the envelope" salary.

"I understand that I am now putting a name I've earned for years on the line and that people who recently praised me will very soon start hating me in the comments and beyond."

Describing 6 years of his work at the Come Back Alive Foundation, the founder of which he is, he assured that he had introduced the most transparent reporting system in the foundation. In addition, in the publication, he promised to take a polygraph annually and voluntarily with the subsequent publication of the results, in particular on the risks of corruption and promised future subordinates honesty and directness on his part. A week after this publication, the government appointed Vitaliy Deynega as Deputy Minister of Defense for Digital Development, Digital Transformation and Digitalization.

Transparency and openness did not prevent Vitaliy Deynega from getting the position. On the contrary, they protected him as an official of the Ministry of Defense from possible sensational exposures that could harm him and the ministry in the future. In addition, it helped to build transparent communication not only with subordinates but also with society. After all, **a person who does not try to hide unpleasant facts about himself but speaks frankly about them inspires trust and favour for himself and his activities.**


Full text of the publication (post).

Regardless of whether it is internal or external communication, **coherence** between all stakeholders is not only important but necessary. Both internally and externally, it is necessary to have a unified position and move in accordance with it. And only after agreeing on everything can the public be reached with a message and clearly formulated calls to action.

The country's authorities should strive to adhere to a "one voice" policy, where all agencies communicate as one organism. Conflicting messages between, for example, an institution and the prime minister are unacceptable.

Coherence of actions

* indicates a single strategic position, a single direction in the movement of the government and society;

* creates a kind of monolith, thanks to which the state increases its rating and rises in global rankings.

ONE VOICE
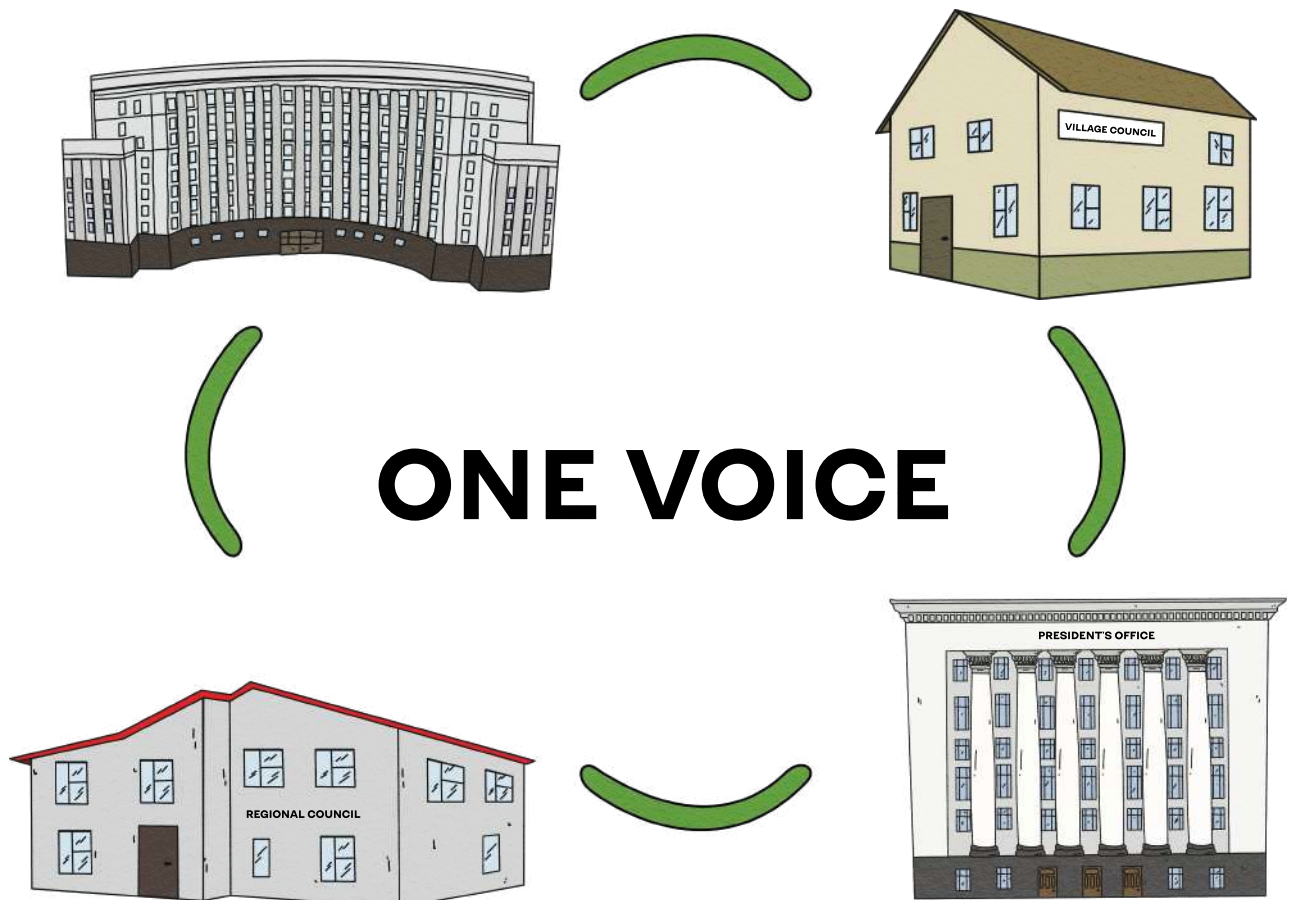
A vivid example of how coherence in communication leads to a successful outcome is an experiment that took place in the resort town of Morshyn in the Lviv region in 2021, at a time when the whole country and the world were trying to fight COVID-19. In April 2021, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine launched a pilot project to vaccinate the town's residents against the coronavirus. As of October 26, 75% of the population of Morshyn, with a population of 4,200, had received the first dose and 74% of the adult population the second dose, and there were no patients with COVID-19 who needed hospitalization.

For comparison, at that time, in the region as a whole, more than 23% of the adult population had received the full course of vaccination, and about 35% had received the first dose. At the end of October, the region moved into the red zone, the most dangerous in terms of morbidity.

How did Morshyn succeed?
It was due to the coordinated actions of central and local authorities. City Mayor Ruslan Ilnytskyi suggested that the government implement such a project, and the head of the regional state administration Maksym Kozytskyi broadcasted that vaccines do not change our bodies, do not cause mutations, but protect people.

Doctors, the media, and religious communities of the city joined the initiative. **The authorities launched an information campaign:** they made billboards and set up tents to distribute leaflets.

Family doctors, who were among the first to be vaccinated, called their patients and convinced them to get vaccinated. The townspeople were told that this would help avoid a lockdown, as the resort's main income depends on tourists.

At the time, **the Centre for Strategic Communication and Information Security** actively refuted the fakes about vaccinations. In order to draw the media's attention to the experiment in Morshyn, it launched an information campaign to promote this successful experience. The news about the case spread rapidly, which in the end had a positive effect on the general attitude towards vaccination in Ukraine.

According to the mayor of Morshyn, the economic factor and the influence of the competent opinion of doctors worked. **This helped the resort town overcome the economic problems associated with the epidemic.** In April 2021, the budget was fulfilled by 50%, and in October – by 86-87%.

Communication should include a clear action plan that takes into account short-, medium-, and long-term planning. **An action plan** is a path for the government and the people to follow.

Even if not everything is in line with the plan, if there is an action plan, it is always clear which way to go. **The action plan should specify** who does what and how, what information channels are used, within what period, who is responsible for what, and what goals are to be achieved. Transparency policy involves the joint development of an action plan (government and society), which in turn guarantees coherence of actions.

If all stakeholders follow the plan, the joy of what has been achieved will be shared. In the event of failure, even if responsibility is reduced to an individual level (e.g., the project leader), this will not have a destructive impact on overall trust.

A good example of how to apply this postulate is the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Association Agreement, which has clear deadlines and responsibilities of the authorities for the implementation of specific tasks.

This is a large document of about 1000 pages, which contains 1943 tasks in 27 areas. The implementation of the tasks is the responsibility of 106 Ukrainian authorities, who are obliged to develop communication plans for European integration steps in their departments. Accordingly, communication efforts are based on a clear roadmap and indicators for assessing progress. Every year, the EU provides its public conclusions on the success and pace of fulfilment of all obligations by the Ukrainian side, **which allows the public to assess the real steps** taken by the authorities in implementing the Association Agreement and fulfilling the loudest promises related to it.

Promptness has always played a key role in communications. In the public sector, **promptness** means informing the public on time, building trust, avoiding danger, and receiving feedback. For the media, it means more print runs, higher profits, and securing the audience.

In the world of modern technology, where it takes a split second to transmit any information of almost any size, it is especially important to be prompt. Promptness should not be confused with chasing. It should be based on coherence and be in line with an action plan. **The public sector is often a generator of a large amount of information, a primary source. Verified, coordinated, high-quality information that reaches the end consumer on time in an undistorted form and provides quality feedback is promptness.**

If there is no promptness in communication or if it is neglected, even positive initiatives – adopted bills, decisions, achieved results – remain unnoticed by people, at best as something secondary, on the last pages of the newspaper, and at worst, never reach them.

ON TIME

An unprecedented in terms of promptness and frankness of messages case of Ukraine's international communication was the address of the President of Ukraine and Ukrainian top officials to the international community from the first hours of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Ukrainian leaders did not stop there. Fact-based, prompt and passionate speeches, reporting on daily events in peaceful cities and at the frontline demonstrated the strength of Ukrainian resistance, swayed the population of different countries to our side, who at rallies in European cities encouraged national governments not to be mere observers. Emotional appeals sometimes had no specific recipients, but the context allowed us to identify imaginary counterparts and changed the actions of politicians in favour of Ukraine. It is important **that timely information and the degree of statements were and are monitored by international media, which are eager to spread Ukrainian messages about the real state of affairs.**

This has become a significant lever in confronting Russian propaganda with its sick imagination and enormous budget. Ukraine has finally begun to gain the upper hand in the information confrontation with Russia, particularly in the international arena.

DIGITALIZING

The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine builds not only convenient administrative services but also very convenient and understandable communication with the population. The institution generates a large number of innovative products for people and knows how to simply tell the public about them. The agency writes in short, clear language about digital changes, which are not easy to comprehend if you are not a professional IT specialist.

The communication of the Ministry of Digital Transformation is systematic, clear and effective, based on a simple algorithm

✳ highlighting the existing problem with public service and announcing the development of a new product to solve this problem.

✳ An intermediate result on the stage of development or the need for testing.

✳ Final presentation of the product and explanation of its use. Usually, these are simple instructions or even mini-series with clear explanations.

✳ Supporting the achievement through communication, always with numbers, dates, and facts. Thanks to the human-centred manner of communication in official releases, the word digitalization is not perceived as something scary and intangible, but rather associated with progress.
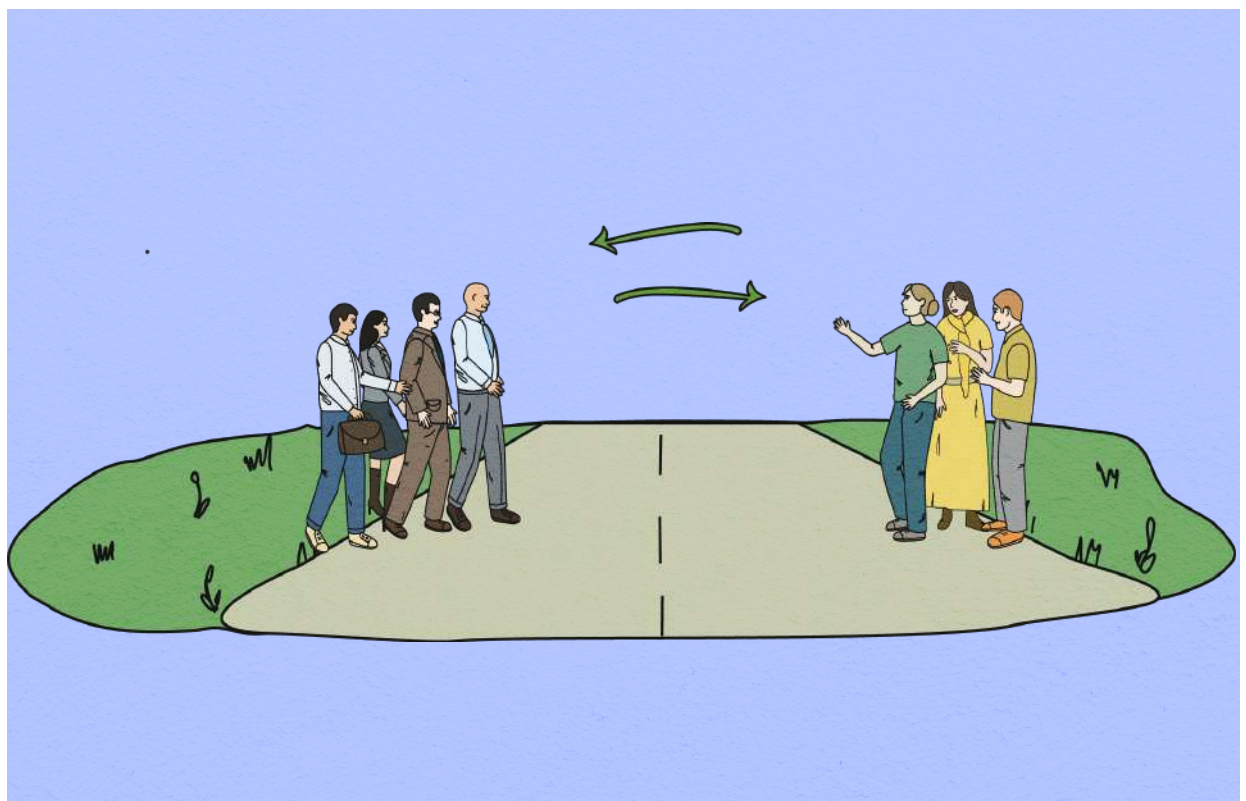
Feedback

Communication is about people. Accordingly, it is a two-way road. The Ukrainian public sector often understands communication as simply informing, responding and "putting out fires," i.e. as a one-way process where the government makes all decisions and, accordingly, informs society about them through its channels.

Instead, in **communication, society plays an important role of a subject, an active participant, rather than an object, a passive observer**. However, we see a lack of understanding of the two-sidedness of the process. There is no need to separate the government from society and vice versa.

Without engagement, without interaction, the country cannot achieve the desired results. **High-quality communication always involves feedback**, and communication should enter a rhythm that will continuously provide feedback. Good feedback should also be seen as a result of good communication. It is direct evidence of the critical thinking of citizens.

Society should not accept messages from the authorities as something ready-made without analyzing and expressing their opinions. **Feedback means a continuous flow of data** that needs to be worked with: accumulated, researched, analyzed, and, based on the findings, new policies should be formed and existing ones changed.

Opening of the land market in Ukraine. Despite the initial rejection, the implementation of the land reform was an example of active communication with the community and continuous gathering of feedback.

This is mainly because it was the first reform of the new government, which its predecessors did not dare to complete. Therefore, it was important for the country's leadership to achieve the support of international partners and at the same time not to lose the electorate. Among all the innovations, the government tried to communicate with communities during field meetings in the regions and later switched to the format of webinars and seminars, training sessions, where, in addition to explaining the innovations, **speakers collected feedback** from farmers, community leaders, members of agricultural associations, activists, etc.

They answered controversial questions, debunked myths about land grabs by foreigners and the export of black soil by railroad cars abroad, and discussed options for changes to land reform-related bills. Communication with people and the negative feedback obtained helped reduce the size of shares that can be concentrated in one person to 100 hectares. The sale of land to legal entities was also postponed until 2024. **Thus, the feedback protected the public interest, which was taken into account in the final version of the law.**

Human language

The government communicates with different target audiences. One of the tasks of strategic communication is to recognize the diversity of audiences, their needs, wishes and motivations.

To achieve this, **you need to learn to speak the language of the audience**. Speaking the language of the user means that the user will understand the government and the government will receive quality feedback in return. This does not mean vulgarization or switching to slang.

It means **adapting the message for different stakeholders.** One message – different presentation.

For example, the Cabinet of Ministers' resolution on public debt restructuring cannot be presented in the same way to all stakeholders. The message cannot sound the same to the international community, including international financial institutions, as it does to domestic entrepreneurs, in particular small businesses.

In 2014, 68% of respondents had heard of the government's decentralization initiative, aimed at transferring more powers to local authorities: 15% of them were well aware of it, and 53% had heard something about it. The rest did not know anything at all.

The survey showed that public awareness of decentralization has changed from attempts to understand (in the fall of 2014) what it is in general to "how it will be implemented" (in the spring of 2015). Among the respondents, some perceived the reform as a chance to build a democratic society and saw opportunities for more efficient local management and solving specific problems in local communities. However, even supporters had specific questions about its implementation and possible challenges. However, **the lack of accurate information and answers to specific questions**

led to distrust, resistance to the reform, and fears about its consequences. People were confused because of differences in interpretation of certain statements, populist promises, and lack of understanding of the stages of implementation.

Thus, the public supported the process in general terms, but there was no effective communication and no positive examples of implementation, which created confusion and spread discouragement. This is a case where **the lack of clear messages for different audiences negatively affected the overall perception of the reform.** After all, the only complicated explanations were appropriate for the international community, or even politicians, but were too far from the lives of ordinary citizens or villagers, which worked against the real involvement of citizens in the reform.

Capacity development

Communication will not work without a quality human resource. **One of the roles of a leader in any team is to identify strong players and invest in their further development.** Creating a good team is not an easy task, particularly in the public sector, where there is a severe lack of resources to attract professional staff.

In such circumstances, you need to work with those who are available and invest as much as possible in the development of both individuals and the entire team. In recent years, this has been possible in Ukraine thanks to various assistance from international organizations, donors, embassies, and intergovernmental programs. **You should not neglect the opportunity to send your staff to educational and training programs** or to finance a good internship outside the country or to assist in professional development.

The government is a powerful organization with many capabilities, and because of this, the government can also offer a platform for learning in cooperation with various institutions. **People need to be involved in the process**, motivated, and explained that they are a part of a large organism that is constantly writing new pages in the history of the state.
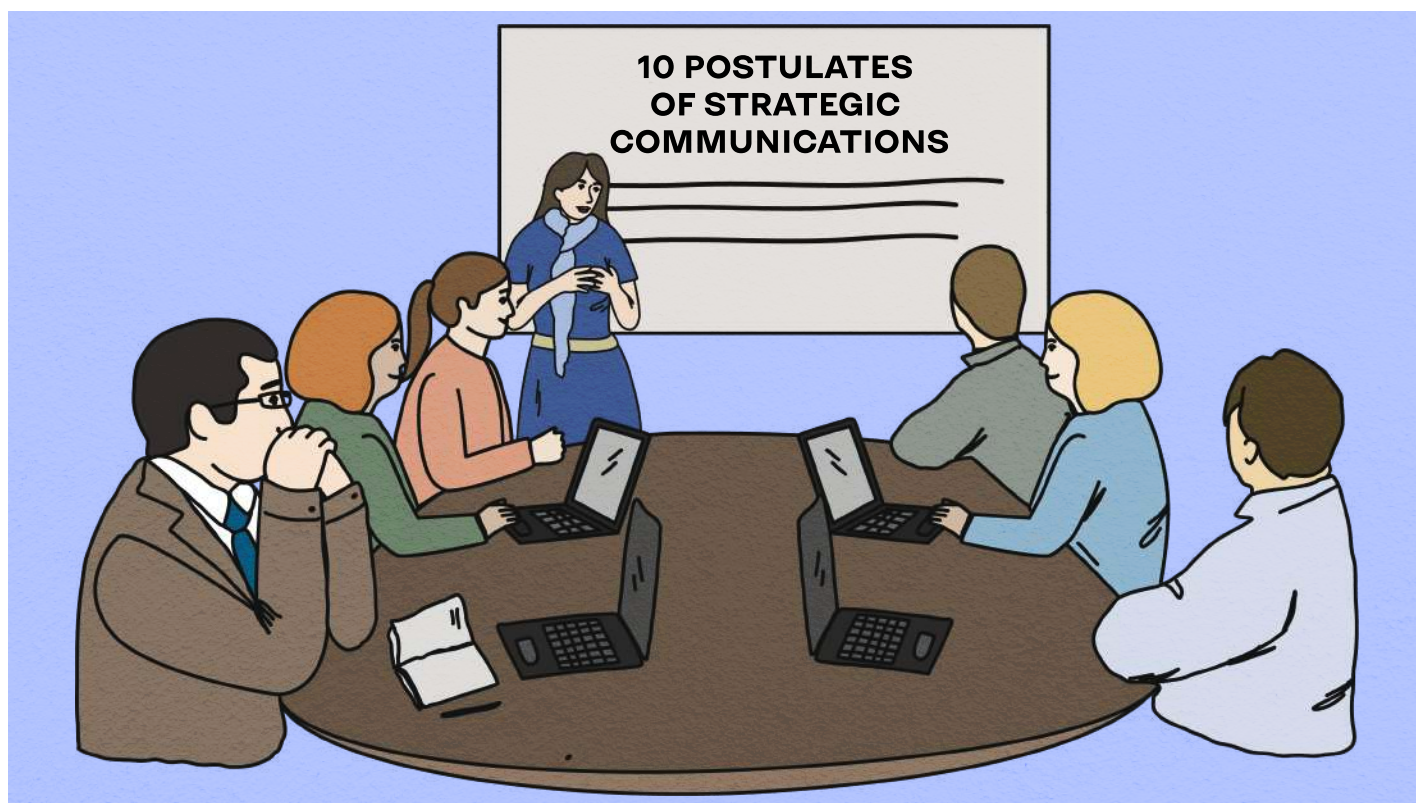
"RUSSIAN DESINFORMATION AND ATTEMPTS TO COUNTER IT"

- hybrid warfare and its components;
- information and cybersecurity;
- fake news: detection, counteraction and response.

"STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION. STRATEGIES OF CRISIS RESPONSE"

- strategic communications base;
- communication strategy;
- crisis communications.

Trainings by the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security.

In Ukraine, public administration reform aimed at increasing the productivity of the public service is still ongoing. This task is the responsibility of the National Agency on Civil Service. Programs agreed upon with the agency are aimed at forming or improving professional knowledge and skills, and developing personal qualities of civil servants to increase efficiency.

The agency has launched a "Knowledge Management Portal" where civil servants can choose and plan their training. The programs are constantly updated.

For example, in November 2022, the agency launched a project to help civil servants to learn English.

The partner is EF Language Learning Solutions, one of the largest international education companies. You can take courses on the already-mentioned knowledge management portal.

Cooperation with the EU has created many opportunities for the development of Ukrainian civil servants. For example, the training platform of the Natolin4Capacity Building project. Here, civil servants have the opportunity to take free online training in 16 courses on various aspects of the EU's functioning and the development of EU-Ukraine relations in the period of 2022-2023.

The Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security also offers two training programs certified by the National Agency for Civil Service

✳ The professional development programme **"Russian disinformation and ways to counter it"**. It was developed by the Centre for Strategic Communications in cooperation with the EU Project **"Support to Comprehensive Public Administration Reform in Ukraine"** (EU4PAR) and the Higher School of Public Administration.

✳ The professional development programme **"Strategic Communications in Public Administration. Strategies for Crisis Response"** was developed by the Centre for Strategic Communications in cooperation with the EU project **"Support to Strategic Communications in Ukraine"** and the Higher School of Public Administration.

Systemic communication

It is not about the process, but about communication work inside the system. The public sector with all its components is one whole, a unified system. Accordingly, strategic communications should be developed for the system and its parts, but not for individual units – a minister, director, head of department, etc. Regardless of who heads the agency, **strategic communication should work for the system.**

Any new leader should simply integrate into the existing mechanism. Individualization within governmental strategic communications threatens to destroy institutional memory and threatens the building and strengthening of existing institutions. There is nothing wrong with an individual having his or her vision and wishes regarding Strategic Communications, but within the public sector, **these visions and wishes should be in line with what has already been developed**, at least with clearly defined directions of the state's development.

Individual contributions are welcome, but they should be based on the existing strategy. Every civil servant swears allegiance to the people of Ukraine, and thus to the system that serves the people.
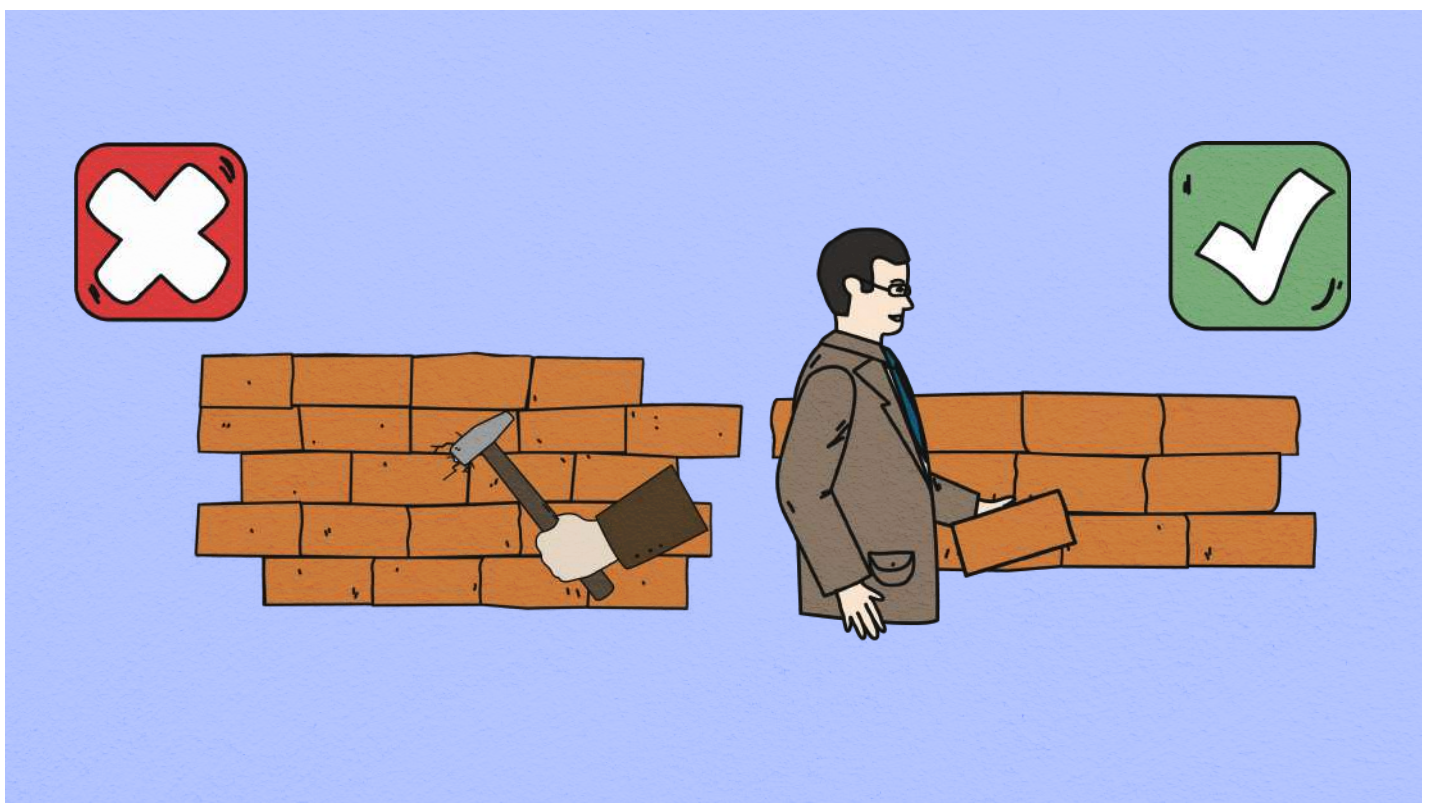
The UK government's communication strategy can be found in its separate sector, Government Communication Services. Information materials about the strategy and planned activities, mission, vision, and developed standards can be downloaded, training can be accessed, and you can get involved in work.

Regardless of who has led, is leading, or will lead the government, what political force they represent, and what ideology they follow, the strategy and standards developed remain the same.

Their communications support the priorities of ministries, not individual ministers, ensuring that public services work effectively and improve people's lives. At the mission level, the British see communications as one of the main levers for achieving change, alongside legislation, regulation, taxation and spending.

They are always focused on receiving feedback, so now the UK public services website has announced an opportunity for everyone to share ideas and visions for transforming communications until 2025 so that they best meet the needs of citizens.

Communication and the theory of change

Why is the theory of change important in the context of strategic communications? The report of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) "Strategic Communications and the National Interest" notes that strategic communications should become a more important component at the highest levels of government, at the early stage of developing government strategies, in response to a crisis or emergency, and generally as one of the most important components of policy making.

Carol Weiss, the author of the first publication on the theory of change, reasoned that the lack of a clear understanding and description of the sequence of steps that lead to the achievement of the goals of a program, such as a policy, makes it extremely difficult to evaluate its implementation. But even worse, is that the lack of such an understanding and description significantly reduces the likelihood of achieving the program's goal. Weiss suggested **describing the essence of the program as a chain of steps, each of which ends with the achievement of a set result.**
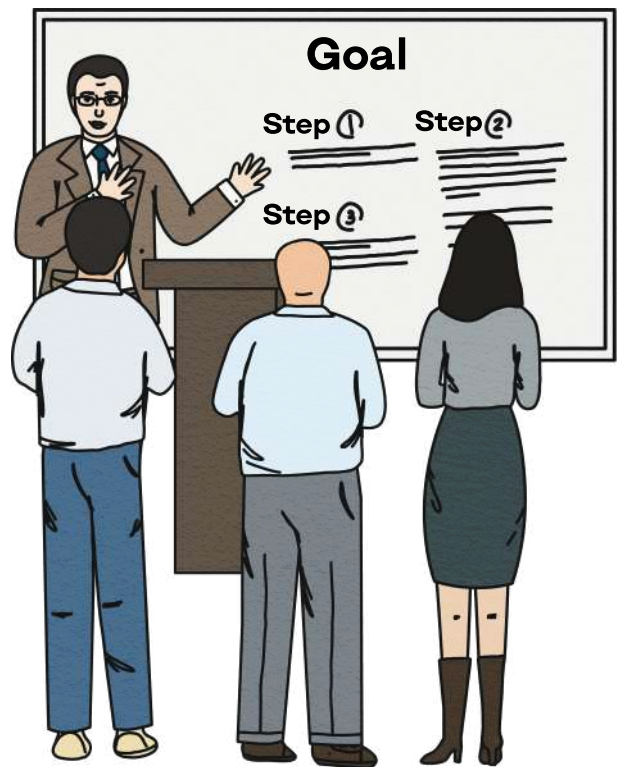
This chain should start with the activities within the program and lead to the achievement of the long-term goal of the program. **This is the theory of change**. In a loose interpretation, it is one of the ways to describe a strategy. Thus, we conclude that the theory of change is important for proper communication of the strategy itself, its essence and importance.

The chains of steps Weiss talks about correlate with coherence and an action plan. If we want strategic communications to become a more important component at the highest levels of management, it is essential to apply the theory of change. It provides a clear measurement tool that makes it easier and simpler to evaluate the effectiveness of communications, understand what works and what doesn't, and make appropriate adjustments.

The reform of Ukraine's internal affairs system began in 2014 and has become a successful example of the implementation of the theory of change. Before the official start of the reforms, the transformation of the "Militia" into the "Police" was actively discussed in the media. This was done to explain to people why the reform was necessary.

The first stage (informational preparation of the population) was followed by the second stage, which involved preparing official documents and creating a positive image of the reformed structure. Young people were actively invited to join the police, who were presented as a new generation capable of changing the system.

To encourage people, police officers were offered higher salaries. In July 2015, the first patrol officers went to work. They received brand new uniforms and cars, a salary of 8 thousand hryvnias, which was 3-4 times higher than the salary of an average district police officer. People saw a picture: young men and women in perfect physical shape, educated and polite.

The next stage of the reform is re-certification. The authorities had to explain to the public why police officers needed to be recertified and to carry it out.

They managed to explain it, but they did not carry it out completely. After all, some of the old staff tried to stay in the system by any means necessary. Corruption was the subject of the discussion. And the then head of the National Police, Khatia Dekanoidze, emphasized that the entire system could not be cleansed with just one wave of recertification and that this process should be long.

This was followed by raising salaries for law enforcement officers, the creation of cyber police, and reforming less public areas of the system.

And even though not all stages were carried out as planned, according to the Razumkov Center, in 2014 only 5% of Ukrainians trusted militiamen, and in 2019, 37.8% of people trusted the police.

As of early 2023, 58% of Ukrainians trust the National Police.

Result-oriented communication

Society expects positive news backed by real results. Although it may look complicated, there is no simpler form of communication than step-by-step. In this case, it means **"step-by-step" informing of society about specific goals achieved.**

It doesn't matter whether it is a long and large-scale healthcare reform or a small piece of road that has been paved – it must be done in a realistic, completed way. **It should be something that society can see or touch, check for quality, and provide feedback.**

The constant use of promises and futuristic narratives – "planned," "to be done," "expected," "soon to be seen," "predicted," "soon" – without any final or intermediate result pushes the entire public sector into the abyss of populism and creates/deepens distrust between the government and society.

In the process of formulating and implementing communication, it is **important to realistically assess the possibilities and implementation.** The results should also be covered, regardless of how they turned out.

ALREADY DONE

TO BE DONE