COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS ADVOCATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

Summary

Communication at all levels will be necessary for people to work toward goals of sustainable development. The best way for individuals and/or organizations to engage the public in sustainability issues is to extensively research the problems or issues at stake and formulate communication campaigns designed for public awareness and action concerning those problems or issues.

Communication campaigns are designed to reach target audiences with specific

messages concerning specific problems/issues. Mass media communication channels are usually used in campaigns geared for wide and public audiences, but often campaigns directed to local communities with specifically identified audiences are the most effective in involving citizens in problem-solving and planning decisions that affect their everyday lives. Therefore, both mass media campaigns and interpersonal communication campaigns will be discussed in this article.

The community level is perhaps the best place to begin. Although communities across the globe vary significantly in size, structure and culture, most communities share in common various channels of communication. These channels include some or all of the following: interpersonal formats for communication (such as face-to-face dialogue individually or in meetings, letter writing, telephone contact, or Internet e-mail and chat rooms) and mass-mediated formats for communication (such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the World Wide Web). The selection of communication channels to be used in a campaign depends on the geographic area and target audience to be reached.

This article presents a step-by-step method for formulating communication campaigns, followed by specific examples of successful campaigns for environmental sustainability issues.

1. Introduction

Communication campaigns are well-researched and well-planned methods of reaching target audiences with specific messages designed to produce specific results. Campaigns to promote sustainable development are as diverse as the different environmental issues and problems in communities of various sizes and cultures. The first step is to identify the environmental problems/issues and agree the situation must be improved or changed. Then, a public awareness/action campaign can be launched. A public awareness/action campaign can have a far-reaching impact on wide audiences because of the nature of communication tools. These tools include both interpersonal communication channels and mass media channels. Communication campaigns can provide people with informational and motivational messages, which can in turn stimulate people to take action.

In working toward global sustainable development, the community level is a good place to start because it is communities that collectively comprise a nation. It is the citizens or members of a community who best understand the problems inherent to the community in which they live, so they should be included in sustainable development dialogue. Since these citizens have a stake in sustainability outcomes, they are more likely to respond with actions toward situation improvement or a solution if they have had input into the decision-making processes.

2. Ten-Step Campaign Planning Process

Communication campaigns are most effective when they are carefully planned. A step-by-step planning process is recommended. Following is a ten-step planning process for communication campaigns.

2.1. Step One: Define the Problem/Issue

The first thing to do is to define any problems that currently contribute to an unsustainable situation. A problem is defined as the undesired difference between a present (unsustainable) situation and a future, desired (sustainable) situation. The definition of the problem must be a factual and specific description of the existing undesired situation. A communication campaign usually is designed to deal with just one problem. However, a communication campaign can also address a complex problem by breaking it down into a series of sub-problems.

2.2. Step Two: Analyze the Problem/Issue; Gather Information/Research

The problem or issue to be addressed by the campaign should be analyzed from all perspectives. This step involves gathering information and extensively researching the problem/issue. Questions such as the following should be asked:

With whom, where, when and to what extent does the problem occur?
Who says there is a problem and for whom is it a problem?
What are the signs of the problem?
What role does human behavior play in connection with the problem?
How urgent is the problem? Are there human health risks?
What is the history of the problem?
What are the causes of the problem?
Does the problem involve human knowledge, attitudes or behaviors?
Does the problem violate any accepted laws or policies?

At this stage of the campaign process, not only is the problem or issue thoroughly researched, but the audience may also be polled to determine existing knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values concerning the problem or issue. At this point, individuals with "traditional" or local knowledge might also be consulted.

2.3. Step Three: Form Partnerships; Gain Support of other interested or concerned individuals, companies, institutions, etc.

At this point in the campaign strategy process, it may be valuable to gain the support of others who are also concerned about the problem/issue. Existing organizations may be willing to donate time and/or resources toward problem solution and/or situation improvement. Individuals who perceive the situation to be a problem might be interested and/or willing to contribute. Therefore, some initial or preliminary campaigning might be valuable in obtaining this support. Meetings, public forums, workshops and other similar gatherings can be used to bring together like-minded people. It is often from these "brainstorming" sessions that the best campaign ideas emerge.

2.4. Step Four: Determine Campaign Goal(s) and Objective(s)

Once the problem is defined and well researched, a goal can be determined. A goal is a general description of a desired end situation. Objectives must then be determined as

means for working toward the desired goal. Objectives determine who should reach who or what, when, where, and how.

The objectives of the campaign should be determined with improvement of the situation and/or correction of the problem in mind. The objectives must be defined in perceptible and measurable results. The length of time for achieving the objectives must also be indicated. Objectives must be obtainable, and therefore should be defined in terms of what the communicators intend for people to do concerning the problem.

If a change is desired in behavioral aspects of human nature, the campaign objectives may be written as behavior modification goals. This would involve identifying the behavior it is hoped the audience will enact as a result of the campaign messages.

2.5. Step Five: Target Audience Analysis

In order to make the environmental problem/issue have relevance to the audience, careful audience targeting must be achieved. The question should be asked: with which segments of the population is there a fair chance of realizing the campaign objectives? Sometimes audiences can be determined by asking: for whom is this a problem or who needs to take action to remedy the situation?

In response to the main question of who is the target audience, consider the following:

Who is the final target audience?
Is there an intermediate target audience who will take the message to the final target audience?
Is there a secondary target audience to whom the initial target audience can take messages?
Size of the target audience
Demographic and social-economic characteristics of target audience: age, education, family, gender, cultural background, religion, income and welfare, profession and working environment, car owner, home- or land-owner, etc.
Psychological characteristics of target audience: hobbies, interests, existing knowledge, attitudes and values concerning environment, etc.
Accessibility and traceability of the target audience
Size and intensity of the problem for the target group
Time needed to achieve the objective with the target group
Costs and best means possible of reaching target group.

2.5.1. Functions of Audiences

One factor to keep in mind when determining the target audience is that audiences may serve various functions, depending on the problem/issue. The most basic function of an audience is as a "market" for information. Audience members are perceived as "customers" of knowledge, and the communicator's role is to enlighten, inform or entertain the audience with the content of the messages.

A more interactive function of an audience is as "dialogue partner" with the

communicator. This function involves a two-way communication situation in which effective communication should theoretically flow both ways between senders and receivers of messages. Audiences are talked with, not at, with the aim of mutual understanding, negotiating, and problem solving. This interaction works well for environmental sustainability issues.

Another and highly effective function of audiences is as "communicators." Audiences can be recruited to become active senders and communicators after they have received the messages. Audience members can become actively involved in re-circulating the messages, as they take the information they have learned and the values they have formed to share with their circle of friends, acquaintances and communities.

2.5.2. Factors concerning Target Audiences

Several factors concerning target audiences should be taken into consideration when preparing communication campaigns.

The first of these factors is the knowledge factor. The question should be asked: what is the audience's level of knowledge, awareness, and/or insight concerning the problem/issue? The audience's knowledge level will determine the type of messages that need to be devised. Audience knowledge can be determined by survey or questionnaire methods of scientific polling. If personal contact with the target audience is possible, then audience knowledge can also be determined through feedback obtained at public meetings or other events to which the audience is invited.

The second factor is the attitude factor. The questions should be asked: what are the audience's interest in, feelings or opinions about, or prejudices concerning the problem/issue? These attitude factors will affect the receipt of messages, so messages will have to be designed with these attitude factors in mind.

The third factor is the behavior factor. The questions should be asked: what behavior or behavioral intentions does the target audience exhibit in relation to the problem? Is the current behavior an unsustainable one that the audience might be willing to change if informed and/or persuaded? If so, what information (based on the knowledge factor) is needed for presentation? And what type of persuasive campaign would be effective with this particular audience?

Keep in mind that, at the same time as target audience knowledge is assessed, current attitudes and behaviors relating to the problem or issues can also be determined through the same survey/questionnaire/feedback techniques.

2.6. Step Six: Determine Campaign Budget

Most communication campaigns will involve the use of funds for various campaign activities. Before communication channels are selected, a budget will need to be determined because different methods of information distribution will entail various costs. Probably the greatest costs of communication campaigns are advertising costs and printing costs if high quality brochures and other such publications are used. If the

campaign entails the use of advertising on television or in newspapers and magazines, the cost of the campaign will have to include advertising costs according to the stations or publications selected for the target audience. Advertising can be an expensive part of a campaign and therefore is usually used by organizations with advertising budgets or is sponsored by philanthropic individuals.

Campaign organizers should take advantage of free and low-cost efforts when relevant and when possible. If the campaign involves events to which the public is invited, then most of the mass media will run public service announcements for free because the events are newsworthy. Many campaigns also involve public events such as concerts, workshops, or even advocacy events such as protests, all of which are "newsworthy" events worthy of news coverage. Other low-cost strategies involve the distribution of flyers or letters. If a letter-writing campaign is used and letters are being sent in bulk to legislators or other government officials, for example, then bulk-mailing rates can apply.

Regardless of the campaign budget, it is best to know how much money is available for spending in advance of planning campaign activities. Many successful environmental sustainability campaigns that occur at the community level are conducted on low budgets and rely to a great extent on volunteer help.

2.7. Step Seven: Select Communication Channels

Once the campaign goals and objectives are determined, the audience is analyzed, and the budget planned, the next step is to decide the communication channels most appropriate for the target audience: interpersonal communication channels or mass media communication channels.

2.7.1. Interpersonal Communication Channels

Interpersonal Communication Channels work best for relatively small and specifically identified audiences with whom the communicators can have personal contact. Interpersonal communication channels work well within small communities because direct communication can be used. Some interpersonal channels include:

Personal letters,
Personal e-mails,
Door-to-door, face-to-face interaction,
Speeches/Presentations,
Pamphlets/Flyers/Brochures to individual addresses,
Meetings/Workshops.

Personal letters and e-mails
Personal letters and e-mails offer direct contact to individuals in communities. The advantage is the personal touch; recipients feel they have been personally selected to participate or help with the campaign goals. E-mails offer the advantage of instant delivery and also provide an easy method of feedback from message recipients to message senders. Letters offer an even more personal touch, but delivery takes longer

and postage is usually required. However, letters do have the advantage of providing a "hard" copy that can be kept and filed.

Face-to-Face Interactions

Interaction that takes place physically between the message sender(s) and receiver(s) is one of the best campaign strategies because face-to-face interaction allows for non-verbal as well as verbal communication. Research shows that non-verbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, etc.) has greater impact on message delivery than the actual words expressed (verbal messages.) Campaign strategies can involve campaign workers going from door to door to deliver messages while also "visiting " with people, or strategies can include speeches or presentations to live audiences. Another advantage is the instant feedback and the opportunity for question/answer sessions or the discussions that speeches and presentations involve. Meetings and workshops can also offer this advantage and are often used to get people together to discuss sustainability problems/issues.

Pamphlets/Flyers/Brochures

Campaign materials to support campaign goals may include pamphlets, flyers, or brochures. Flyers can be simple one-page announcements or suggestions while pamphlets usually consist of a two-page fold and brochures are usually two or more folded pages. The advantage of these printed materials is that people can actually have a physical printed document to hold, read, and maybe take home to save as a reminder of the goals to be achieved toward environmental sustainability. These can be easy to produce with today's computer layout programs and can be easily and cheaply reproduced at print shops. Black and white pamphlets and flyers can be printed on colored paper to gain attention. Four-color brochures will be more expensive to produce, but, depending on the campaign, they can be effective reminders for people to take home and keep.

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Biographical Sketch

Lea Jane Parker is an Associate Professor of Communication in the School of Communication at Northern Arizona University (NAU) where she teaches Environmental Communication and Journalism courses. She was responsible for establishing Environmental Communication courses and programs at NAU. Environmental Communication is currently an emphasis area in the Journalism Program in NAU's School of Communication and in the Environmental Sciences Program in NAU's College of Arts and Sciences.

Affiliations include Parker's role as a Partnership Leader for Second Nature, a non-profit organization dedicated to environmental education in colleges and universities. She is a member of the leadership team for The Ponderosa Project at NAU, an interdisciplinary faculty effort to introduce environmental sustainability issues across the curriculum at NAU, and she is a member of the outreach committee for NAU's Center for Sustainable Environments.

Ms. Parker is the author of the book: *Environmental Communication: Messages, Media & Methods*, 1995 and 1997 editions, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co. She is also the author of many scholarly articles and has published in *Jounalism Quarterly.* A former journalist for more than 15 years, she has also authored hundreds of published newspaper articles, magazine articles, and photographs.

Degrees held by Parker include a Master of Arts in College Education with an emphasis in Journalism and Public Relations from Northern Arizona University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education with an emphasis in Biology and General Science from Arizona State University. She has nearly 25 years of experience teaching at secondary, community, and higher education levels.

Current research interests and projects include environmental sustainability issues and the communication of environmental issues to audiences.