

PROOF OF CONCEPT WORKSHOP—CONTENT COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

12 FEBRUARY 2018

MEETING BRIEF

Open

- The chair of the workshop, Adjunct Professor Virginia Haussegger, opened the meeting and thanked participants for making the time available to attend.
- Professor Mark Evans, Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), noted at the outset the integral role of communication planning and implementation as part of policy design; he noted its relevance to current work by IGPA on improving policy design through executive education on new policy proposals (NPPs).
- David Pembroke, Head of The Content Group, presented that the overall objectives of the framework were to improve capability among communications practitioners worldwide. This was to be achieved by adding value to products for internal or external communications consumption through, largely, the telling of stories; “We are all in the publishing business now”. Publish, monitor, respond.
 - To make the framework more relevant to government, it was deliberately geared to content communications rather than content marketing.
- David pointed out that, through the advent and use of social networking and similar communications platforms, citizens were now both information consumers and creators. This created both a challenge and risk for communication professionals in competing for communication participants’ time and attention.
- David recorded that it was his Group’s intention that the Framework would be developed as an ‘open standard’ methodology for widespread use by organisations in the government, non-government and commercial sectors.

Overall comments on the draft Framework

- Overall, the Framework was thought to be a useful contribution to communication practice by providing signposts to key planning stages of the communication process.
 - For it to be successful, it would need to be integrated into the continuum of policy development—and for non-communication policy practitioners – policy designers and implementers – to use it as part of their work. It should have as its overall goal end-to-end communication use, overtly geared to the target audience throughout.

- The Framework should not be static. It should be a 'living asset' that should be adapted, tweaked, reviewed and updated.
- The role of behavioural economics and 'nudge theory' in anticipating and providing incentives to citizens and policy participants should be considered.
 - This would enable communications practice to be injected into the core of the policy rationale, rather than being a bolt-on to support consumption.
- It was important to remember that governments' communication products have to appeal to multiple audiences; policies and programs sometimes affect multiple and polarised audience segments.
 - By the draft Framework relying on 'story telling', some audiences could be excluded or antagonised by policy communication.
- It would be important for Evaluation to be included as a prominent and distinct part of the Framework, bringing together disparate review and evaluation elements currently embedded throughout different phases.
- Design of the tool should be conscious that it might be used by not only policy practitioners (and those who implement policy) but regulators too.
- It should clearly link to media strategy and real time engagement
- In short, this suggests that the tool should integrate with most aspects of a Department/agencies workplan. A good way of conceptualising this would be to focus on all those spaces where trust systems need to be built both internally and externally.

Comments on the phases

The tool should begin by identifying its value-added and purpose and presenting the operating principles to underpin the use of the tool. These could link to principles of better policy development.

Phase 1

- There should be a strong understanding of what success looks like from the outset.
- The message must be believable and authentic, otherwise its credibility will be undermined.
- Important to anticipate, understand and have understood by others potential unintended audience impacts and reactions.
- To broaden its usefulness, the framework should record effects and risks of policy communication beyond immediate policy.
- Important to gather evidence through variety of means.

- Market research could and, where possible should, be used to identify audience segmentation and communication/channel preferences.
- The focus in Phase 1 is on building the evidence base.

Phase 2

- Story-telling has its pros and cons—can be an important means of enabling citizens and policy participants to understand their rights, obligations and entitlements through the lens of another—but could be isolating if individuals cannot empathise with the story.
- On governance, important to be clear who is responsible with what to ensure clear accountability for parts of the policy process.
 - Communication professionals should be responsible for communication outputs but not policy outcomes if the policy intent is designed elsewhere.

Phase 3

- To be broadly useful, tool should be scalable organisationally and across sectors—making a single one tool fit *all* situations will render it less effective.
- Language should distinguish between communication outputs and policy outcomes.
- Focus should be clear that it applies across a range of communication tools, including campaign communications as well as social media strategy—presently seems very digital focussed.

Phase 4

- Be clear, from audience feedback, what channels they prefer to consume information.
- The tool could refer to policy experimentation but, if so, be clear through the governance process that risks are clear, and that senior officers and decision-makers are aware (and agree) to risks.

Phase 5

- Keep the tool simple—making it a shopping list of ‘must dos’ will ostracise the audience and render it an undesirable compliance device.
 - It needs to make users’ lives easier not more burdensome.
- Product of tool could be used to construct FAQs—this would make it useful to other parts of the business and encourage its application and adoption. There is potential integration here with development of Artificial Intelligence.
- To make clear that communication is part of the ‘policy continuum’, there should be an overarching framework or architecture that clarifies how the framework relates to policy development and implementation.

- Policy co-design could also be included here.
- This will broaden the tool's usefulness to policy areas as well as communications areas.

Close

Mark Evans thanked participants for attending and noted that IGPA would shortly deliver a program on NPP preparation. Lessons from that program might provide additional input to the development of the tool.

We will also be offering free places to workshop participants on a pilot learning and development programme to be delivered at the end of March.