

Social Marketing and Behavior Change for Environmental Protection

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This brown bag is part of a how-to series that the DER Project Communication group regularly conducts for operations staff. Project leaders share practical strategies on how communication was effectively designed and used to engage stakeholders, change behavior, and mitigate risks - for better project results.

Speaker:

- Raquel (Rocky) Tirona, Vice-President, Rare Philippines
 - Rare is an international NGO helping empower communities in 57 countries to better manage their coastal environment, watersheds and wetlands

Integrating behavior change communication early in project design

- There are many schools of thought and theories on how behaviors change. Some communication approaches use “carrots” (reward/benefits) over “sticks” (punishment) while some appeal to emotions and others, to reason. To effect change, behavior shifts have to be made on a collective level across a group of people.

- Behavior change communication use combinations of tools and approaches from other fields such as advocacy, lobbying, Information, Education and Communication (IEC), Social Marketing, etc.
- Rare uses behavioral change approaches applying:
 - a holistic understanding of human motivation and decision-making
 - an in-depth engagement with a specific target audience
 - to deploy strategies that promote positive behaviors or social norms which are supportive of a social goal
- Rare employs a theory of behavior change that starts with determining project goals, for example, setting up a marine sanctuary in a pre-identified island (“conservation result” in the graphic below), and then work backwards to identify threats and reduce them (“threat reduction”), and determine the behaviors that needed to be changed (“behavior change”):



- To integrate behavior change communication in the projects’ design, development managers would first need to determine the main threats to setting up the marine sanctuary and sustaining it – and more importantly, identify the main elements that can be reduced. To design and plan behavior change approaches, development managers need to ask:
 - Threat reduction: What are the main threats? Which ones can be reduced by the project / program?
 - Is it the rapid depletion of fish stocks? Is solid waste harming the marine life? Is it the damage to the coral reefs?
- Development managers can then map the key groups presenting the most threats, and determine the key behaviors that they need to change to reduce the threats. They can ask:
 - Behavior change: Which groups are responsible for depleting the fish stocks, what are their behaviors now and which of these behavior do they need to change? Which groups are producing and dumping solid waste that harms the marine life, what are they currently doing and what behaviors do they need to change?

Determining the communication approaches



- Most communication campaigns start and end with increasing the knowledge and shifting the attitudes of identified audiences, thus, the bevy of printed materials and the default focus on mass media and social media. Behavioral and communication theorists, however, point out the obvious: people may know that something is good or bad for them or they feel strongly negative or positive about certain issues – but improved knowledge and positive attitudes over an issue do not automatically change behavior.
 - For example, while practically everyone knows that exercise is good for them and responds positively to keeping fit, not everyone translates this knowledge and attitude into behavior – and actually exercise.
 - To integrate behavior change in project design, development managers would first need to ask:
 - Knowledge: what knowledge is needed to increase awareness and shift attitudes?
 - Attitude: What attitudes need to shift for conversations to take place?
- To push improved knowledge and shift attitudes closer to behavior change, communication campaigns will need to spark conversations using interpersonal communication to maximize the strength of peer influence and pressure.
 - After identifying the gaps in knowledge and attitudes, development managers can then ask:
 - Interpersonal communication: What conversations are needed to encourage adoption of new behaviors?
- The barriers to adoption also need to be identified for development managers to determine the critical elements that can obstruct project goals. These are the barriers other than knowledge and attitudes – to set the scope of the communication campaign so other components can be designed to complement communication, and vice-versa.
 - Barrier removal: What are the other barriers to adoption (aside from knowledge and attitudes) – social and cultural, political, economic, others?

Elements of an Effective Behavior Adoption Campaign

- Rare uses what it calls a “pride” campaign to inspire communities to change social norms around how their natural resources are used in everyday life. The following principles are used for fisheries, watershed protection and coastal management but they are also applicable to other sectors:

1. *Principle 1: Conservation (or sustainable development) is about behavior*
 - Half of development work is all about changing behavior as the problems and solutions start with and end with human behavior.
2. *Principle 2: Cross the chasm: people adopt new ideas and behaviors at different rates*
 - Communities change differently. While groups may seem homogenous, they are made up different individuals who adopt new ideas and behaviors at different rates. There will be early adopters of new behaviors, those who will follow the early minority and laggards who may still not be convinced even after communication campaigns end.
 - To be effective and sustainable, a new behavior must cross the chasm from innovators and early adopters to the broader majority.
3. *Principle 3: Know your audience*
 - Within a population, individuals will have different characteristics that influence how they pay attention to, understand and act on different messages. Laggards, for instance, will not be swayed by any more communication message so strategies that can work for them would be enforcement and monitoring.
 - Mapping audiences should include not just their stake on the project, positions on issues and media habits but also their key current behaviors, determinants that would motivate them to change, their needs and wants, and how relevant the behavior changes will be to their lives.
4. *Principle 4: Simplify the choices*
 - The ability to accomplish a targeted change in behavior is an inverse function of the available behavioral options. Studies suggest that people become confused when presented with seven or more options.
 - To be effective, the key behavior to be changed should not only be well-targeted, a campaign should also promote only one specific solution.
5. *Principle 5: Make change worth it*
 - People always weigh whether a change in behavior would benefit them. Effective communication campaigns always put themselves on the shoes of a targeted audience to ask: what's in it for me?
 - A key principle that social marketers always consider is that consumers care first about themselves. Development managers need to recognize that behavior change campaigns should make individuals whose behavior they are trying to change the core focus of efforts – not the mission of the project or organization, or the social goal.
6. *Principle 6: Go beyond knowledge*
 - “Just because you tell me doesn't mean I will believe it.” Addressing the knowledge and attitudes of target audiences are important and necessary, but taken by themselves cannot change behavior.
 - Effective communication campaigns mix communication approaches that target where people are in the behavior change spectrum:
 - Some target audiences may already know and are aware of the need to change behaviors as well as the options to do so – these people require approaches to bring them closer to trying a new behavior

- Some people may have already adopted a new behavior – and may need interventions to sustain the behavior change
- 7. *Principle 7: Speak to the heart*
 - People rarely evaluate whether to try a new behavior entirely from a rational or economic standpoint. Subjective and emotional hooks also strongly influence adoption.
- 8. *Principle 8: Get people talking*
 - Interpersonal communication is essential to behavior change as people usually weigh their decision to try new ideas or behavior by talking with their peers. Peer influence and validation are strong determinants of behavior change.
- 9. *Principle 9: Build a movement*
 - The support and enforcement by a wider group or community increase the likelihood of individual behavior change. Individuals more often than not conform to social standards, and their behavior changes are sustained longer when they become norms.
 - Some behavior changes may take a long time often even after projects are finished. Integrating behavior change interventions into projects require the buy-in of trusted institutions (i.e., local government units, people's organizations, etc.) at the local level, at the very start of a project. These institutions will remain even after project completion, and their stake and investment on the social goals ensure that new behaviors are not just adopted but sustained over time.
- 10. *Principle 10: Remove barriers*
 - Some barriers are not knowledge- or behavior-related but may be linked to supply, policy, infrastructure or combinations of all these. Communication interventions are not stand-alone and will have to work with other project components to introduce and reinforce behavior changes.
 - Behavioral messages asking mothers to vaccinate their children, for example, will not work if the supply chain has not been prepared or is broken in some points – if there are no or not enough vaccine supplies; if the supplies are expired or rendered unusable because they have not been refrigerated at some points; if there are no trained medical personnel who will provide the services; if vaccines are not free and mothers cannot afford them, etc.
- 11. *Principle 11: Measure, monitor and manage*
 - Like any well-planned communication campaign, effective monitoring and evaluation methodologies should be well-thought of and designed at the start of the project. Some behaviors that take time to get adopted (while some are one-time adoption, for instance, vaccination of infants) can be measured in increments and proxies.
- 12. *Principle 12: Plan for the long haul*
 - Since behaviors change does not happen overnight, and sometimes happen beyond the projects' life, development managers must consider building the local capacity and ownership of trusted institutions and groups.