Guiding principles: packaging your key messages

These guiding principles should underlie your communications approach. Focus is often put on the types of communications methods to use - a policy brief, a report, a brochure, a presentation – rather than how to package a message so it sticks in the target stakeholder's mind and helps them to make decisions. Taking the time to apply these principles will make your communications work more efficient and targeted. They cover:

- **Knowing your stakeholders:** What are their needs and what are your solutions?
- **Getting your message to stick:** Use a set of principles to make create sticky ideas

Knowing your stakeholders

"Not everyone will find your research useful. You need to know who your audience is and what information they need in order to communicate with them effectively." – Research to Action[3]

To motivate change in behaviour, you need to tailor your message to your stakeholders so that it is as relevant as possible to their needs.[4] Therefore be as specific as possible when identifying your stakeholders.

Use the questions below to put yourself into the shoes of your stakeholders. The answers will help you to target your key messages to their needs and use appropriate communications methods.

Interest and attitude

- How engaged are your stakeholders in your issue?
- Why do you think this issue is important to your stakeholders?
- How receptive will they be to your argument?
- Are they open to change?
- What, if any, political or organisational constraints do they operate in?

Knowledge

- What do they know about this issue?
- What information do they need to engage with your issue?
- What has been their exposure to this issue previously?
- How much technical knowledge do they have?

Communication methods

- How can you answer their information needs?
- Where do they normally get their information from?
- How much time do they have to listen to your key messages?
- What drives them to change their behaviour, e.g. votes?
- What challenges might you face when presenting your key messages to them?
- How can you overcome these challenges?

Use this information to complete Tool 1: Developing a communications workplan.

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[3] Reference: http://www.researchtoaction.org (accessed July 2015)

[4] Reference: http://smallbusiness.chron.com/tips-knowing-target-audience-communicating-within-organization-36023.html (accessed July 2015)

Getting your message to stick

"If a message can't be used to make predictions or decisions it is without value, no matter how accurate or comprehensive it is." – Chip Heath and Dan Heath, authors of Made to Stick

What are you trying to achieve when carrying out communications work? You want to get your stakeholders to act, e.g. take part in your innovation, use your research in funding decisions etc. We all have good ideas we want people to use, e.g. use your innovation.

Sadly, a good idea is not enough to result in change on its own. You need to make your messages stick in the minds of your stakeholders. You need your messages to be understood, remembered and have a lasting impact. You need to change your stakeholders' opinions or behaviour and get them to act.

"A lie can get halfway around the world before the truth can even get its boots on." – Mark Twain, Author

The good news is, you don't need a huge advertising budget to get your message to stick – think of the urban myths that spread without an advertising agency's help, e.g. negative rumours about vaccine campaigns.

> ➢ Read the Stand Up Kid – an example of a "sticky" mental health communications campaign, p10

The curse of knowledge

The reason it is so hard to get make ideas stick is due to the curse of knowledge. Once we know something, it is hard to imagine not knowing it.

SUCCESs

Luckily, there are six principles, making up the acronym "SUCCESs", we can use to help us make our ideas stick:

1. **S**imple – what is the core of our message?
2. **U**nexpected - How do we get our audience to pay attention?
3. **C**oncrete - How do we make our ideas clear?
4. **C**redible - How do we make people believe our ideas?
5. **E**motional - How do we get people to care about our ideas?
6. **S**tories - How do we get people to act on our ideas?

These principles are the result of analysing hundreds of sticky ideas by brothers Chip Heath, Professor of Organizational Behaviour at Stanford University, and Dan Heath, Senior Fellow at Duke University. You can read more examples and details about all of these principles in their book *Made to Stick*.[5]

Using SUCCESs in communications products

The SUCCESs principles are especially helpful when drafting your impact summary (Tool 3) – a short summary of the key impacts your project has had. Your impact summary can be used for multiple purposes:

- **Elevator pitch**: One to three minute speech to grab the attention of your stakeholders and get them to change their behaviour.
- **Policy brief**: A concise summary presenting research or project findings that address an urgent and relevant problem and can offer evidence-based recommendations for action.

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[5] Reference: C Heath, D Heath, **Made to Stick**, Random House, 1st edition, 2007. ISBN: 1400064287 http://heathbrothers.com/books/made-to-stick/ (accessed July 2015)

Simple – What is the core of your message?

Simple messages mean stripping your ideas down to the **single most important thing** to say (see *Example: Simple and complicated messages* box). Simple does not mean dumbing down, it means uncomplicated.

A simple message should:

- be profound and have meaning
- help people know how to act

"Simple" can be split into two parts:

1. **Finding the core of the message**: Prioritise your messages so that your ideas are stripped down to the most important idea. If you say ten things, but don't really say anything substantial, your stakeholders will get decision paralysis, not knowing which idea to remember and act on.
2. **Making your message compact:** Explaining new ideas takes attention and attention is already scarce so use what your stakeholder already knows. Therefore, research your stakeholder so you know which analogies to use.

Example: Simple and complicated messages

Simple • One message • Compact, uses analogies	Complicated • Many messages • Explains all the detail, no analogies
If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.	It has been shown that a person working on a business idea on their own will make progress very quickly, perhaps in a year or two. However, if that person worked with a team - of about eight - 20 people in a small business or 100-200 if it is a bigger company - they will be able to make their business grow in a way that is sustainable.
Think twice before laughing along, mental illness is no joke.	Research shows that one in ten young people will experience a mental health problem and, sadly, 90% of those young people will experience stigma and discrimination. They may be laughed at or bullied. This kind of stigma stops young people seeking help. Young people need to support their friends with mental health problems by think about what life might be like for their friends, talking to them and not laughing at them.
Train the public using Mental Health First Aid	Giving lay people training on how to help someone experiencing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis could help to save lives. The training outlines simple, memorable steps for the lay person to learn and use in an emergency.

Unexpected - How do we get our stakeholders to pay attention? And how do we keep it?

The unexpected principle helps us to grab and keep the attention of our stakeholders.

Surprise gets attention: This happens when our guessing machines fail; we expect something and then it doesn't happen or the opposite occurs. Target your stakeholder's guessing machines by asking yourself:

- What is counterintuitive about your core message?
- What are the unexpected implications of your core message?

Interest keeps attention: Curiosity happens when we feel a gap in our knowledge.

- How will make your stakeholder curiosity so you can fill their knowledge gaps?

Concrete - How do we make our ideas clear? How do we overcome the curse of knowledge?

Research often deals with the abstract and conceptual. Being concrete is the only way to ensure everyone has the same understanding of the concept.

- **Be concrete and use sensory language**: If you can imagine something with your sense - i.e. see it, feel it, hear it, touch it - it's concrete. Can you use a prop to explain your message, e.g. a mobile phone with a mhealth training app on it?
- **Paint a specific mental picture**: E.g. it's easier to imagine a friend who lives with a mental health disorder, rather than any person in the world with a mental health disorder.
- **Use memory hooks**: There are many different types of memories, from feelings to images to smells. Imagine them as hooks. Certain ideas will loop into more memory hooks and therefore stick better. By turning a concept, such as living with a mental health disorder, into an experience for your target stakeholder, e.g. through role play or a watching a play or video about a person growing up with a mental health disorder, you tap into more memory hooks and make your idea stickier.

Credible - How do we make people believe ideas?

Information comes from many sources, why should our audience believe our idea? Understanding your stakeholders helps here. If you are communicating with a funder, they may have heard of your organisation, e.g. African Mental Health Foundation, and citing the name of your organisation could be enough to mark credibility. If you are communicating with a service user, they may not have heard of your organisation and you may need to make sure your message is endorsed by community leader to get credibility.

Credibility from outside: Use authorities (e.g. World Health Organization or Vikram Patel, Professor of International Mental Health) or living proof (e.g. a lay person who was convinced by the mental health training she received).

Credibility from inside: Use statistics that show a relationship, concrete details or the Sinatra Test:

- **Statistics to illustrate relationships:** Statistics are rarely meaningful in and of themselves. It's more important for people to remember the relationship than the number. Bring them to life by contextualising them in terms that are more human, more every day. As public health professionals, we love statistics but for many they are difficult to conceptualise, e.g. "one in ten young people will experience a mental health disorder" is hard to understand when heard in isolation. Relating statistics to every day scenarios, like a school classroom, make them easier to understand (To see how, read the Stand Up Kid – an example of a "sticky" mental health communications campaign, p10).
- **Concrete, specific details:** A person's knowledge of details is often a good proxy for expertise. An idea with tangible, concrete, specific details is more believable. Giving the exact location, the service user's name, the exact time, or the service provider's name makes the idea more credible.
- **Sinatra Test: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere":** Frank Sinatra sang this line in his famous song, "New York, New York". Has your innovation been taken up by another funder or used in a different country? If so, a local government maybe more likely to adopt it.

Testable credentials: i.e. 'try before you buy'. Can you get your stakeholder to test the innovation you are promoting? E.g. If you want to provide community health workers training for detecting depression, ask your stakeholder to try to detect depression between two actors – one acting symptoms of depression, one who is stressed and teary about a decision they have to make and get them to try to detect which has depression *without* having had training. Then give them some basic tips and get them to try again. They may see how the training will help with detecting depression.

Emotional - How do we get people to care about our ideas?

To get people to care about our ideas, we need to make them feel something. Feelings inspire action. Emotional does not always mean sad. Emotion includes disgust, anger, outrage, hope.

People care about people, not ideas
"If I look at the mass, I won't act. If I look at the one, I will." – Mother Theresa

Charities often use Mother Theresa's idea, e .g. instead of asking people to donate to "improve mental health worldwide", tell a story about a specific person who needs support to treat a mental health disorder using emotion – sadness, hope, anger - to get your stakeholders to care.

Associate with something people already care about. Linking something your stakeholder does care about with something they don't yet care about creates an emotional association, e.g. If people with HIV were treated in the same way people with mental health disorders are, there would be outrage.

Instead of "What's in it for me?" it's more "What's in it for my group?" People make decisions on practicalities – will this decision give me more money and security? But people are more likely to make decisions based on their ideal selves - "What would a person *like me* do in this situation?" E.g. Appeal to public health donors wanting to fund the 'next big thing' by making them think: "What would a progressive donor do? Fund mental health!"

"I don't want to be like *that* kind of a person" Identity can be a stronger influence than self-interest, e.g. I don't want to be a Minister for Health with a bad legacy.

Stories - How do you get people to act on your idea?

The story must reflect your core message, e.g. tell a success story of another country which implemented your policy objective and got results. By telling a story you engage the audience and involve people with your idea, asking them to participate with you.

Stories contain wisdom. They tell you how to solve problems, like a flight simulator for the brain, so that when you are in the real situation, you can use the story to help you to solve the problem and make a decision, e.g. a story of a community leader who used your innovation to reduce a mental health burden in their village may help other community leaders do the same.

Anyone can spot a story. There are three different story plots that you can use to help you spot a story within your project. If you find a story with one of these plots that matches your objective, they may help you to inspire your stakeholders to act in a way that you want them to:

1. **Challenge plots** inspire us by appealing to our perseverance and courage. They make us want to work harder, take on new challenges, and/or overcome obstacles. These stories are about obstacles that seem daunting to the protagonist, e.g. a person speaks about their mental health disorder in order to help others get through similar situations despite experiencing discrimination and stigma within their community. This is a good plot for advocating for change despite obstacles.

2. **Connection plots** inspire us in social ways. They make us want to help others, be more tolerant of others, work with others, love others. These stories are about people who develop a relationship that bridges a gap – racial, class, ethnic, religious, demographic, or otherwise, e.g. a community leader helps a person in their village with schizophrenia to access biomedical treatment leading to that person being accepted back into the community. This is a good plot for destigmatising mental health disorders.

3. **Creative plots** make us want to do something different, to be creative, and to experiment. This involves someone making a breakthrough, solving a long-standing puzzle or tackling a problem in an innovative way, e.g. a country with a lack of psychologists uses mental health service users as peer-support workers to give basic psychosocial support to people recently diagnosed with a mental health disorder. This is a good plot to inspire researchers to develop innovations to improve mental health.

Example: Stand up kid – a "sticky" mental health communications campaign

Charity: Time to Change

Campaign aim: To improve the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of young people and families around mental health in the UK. The campaign included a short awareness raising film (based on research with young people), a poster, a school assembly presentation and lesson materials. [Read more about the campaign].

Target stakeholder: Young people in the UK at Secondary School (age 12 – 18)

Activities: Video of fictional scenario aimed at changing the attitudes of young people around mental health.

Video: The Stand Up Kid film is aimed at stamping out stigma faced by young people affected by mental health problems in the West Midlands, UK. The film was promoted through Facebook and on selected websites that young people used. Watch the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE5Ip60_HJk

Description of video: A teenage boy comes into class late, looking down and being sullen. He is berated by his teacher for being late and the other kids in the class snigger at him. He tells a joke. The class laugh. He gets told off by the teacher.

Suddenly, he stands on a chair and starts telling another joke "How many teachers does it take to change a lightbulb?" He is challenging his teacher. The teacher sighs and rolls his eyes and the other kids laugh. He starts another joke: "How many depressed people does it take to change a lightbulb?" His classmates look uncomfortable. He answers: "Doesn't matter, it's always dark isn't it?" His classmates laugh uncomfortably.

He suddenly lifts his arm and says "When you wake up with a dead arm, you can't control it, can't make it do anything. Imagine that in your whole body, your mind, your whole life. Remember when I was off school? Remember all the jokes? What options are you choosing Michael? Getting out of bed? Staying awake? Coming to class? Only that's when I was so low, getting out of bed wasn't an option for me. Even on Facebook, I changed my status to 'still skiving' [slang for playing truant from school]. It's funny isn't it? Just makes it a little harder. Sometimes it's already too hard…I mean you lot are my mates, right?"

He then sits down in silence, looking confused and sad. No one says anything and people look around in awkward silence.

Then one girl gets up and stands on her chair, looking defiant. The sound of the classroom carries on but the screen goes black and a message in white appears, saying "3 of your classmates will experience a mental health problem." It fades and another piece of white text appears: "Think twice before laughing along, mental illness is no joke", and again: "Make a stand and help spread the word".

The last piece of text is the charity's logo "it's time to talk, it's time to change. Let's end mental health discrimination." It gives a web link for viewers to learn more: "Time-to-change.org.uk/standup". There are logos at the bottom from MIND charity, Rethink Mental Illness charity, Comic Relief charity and the UK Department of Health, all leading organizations in the UK.

Is it sticky?

- ✓ **Simple:** The message is clear and concise – "Think twice before laughing along, mental illness is no joke. Make a stand and help spread the word"
- ✓ **Unexpected:** At first you think the boy walking in late is lazy and the class clown. He stands on his chair telling jokes and not taking his school work seriously. When he asks "How many depressed people does it take to change a lightbulb?" it breaks our guessing machines. We don't expect him to make a joke about depression in that way. It makes you curious about why he brought up depression and makes you want to know more about him.
- ✓ **Concrete:** You can see the boy in the classroom with his friends, just like any other ordinary boy. You identify with the character. When he talks about a dead arm, this is something we have all experienced. Using this analogy for depression makes the audience realise this is something the boy doesn't have control over. The boy standing on his chair and the girl standing on her chair physically echo the call to action to make a stand.
- ✓ **Credible:** The organisation, Time to Change, is a credible organisation. The logos at the end support the credibility of the message. The statistics are first shown on a human scale – you see the boy and the girl stand up in a classroom – and are then written in a way that relates to the setting: three people in one class will be living with a mental health disorder.
- ✓ **Emotional:** When you watch the boy talk, you feel as uncomfortable as his classmates. You were laughing along with them a minute ago and now you know the truth of the boy's lateness. You empathise with the boy and feel him struggle. It makes you care about him.
- ✓ **Story:** The whole film tells a short story. It is a connection plot that makes us want to help others, be more tolerant of others, work with others, love others. It inspires us to act – not laugh, but support, stand up and spread the word. It provides a solution for you to learn more about your part in the story by giving a link to the website.

Engagement: Since its launch in September 2012, the film has been viewed on You Tube 1,143,984 times (across all age ranges, all countries). Between 17 September 2012 and 31 January 2013, 39,765 young people (14 to 18) watched the film in the UK.

Outcome: The film was one part of a wider programme of work that has contributed to:
- A 10% improvement in young people's mental health knowledge
- A 6% reduction in the amount of discrimination experienced by young people with personal experience of mental health problems.

[Read more on the Time to Change impact webpage].