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The Leadership Communication Tool Kit

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Preface

We can certainly all agree that management and communication are closely related. And we can probably agree that if you want to be an excellent manager, you must be good at communicating. But what does it mean to be a good communicator?

The purpose of this tool kit is to provide you with some communication tools that can give you a professional approach to your communication tasks.

The Leadership Communication Tool Kit is a simple communication tool that helps you adapt your communication to your target group.

This booklet contains the short version of the tool kit. The more detailed version can be found in our book *Leadership Communication in Theory and Practice*. The book also describes the prerequisites that must be present in order to succeed with communication, such as an open communication environment.

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The material is a customized version of the Danfoss Leadership Communication Tool Kit, originally devised in 2011 in connection with the communication training of managers at Danfoss A/S.

Introduction

It's senior management's responsibility to communicate the company's overall strategic direction and to ensure that employees' immediate manager conveys the message.

It's the immediate manager's responsibility to communicate the strategic decisions while explaining the importance of these decisions for the department, team and individual employees.

The best way to plan your communication is to relate to the following seven elements:

- Target group
- Objective
- Message
- Anticipated reactions
- Channel
- Timing
- Responsibility.
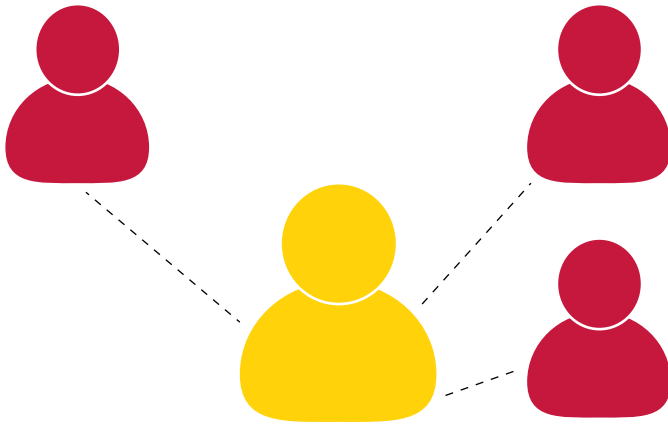
» Face-to-face communication is the employee's preferred communication channel for important information. A survey shows that 68% of employees prefer face-to-face communication, 21% prefer e-mail, 6% the phone and 5% written communication.
(Rogen International, New York)

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◎ **Target group**	⟳ **Objective**	💬 **Message**	👍 **An... rea...**
Who is the message for?	**What do I want to achieve with the message?**	**What is the key message?**	**What re... should ... anticipa... the targ... group(s...**
• Directly affected • Indirectly affected • Not affected	• Information • Changing opinions or behaviour • Engagement/ ownership	• Be precise, short and specific • Three points that answers who, what, where and when	• Neutr... • Surpr... • Resis... • Ange... • Enthu... • Etc.

Anticipated reactions	Channel	Timing	Responsi-bility
What reactions do I anticipate from my target group(s)?	What/which communication channel(s) should I choose?	When should I communicate?	Who is responsible for communicating?
General organised resistance or enthusiasm	• Information (transmission): e-mail, intranet • Acceptance (dialogue): Face-to-face meetings/ social media • Ownership (involvement): Face-to-face meetings	• Adjust with other communi-cation plans	• Manager(s)

Target group

When you prepare messages, you must first consider who the target groups are. Who is the message for?

- Your department?
- A group of employees?
- The entire company?

There is a tendency to focus on what you want to say before you consider the target groups. This may result in the communication not being tailored to the needs of the target group, and you will therefore not achieve the objective of the communication.

When you define your target groups, you must also consider who is directly, indirectly or not affected by the impact of the message.

The questions on the next page can help the sender to understand the target group's needs.

Understand your target group	Target group #1	Target group #2	Target group #...
What does your target group already know?			
What relevance does your message have for the target group?			
What would they like to know?			
What do they think they know?			
What is new to them?			
What can prevent them from doing what you ask them?			
What relationship do you have with your target group?			
Is there a case of an equal relationship between you and your target group?			
Does your target group regard you as trustworthy?			
What is the target group's opinion of you?			
Is your target group comfortable or uncomfortable with respect to unknown parameters?			
Does your target group prefer an indirect or direct style of communication?			

Objective

As the saying goes; you must know where you are going before you can find out how to get there.

The same applies to communication: You must know what you want to achieve before you can formulate your message and decide how you want to communicate it.

The objective of your communication could be, for example:

- Information and knowledge
- Changing opinions/behaviour
- Motivation and engagement
- Support and ownership of a new strategy.

Objectives can vary from target group to target group, and the same applies to the form of communication, as each form has a specific objective: In the communication form transmission, the target groups must receive the message, in the communication form dialogue, they must understand the message, and in the communication form involvement, they must interpret the message and so take ownership.

Message

What do you want to communicate to your target group, and how do you formulate it?

Consider the following when you formulate the message:

- Identify your key message
- Adapt the communication to each target group.

The key message – what?

Every form of communication has a key message, which is the essence of what you want to communicate.

Ask yourself: "What is it I mainly want my target group to know?". The answer gives you a good idea of what your key message is.

The key message must be precise, short and concrete. Formulate three points corresponding to the wh-questions who, what, where, when, etc.

A key message helps you cut to the bone and ensure consistency in your message to all target groups.

Customize the communication – how?

When the target group(s) are in place, and you have formulated the key message, you need to formulate what you want to communicate to the target group. If you have several target groups, it may be necessary to formulate several different messages depending on the needs of your target groups.

- Start with the key message, so the target group immediately gets an idea of what it's about.
- Then elaborate the key message with facts, examples and details that are important to each target group.
- Explain how the message correlates to a strategy (the common thread).
- Explain in more detail what it means for the individual target group.
- Repeat the key message so that the target group remembers it.

Note when choosing involvement as a form of communication, the message must not be formulated in advance of the communication. It happens in a communicative situation with the employees, where you and your employees interpret and formulate the message.

In the case of the involvement, it's crucial that you as a manager allow room for the employees to reflect on the message. You can achieve this by following these ten points of inspiration:

1. Be value-neutral.
2. Accept feedback and criticism.
3. Listen rather than convince.

4. Accept different worldviews.
5. Be curious.
6. Be investigative.
7. Be concerned with understanding what the other person understands.
8. Show sincere interest in the other person and their concerns.
9. Focus on employees' relationship to change.
10. Listen for the unsaid.

Anticipated reactions

The target groups interpret the message in every communication situation based on personal experience.

Many managers have been in a situation where they have been surprised by the target group's reactions, primarily because they haven't thought through the possible reactions in advance. If you do that, you risk appearing uncertain. This may result in that you seem untrustworthy and therefore you experience that the message doesn't resonate with employees.

Ask yourself how you think your target group will react: Neutral? Surprised? Reluctantly? Excited? Angrily?

If you have prepared yourself for different reactions - from enthusiasm to opposition, even anger - then already in your message, you can pre-empt the reactions through the choice of words and by proactively answering the questions that these reactions might result in. You can also prepare some possible questions and answers, which you can use in a communication situation.

Channel

In order to succeed in your communication, it's crucial that the form of communication and communication channel are linked.

Select the communication channel based on the form of communication:

Form of communication	Communication channel
Transmission	E-mail, intranet
Dialogue	Face-to-face meetings, phone calls, online meetings, social media
Involvement	Face-to-face meetings

There is a difference whether you choose verbal or written communication. When choosing a communication channel that allows you to communicate face-to-face, then you will have a higher possibility together with your target group of achieving a common understanding of the message, even if the communication channel, for example, is an online meeting. Written communication doesn't have the same possibilities.

Timing

Make sure the timing is right:

- Are there other communication issues along the way that can backfire on your planned communication? If so, make sure that the messages are adapted.
- Make sure that the employees who are directly affected are informed before the information is transmitted throughout the organization.
- Inform and prepare your immediate managers about the communication, so they can answer any questions from employees.

Responsibility

Communication responsibility lies with the manager!

Communication can't be outsourced, as it's part of management responsibility. Of course, this doesn't mean that you can't get support from communication advisors and HR consultants.

Understanding the interaction

Professional communication is about understanding the interaction between the seven elements as illustrated in the communication diamond on the next page. In preparation of a communication task, you use the tool kit point-by-point as described in this booklet. However, often it seems you must go back and re-evaluate the individual elements because, for instance, you have overlooked a target group or recognize that you must use another form of communication. Therefore, use the communication diamond to ensure that you have considered all aspects of your preparation.

Thorough preparation is the key to any successful communication, therefore, allow sufficient time for planning.