

Tool: Understanding the role of communication



What can I do with this tool?

Understanding the role of communication helps you to manage realistic expectations about the impact of your communication. It gives you insight to what degree communication alone can help you reach your goal, or whether you need other tools on the side to do the job and which ones you need.

For whom is this tool meant?

For professionals who help implement international agreements on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development

What knowledge is presumed for using this tool?

To effectively use this tool, it is required to understand Key subjects 1 - 5 of the [course Strategic communication](#) on [Frogleaps.org](#).

When can I use it?

It is never too late to focus on understanding the role of communication. However we advise you to do it as a first step after you analyze your target audiences. The sooner, the better! It will help you to be more strategic in the use of communication and be more successful in your project.

How can I understand the role of communication to reach my goal?

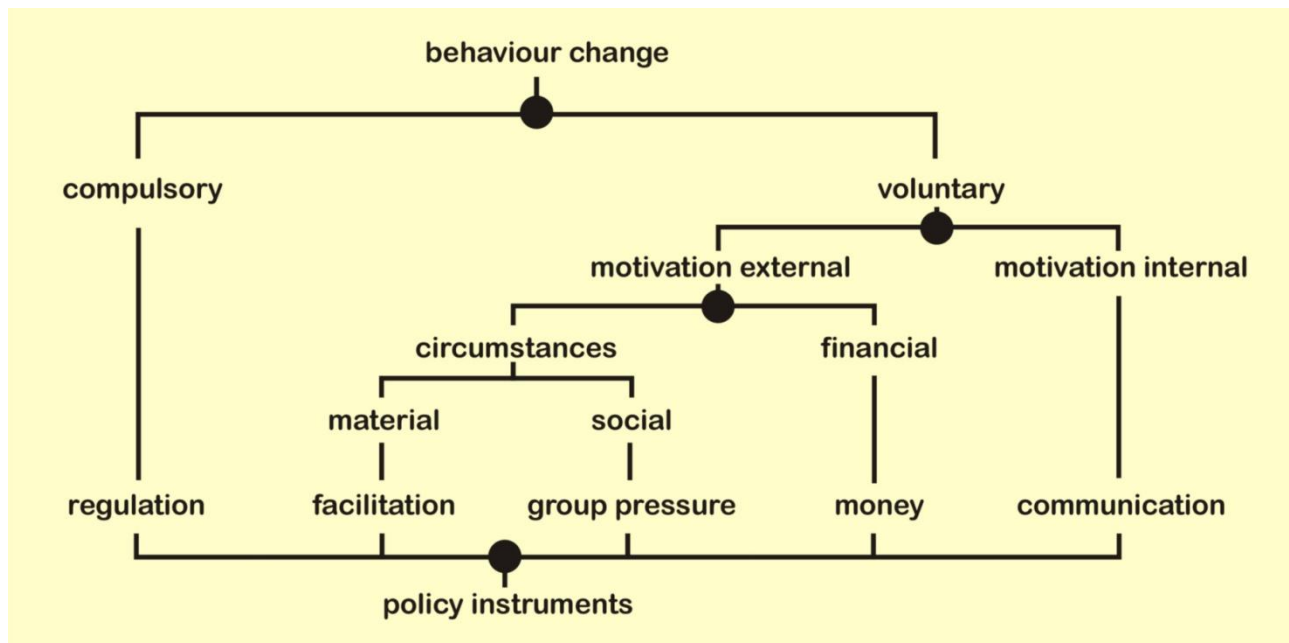
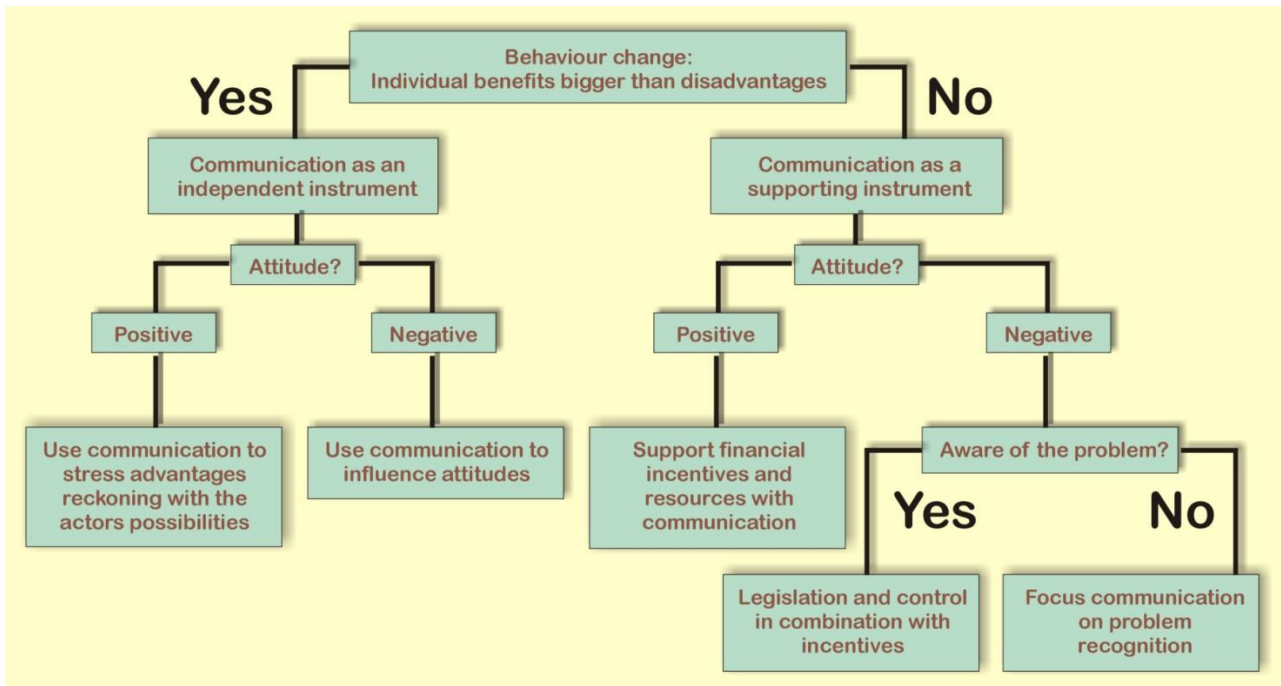
Having too high expectations of communication leads to failure

When your expectations of communication are too high, you will fail. Before you design your communication strategy, you need a realistic judgment: can communication alone reach my goal? Or do I need other interventions on the side to do the job? For instance:

- Rules. To forbid wrong behavior or to prescribe right behavior.
- Enforcement of rules. Without enforcement, rules are a paper tiger.
- Money. To make right behavior rewarding.
- Infrastructure. To help implement the right behavior.

The diagram on the next page helps to clarify the role of communication, from a behavior change perspective. Depending on the effect of the proposed behavior change on perceived benefits and on attitudes, you can either use communication as a sole instrument or you need support from other instruments.

Identifying potential role of communication with a tool



Source: Van Woerkum, *Behavior change and policy instruments*.

Exercise 1: Define the behavior change you ask from your target audience

Find a quiet place with a flip chart and some markers. Explain to your colleagues the Communication challenge and the need to find out what you can expect from Communication in your case. Ask them to help you answer the following questions to assess the potential role of Communication.

1. Define the behavior change you ask from your target audience

Example from Our case of Simona: *'Visitors during the 1st of May celebrations should not disturb the Natura 2000 site with the Pulsatilla Grandis by driving, parking, camping, making fires, mountain biking etc. anywhere they please on the mountain meadow but do so at areas where they cannot harm biodiversity.'*

Ask whether the desired behavior change is clear, if not improve the description. Then discuss the next exercise.

Exercise 2: Analyze to see if the individual benefits of this behavior change bigger than the disadvantages

Use the information you have gathered about your audience on page 2 of the Tool Understand your target audience. Are the disadvantages of the proposed behavior change bigger than benefits or advantages? If so, communication is best used as a supporting instrument (e.g. to explain new regulations). Using communication alone will not result in the desired behavior change. Write down the answers on the flip chart or in the table below:

2. Are the individual benefits of this behavior change bigger than the disadvantages?

Example from Our case of Simona: *'The benefits for the individual visitors during the 1st of May celebrations of driving, parking, camping, making fires etc. only at areas where they cannot harm biodiversity are less than the disadvantages of this new behavior. For instance, they don't not know where these areas are and how to get there. Other tools are needed for the desired behavior change (designated areas for parking, camping, blocking of roads, signs, etc.).'*

Exercise 3: Analyze attitudes towards the behavior change

Discuss whether the attitudes of your audience towards change are positive or negative. Write down the answers to the following question on the flip chart or in the table below: *Is the attitude of your audience towards behavior change positive or negative?*

3. Is the attitude of your audience towards behavior change positive or negative?

Example from Our case of Simona: *'Visitors of the mountain meadow during the 1st of May celebrations were positive towards a 1st of May without conflicts, with more safety for children playing and undisturbed and happy family gatherings. Their basic attitudes towards change – if made easy by supporting infrastructure – was positive.'*

If the **benefits of behavior change and attitudes are both positive**, discuss how you can promote voluntary behavior change using communication as an independent instrument. Internal motivation might be sufficient to change the behavior, and communication can be used to stress advantages of the new behavior.

If the **benefits of behavior are positive but the attitude is negative**, discuss how you can turn this negative attitude into a positive attitude using communication.

If the **benefits of the behavior are negative but the attitudes positive**, use communication to explain and inform supporting interventions like rules, infrastructure and incentives.

If the **benefits of the behavior and attitudes are both negative**, the role of communication depends on the awareness of the problem. Is the target group aware of the problem? If the target group already knows about the issue then a change in practice will only occur with rules, infrastructure and incentives. Communication can be used to explain these interventions.

If the target group lacks knowledge about the problem, communication should also be focused on problem recognition.

Example: *In the beginning of Our case of Simona, Communication was used to invite stakeholders for a round table to discuss the problems & solutions for the 1st of May Celebrations. The desired behavior in this case was attending a meeting. As all or most stakeholders were dissatisfied with the Celebrations, not attending was less attractive than attending, so everybody joined the round table. The role of Communication was stressing the advantages of finding a joint solution and making sure the round table was held at a moment that was suitable for participants. Read more in [Key subject 2](#) how Simona used communication as an supporting instrument to reach her goal.*

Exercise 4: Define the role of communication in your case

Which role could communication play in your case?

Example from Our case of Simona: *'The mountaineering club and hunters club inform their members prior the 1st May celebrations. Now visitors know what to expect. Communication during the 1st of May: signs & instructions for park visitors and information stand about the protected area for the people who want to know more about biodiversity.'*