

Influencing behavioral change through effective communication strategies

The REFRAME project aims at establishing regional cooperative arrangements between regional suppliers and large-scale consumers. At the moment, however, regionally produced food is only a small part of all the goods that are offered to the large suppliers. Therefore, a transition must take place. Solid communication strategies could help with this transition as they have the ability to influence behavior.

In communication, it is often assumed that providing information is enough to bring about a behavioral change. However, both science and practice show that providing information is in most cases not sufficient to realize this type of change. Therefore, we will have to consider different aspects of the current behavior in order to adequately respond to these aspects. The goal is an effective way of communication, which can trigger behavioral change. This document describes a step-by-step guide that can serve as a basis for an effective communication strategy.

1. Identify the behavior that needs to be changed. Why should this behavior change?

For example: when people are buying groceries in their supermarket, they tend to grab the conventional products instead of the regionally produced goods. We want to change this behavior, as locally produced foods have many important benefits for the region. Additionally, we want to create a stable sales market for these goods, so that local entrepreneurs can guarantee their existence.

2. Describe the behavior that is desired.

What are the ultimate goals? Are there intermediate goals? Try to describe these goals as specific as possible.

For example: we want people to buy locally produced food more often.

3. Define the target group.

Who do you want to reach with the communication strategy? Try to get as much relevant information as possible about this target group.

For example: the target group consists of customers of local supermarket X. This is a group of mainly highly educated people. They spend a relatively large amount of money on their groceries.

4. Identify as many factors as possible that might be barriers to the desired behavior.

Sometimes, these factors can influence each other. These cause-and-effect-relationships can become more clear when they are drawn into a scheme.

For example: people might not buy locally produced foods, because they think that it is more expensive than conventional products. They might also think that the quality is less good, or maybe they are unaware of the fact that locally produced food is being offered in their supermarket. It might be possible that one doesn't know how to prepare unconventional foods.

5. Which of these factors (see no. 4) have the strongest impact on behavior?

Assess the potential impact each factor could have, if you overcome the barriers.

For example: not knowing that locally produced food is being offered is a great barrier; if people are not aware of the existence of the products, they cannot intentionally buy them.

6. Which of these factors (see no. 4) are relatively easy to modify?

Some factors are easier to overcome than others.

For example: creating awareness of the fact that the local supermarket sells locally produced foods might be much simpler than teaching people to prepare unconventional food products.

7. Taking impact and modifiability into account, which of the listed factors are the most obvious to change? Can you use one or more factors as a "target"?

For example: awareness of the fact that locally produced foods are being sold has both a large impact on behavior and is relatively easy to modify. Therefore, it would make a good target factor for a campaign or communication strategy.

8. What kind of strategy or intervention could be designed?

The strategy should address the target factor(s) (see no. 7) and fit the target group (see no. 3).

9. Measure the effectiveness of the communication strategy

It is good to have an idea of the situation before the start of the communication strategy, so that it can be compared with the situation during or after the strategy. In advance of carrying out the strategy, think of good measuring methods.

For example: measure the number of locally produced foods that are being sold per week. Do this before the start of the communication campaign, when the campaign has been running for two weeks and two weeks after the campaign has ended.

A Report presenting best practise
'Policy decision taking on urban food
policies and intentions'
Date: 14 February 2019

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Practical application

The steps were used by the municipality of Groningen as a part of the communication strategy on climate adaptation. The goals of this strategy is to create awareness among inhabitants of the municipality about the topic of climate adaptation, and stimulate them to green their gardens. By responding to mutual relationships between residents that live in the same neighborhoods and personal benefits, people are encouraged to get engaged in climate-friendly behavior. Additionally, the steps will be used in a new communication strategy of the municipality of Groningen that focuses on waste management.



Do you want to learn more?

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