



2019 | BRIGHTON

Teaching Leaders on Developing and Implementing Organizational Communication Campaigns

Organizer: Thomas P. Galvin, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract

This PDW aims to raise interest towards the development of knowledge, tools, and methods associated with deliberate organizational communication campaigns, whose purpose is to accomplish a communication outcome – whether to promote the organization’s message, address criticisms against the organization, successfully defuse an opponent’s messages, adjust the organization’s own behaviors and culture, or a combination of the above. This has been an important topic in the U.S. since the September 11 attacks as opponents proved better able to coordinate and deliver messages countering U.S. intentions. Attempts to develop ways and means for improving communications failed for various reasons, in particular because of misalignments between the leaders’ messages and the organizations’ own behaviors. Reviews of military case studies of successful communication campaigns suggest that alignment of the organization’s context, message content, and internal communication processes is important, but these are not consistently achieved. The goal of the PDW is to present insights from these cases to discuss approaches toward general approaches for developing and implementing organizational communication campaigns.

Overview and Justification for PDW

Right now we spend too much time on coordination and process. We have now created organizations whose sum is less than the parts. The enemy is fast, flexible, and more attuned to the cultures where they operate. We talk Narrative, but Narrative is where they beat us. We do messages and themes, and our opponents do Narrative and tap into cultures and religion – Mark Laity, Former NATO Chief of Strategic Communication (Öncü, Bucher, & Aytacı, 2009)

The purpose of the PDW is to bridge theory and practice in addressing a complex and difficult organizational challenge. The above quote exemplifies challenges that, at a political level, the U.S. and its NATO allies has faced continuously since the September 11 attacks of 2001. Subsequently, these have trickled down to the organizational level within the respective governments, including the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

The term *campaign* has been used to represent the strategy behind exercising coordinated activities at the organizational level. *Strategic communication campaigns* (Botan, 1997) applies this term to encompass communication activities (i.e., words and actions) to achieve a specified purpose such as promoting the organization or correcting misperceptions about the organization. Such campaigns are often associated with public relations and marketing campaigns (Crawford & Okigbo, 2014), public diplomacy to “persuade the people of another nation to influence their government’s policies” (Botan, 1997), and the “personal” methods, plans, and rhetoric associated with the organizations’ leader (Farwell, 2012; Paul, 2011; Eder, 2011). Efforts by internal and external consultants sought to improve DoD communication processes (DoD, 2009) and better integrate communication strategies in overall operations (The Joint Staff, 2017).

Unfortunately, most communication campaigns do not achieve their goals (Tatham, 2013; Öncü, Bucher, & Aytacı, 2009). Failure has been attributed to an inability to sustain synchronized messaging (Öncü, Bucher, & Aytacı, 2009), misalignment of an organization’s words and actions (Tatham, 2013), and fears of communication being branded as propaganda and therefore disbelieved and discredited (Hudson, 2013). Galvin (in press) showed that these problems are rooted in several factors, including: (1) an overemphasis on external communication without due consideration to how the organization communicates internally, (2) a misplaced belief that opponents and opposing narratives can be vanquished, (3) an overemphasis on near-term goals based on crisis response and a lack of understanding of how

to change relationships over time, and (4) failure to recognize success (or *victory*) as a transitory state, not an end state.

Moreover, the above literature has either focused on case studies of communication failures or has chosen exemplars that are impossible to replicate such as DoD's (2009) use of the moon landing as an example of communication success (Galvin, in press). In light of this, Galvin (in press) presents two case studies of successful communication campaigns by the NATO Stabilization Force-Bosnia in 2000-2001 and the U.S. Africa Command during its establishment 2007-2011. Both organizations were in difficult circumstances with strained or hostile relationships with stakeholders and/or societies, but through coordinated efforts were successful in bringing about change within the organization and in the environment. The insights from these cases contradict prevailing communication practices. For example, DoD (2009) promotes top-down control over the messages, while Farwell (2012) emphasizes the importance of the organizational leader's personal words and actions. Galvin (in press) suggests instead that bottom-up enactment of the organizational message is vital and that the activities of the senior leadership team outweigh the leader's personal activities alone.

But how can one move forward and develop tools and approaches that leverage what has been learned? Because this work has been accomplished from the perspective of an internal consultant to DoD, there is significant room for bridging theory and practice to expand the discussion across other types of organizations. For example, Galvin (in press) derived and proposed the following six "essential questions" as a starting point for developing methods and methodologies to help leaders develop and implement communication campaigns. These questions are up for debate:

1. What is the organization's narrative?
2. What are the opposing narratives?
3. Who is the organization communicating with?
4. How does the organization ordinarily communicate (internally and externally)?
5. What are the leader's roles in the campaign?
6. How does the organization implement a campaign to change something in the communication environment?

The two-part structure of the PDW is suitable as it will allow me to present the problem space from the internal consultant's perspective so that the subsequent workshop

activities will be more fruitful. The first part will allow participants to become acquainted with the problem, insights from earlier efforts at developing tools and methodologies, and the general applicability to other organizational contexts. It will also present how concepts and constructs from organizational behavior, organizational development, and management science may apply to the essential questions. In the second part, the essential questions serve as a launch point debating ideas, approaches, and recommendations for helping contemporary organizational leaders address complex dynamic communication problems, along with identifying possible gaps and research opportunities.

To enhance the reach of the PDW, the opening presentation and discussions will be recorded and released online via the Talking About Organizations Podcast and will also be the subject of follow-on episodes in *Reflections on Management with Tom Galvin* (<https://reflections.talkingaboutorganizations.com>) over the summer.

Timeframe

The PDW would last approximately for two hours according to the following timeframe.

- Introduction and Presentation (40 minutes)
- Initial Discussion (includes Q & A) (20 minutes)
- Roundtable Discussions (50 minutes)
- Insights from Roundtables and Concluding Remarks (10 minutes)

Registration Procedure

Participation in the second half of the PDW is limited to 50 registered participants. Attendants will be asked to outline their interest in the theme of the PDW, whether/how it relates to their ongoing work, and their preferred roundtables.

References

- Botan, C. (1997). Ethics in strategic communication campaigns: The case for a new approach to public relations,” *Journal of Business Communication* 34 (1997), 188-202.
- Crawford E. C. & Okigbo, C. C. (2014). “Strategic Communication Campaigns,” in Okigbo, C. C. (Ed.), *Strategic Urban Health Communication*. New York: Springer.

- Eder, M. K. (2011). *Leading the narrative: The case for strategic communication*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press.
- Farwell, J. (2012). *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Galvin, T. (in press). *Two case studies of successful strategic communication campaigns*. Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Press.
- Hudson, J. (2013, July 14). "U.S. Repeals Propaganda Ban, Spreads Government-Made News to Americans," *ForeignPolicy.com*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/14/u-s-repeals-propaganda-ban-spreads-government-made-news-to-americans/>
- Öncü, A. A., Bucher, T. & Aytaç, O. (2009). "Introduction" in Öncü, A. A., Bucher, T. & Aytaç, O. (Eds.), *Strategic Communication for Combatting Terrorism*. Ankara, Turkey: Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism. Retrieved from http://www.coedat.nato.int/publication/ws_books/StratComm.pdf
- Paul, C. (2001). *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Tatham, S. (2013). *U.S. Governmental information operations and strategic communications: A discredited tool or user failure? Implications for future conflict*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute.
- The Joint Staff (2017). *Joint Operations Planning*, Joint Publication 3-0. Washington, DC: The Joint Staff.
- U.S. Department of Defense (2009). *Report of the Defense Science Board: Task force on strategic communication*. Washington, DC: Department of Defense. Retrieved from <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/ADA476331.pdf>