COMMUNICATING TECHNICAL CONCEPTS TO NON-TECHNICAL PEOPLE

AN INSPIRE MASTERCLASS | 28 JULY-1 AUGUST 2025

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What is a communication plan?

A living document describing how, when, and what information should be communicated to key stakeholders.

- Specifies who the stakeholders are, what messages they should receive, which channels/platforms/ tactics should be used to reach them, and when/how frequently different details should be communicated.

- Useful for projects, organizations, events, etc.

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Do I need a communications plan?

YES, if the success of any aspect of your project/initiative/organization depends on people knowing about it and taking action.

Do you want to…

… recruit study participants?

… build a network or community?

… showcase the effectiveness of an intervention?

… acquire more funding?

… advocate for policy change?

… then you must COMMUNICATE!

A plan will help!

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PUBLISH, TELL, SHOW
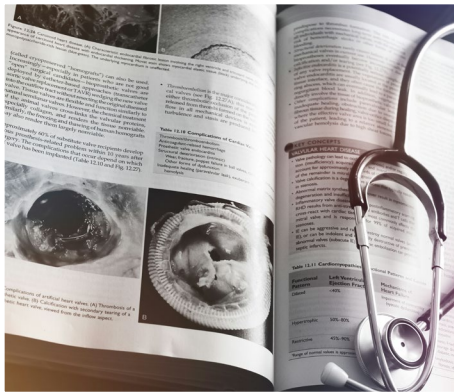
A framework for the implementation scientists among us…

By Syriacus Buguzi and Philbert Nyinondi

(*Tanzania Journal of Sociology* Vol. 11, Issue No.1, June 2025)

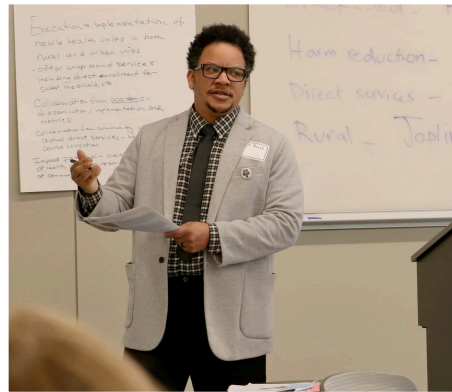inspire

The PTS Framework

PUBLISH

"The Crude Phase"

Disseminating findings through peer-reviewed journals.

TELL

Uncommunicated Potential

Leveraging communication channels to share findings with communities.

SHOW

Impactful Communication

Translating findings into tangible products to influence audiences.

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The PTS Framework

"While publishing establishes academic credibility, telling engages a wider community, and showing translates research into **real-world action**. Researchers are encouraged to recognize **effective research communication** as a key component of the research process… thus empowering [them] to consider the broader implications of their work, guiding them to engage with a diverse set of stakeholders and ultimately **drive societal change**."

Buguzi & Ninyondi

The Publish, Tell, Show (PTS) Framework for Effective Research Communication: A Step-by-Step Approach to Maximising Societal Impact in Tanzania

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DEVELOPING YOUR PLAN

Steps to take and questions to consider

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Comms plan building blocks

Formats
How are you going to distribute that message?

Goals
What do you want to accomplish with your communications?

Channels
Where are you going to distribute that message?

Audience
Who are you targeting with your communication?

Timing
When will you reach out to your audience?

Messages
What message(s) are you aiming to get across?

Evaluation
How will you measure the results of your communication?

Set goals and objectives

Your communications goals/objectives should revolve around getting your research known and used among those who can benefit most from it.

EXAMPLE GOALS:
- Influence policymakers in favor of… [key finding of your research]
- Inspire health providers to use a more effective practice
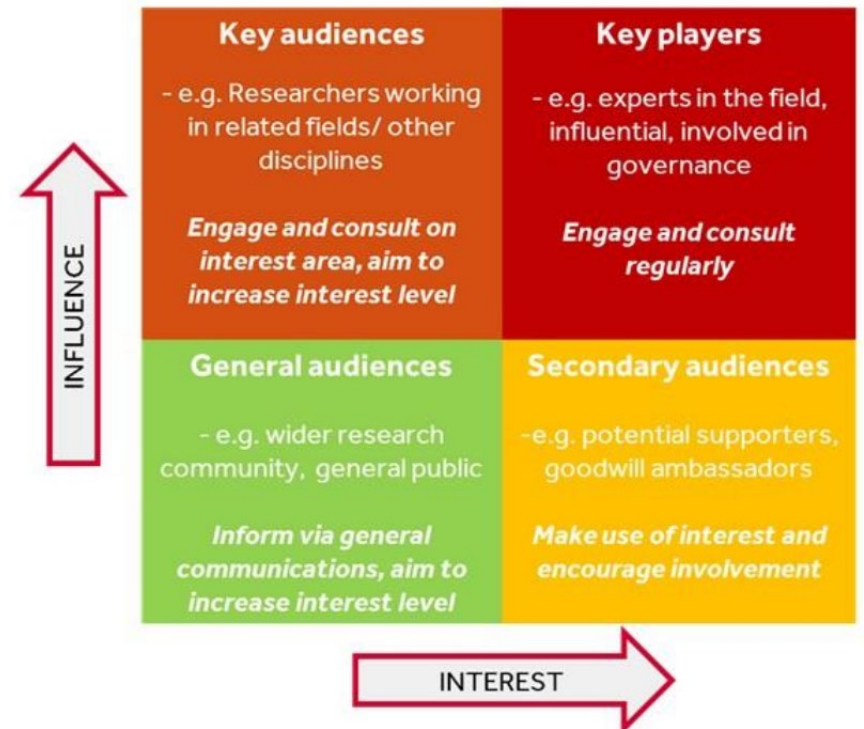- Engage with journalists of sector-specific media

Remember: A goal is an achievable outcome that is generally broad and long-term while an objective defines measurable actions to achieve the overall goal.

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A NOTE ON "AWARENESS"

Identify your audience(s)

YOU CANNOT REACH EVERYONE, NOR DO YOU WANT TO.
List, segment, and prioritize.

- **Key players –** those who are both interested in your research and are important in your field.

- **Key audiences –** those who perhaps don't yet know much about your work but who are important in your field/have influence.

- **Secondary audiences –** those who may be very interested in your research but don't have real influence in the field.

- **General audiences –** these are the people who you want to be aware of your work.

Key audiences
- e.g. Researchers working in related fields/ other disciplines

Engage and consult on interest area, aim to increase interest level

Key players
- e.g. experts in the field, influential, involved in governance

Engage and consult regularly

General audiences
- e.g. wider research community, general public

Inform via general communications, aim to increase interest level

Secondary audiences
- e.g. potential supporters, goodwill ambassadors

Make use of interest and encourage involvement

INFLUENCE

INTEREST

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Consider your audience(s)

The way you communicate your findings should be tailored to your audience. If you want to reach multiple audiences, consider how your messaging should change depending on which you are talking to.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What does the audience already know about this issue?

- What is the audience's current position on the topic?

- What do they need to know?

- What are the current gaps in their knowledge?

- What can you tell them about the findings that will capture their attention?

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Craft your message(s)

Your messaging should clearly describe the key information you want your audience to remember from your research in a way that will resonate with them (consider content, mood, language, and design).

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What does the audience value? How can you frame your message to align with this value?

- How do your findings benefit them and/or the people they serve?

- How are these findings actionable?

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SELECTING YOUR COMMUNICATION FORMATS AND CHANNELS

So many options, more popping up every day!

WHO
do they trust to share accurate information?

WHEN
do they look for research, data, evidence, etc.?

YOUR AUDIENCE IS CENTRAL

WHERE
do they seek out news and information?

WHAT TYPE
of information are they most interested in?

HOW
do they consume news and information?

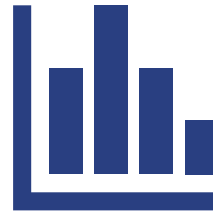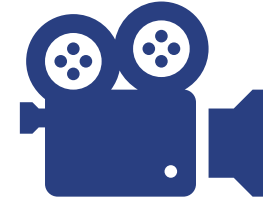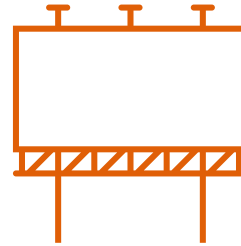**Match channels with audiences. DON'T GUESS. Do your research.**

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Timing is everything!

CONSIDER:

- When will you have something important to say?
- When are your audiences most likely to be paying attention?
- What opportunities might you leverage or create?

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Products/Formats

Channels

Journals

Conferences

Meetings

Webinars

Workshops

Industry publications

Industry mailing lists

Email newsletters

Websites

Traditional media (radio, TV, newspapers)

- Op-eds
- Advertisements
- Interviews

Social media

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- Create content that is engaging/interactive
- Post frequently
- Use accessible language
- Consider the messenger
- Match the content/tone to the platform
- Use hashtags strategically
- Listen, engage, and respond, don't just broadcast
- Follow and re-post your peers, stakeholders, and influencers in your field

EVALUATION

Did your plan succeed?

Measure what matters most

- Go back to your goals and objectives
- Consider what you can reasonably measure
- Determine what you will evaluate
- Create/identify your tools for measurement
- Establish your baseline
- Ask your questions and analyze responses
- Change your approach if needed

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Sample output metrics

- Survey responses – awareness, attitudes, behavior change
- Website analytics – visits, time on site, popular pages
- Newsletter analytics – subscribers, opens, clicks
- Social media engagement
- Mentions in media outlets
- Mentions in policy debates
- New policies reflecting your recommendations
- The Translational Science Benefits Model offers other suggestions for evaluating impact

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To recap…

Formats
How are you going to distribute that message?

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Evaluation
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YOUR TURN

Ready to create your own comms plan?

We've provided a template.

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References and resources

Are We There Yet? A Communications Evaluation Guide. The Communications Network, 2008.

Create a Communications Plan for Disseminating Research Findings. Research Retold, 2024.

Communicating Now: Framing for Health Equity. Frameworks Institute, 2025.

Developing a Communications Plan for Your Research. University of Reading, 2020.

Developing a Plan for Communication. Community Tool Box, Kansas City University.

New Communications Planning Guide for Local Health Departments. NACCHO, 2024.

Public Health Communications Collaborative Academy (online course – free!).

The Case for Communications. Stanford Social Innovation Review.

The Guide to Communicating Research: For Researchers and Research Communicators. Mihaela Gruia, 2024.

Using Social Media to Communicate Your Research. University of Oxford.

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