*Lesson 4: Science communication and dissemination: framing the message*

Learning outcomes:

LO#6 - The student can distinguish the aims and activities pertaining to science communication, dissemination and broader impact.

LO#12 - The student can effectively communicate ideas and the main results of a given project to non-specialist audiences, applying different strategies to increase audience interest and understanding.

LO#14 - The student can implement science engagement tasks in simulated situations.

For any Public Engagement activity or strategy, defining the key message, how to deliver it, in what way and to whom is a crucial task that can make or break the success of the research impact plan.

**Framing the message**

If we look at Public Engagement in a coherent and transversal way through the project lifecycle, there are many messages you must want to engage with the different stakeholders, from research objective definition to the project findings outreach. One key element is framing the message - In the [Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Climate Science](), framing is defined as "making certain considerations salient as a way to simplify or shape the way in which an audience understands a particular problem and its potential solution". In other words, framing involves emphasising certain elements of an issue over others, shaping the way the issue is understood. Different frames must be defined to different audiences and to different goals.

In all cases, there are some key communication principles to follow:

- *Messages should be clear, simple, and easy to understand* - appropriate for the target audience and avoid jargon
- *Messages should be tailored to the different audiences* - know the audiences, what drives them and what are they pre-concepts/ underlying assumption on the subject
- *Messages should be correct* - using simple message does not mean we can disregard the content

**Define the goals: Communication, dissemination and Exploitation**

If we are looking at a research project, we must have the following plans connected to specific engagement goals:

1. Communication: *how to get your project known to a wider audience*
2. Dissemination: *how to get your project findings to target audiences*
3. Exploitation: *how to use the project results by potential users*

Let us look closer to each of these plans:

**a.      Communication**

The communication activities of a project is a transversal task throughout the all project. In the EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms we can find the following description: "Communication on projects is a strategically planned process that starts at the outset of the action and continues throughout its entire lifetime, aimed at promoting the action and its results. It requires strategic and targeted measures for communicating about (i) the action and (ii) its results to a multitude of audiences, including the media and the public and possibly engaging in a two-way exchange."

Thus it targets multiple audiences beyond the project's own community including the media and the general public. As such, it is important to use a clear and simple language so that anyone can easily understand the goals and meanings of the project.

Communication activities include:
- visual identity (logo, graphic charter…)
- Press & Media
- Social media
- Website
- Blogs
- Newsletter
- Promotional materials as leaflets and flyers
- Audio-visual products, etc.

In order to design a communication plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must ask the following questions:
- What does the public need to know about?
- How to describe the project (goal/ key findings / impact) to a non-specialist audience?
- What channels can be targeted? Social media / Blogs and Wikipedia / Press releases and news stories

In a collaborative research project, the communication resources, channels and teams of each participating institution must be brought into this task. This and other tips and guidelines are described in the EC Communicating EU research and innovation guidance for project participants.

**b.      Dissemination**

Dissemination is about transferring knowledge and results. In the EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms we can find the following description: "The public disclosure of the results by any appropriate means (other than resulting from protecting or exploiting the results), including by scientific publications in any medium".

The goal here is promoting the effective use project results, turning them into concrete value and impact for society. As thus, the target audiences are the stakeholders that may take an interest in the potential use of the results (e.g. scientific community, industrial partner, policymakers).

Dissemination activities include:
- publications
- media releases
- policy briefs
- training and workshops
- demonstrations
- online repositories
- events (exhibitions, demo days, cluster events, guided visits), etc.

In order to design a dissemination plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must ask the following questions:
- What are the main project findings?
- Who are the target audiences?
- How to communicate the project main findings to each specific audience? What are the adjustments necessary?
- What channels and communication strategies fit for each audience?

**c.    Exploitation**

In the EC Research & Innovation Participant Portal Glossary/Reference Terms we can find the following description: "The utilisation of results in further research activities other than those covered by the action concerned, or in developing, creating and marketing a product or process, or in creating and providing a service, or in standardisation activities."

As thus, the target audiences are people or organisations that make concrete use of the project results (not restricted to commercial use).

Exploitation activities include:
- market Identification
- business models
- product concept
- stakeholder mapping
- strategic grant planning

In order to design an exploitation plan, the researcher, supported by the RMA, must ask the following questions (from the European IPR Helpdesk):

- What are the (expected) key exploitable results of the project?
- How is the value for further use going to be assessed?

- Which IP protection and IP management measures have been laid down for expected results?
- How will project partners address the issue of (joint) ownership of results and the management of exploitation activities – especially for jointly owned results?
- How are the results going to be used to a) address the call topic challenges and expected impacts, and b) for further uses?
- Who are the main innovators within the consortium to drive commercial exploitation?
- Which (other) results will be produced and could be exploited by people or organisations outside the project – under which terms and conditions?
- What are potential additional application areas (even outside the project's field of research) that could benefit from its developments?
- What impact do your results have for everyday life? How would society benefit from your work? What would be the consequences for future policymaking?
- What are the market & customers' needs and wants?

**Communication, dissemination and exploitation plans: some examples**
Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation activities are developed in order to maximize the impact of the R&I activity or project and must be understood intertwined since one drives the other – and vice versa. Often, we may see the same type of activity or product in more than one of these actions - for example, a press-release or even a magazine article can address multiple actors and goals. **What it is more relevant to distinguish these 3 levels of action is the goal, the focus and the target groups that are addressed.** Let us look at concrete examples:

- [Open Data Incubator Europe Deliverable on Communication and Dissemination](#)
- [60-minute Comms Workout](#): video of lessons learnt from different EU research projects, with tips and Q&As

**General tips an RMA can provide:**
**a.**    **Start from the beginning: study and plan** - know your project, set your goals and design your communication, dissemination and exploitation plans is a clear and simple way
**b.**    **Design SMART activities**: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bound activities
**c.**    **Set Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for each activity** - Build in some simple evaluation measures with clear KPIs to assess if you are succeeding with your objectives. A KPI is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an activity is achieving its key objectives (for example: number of followers in social media).
**d.**    **Set out your key messages in clear, accessible language** - frame your message, avoid jargon
**e.**    **Test your messages in different media** - to try out and select the most effective media of presenting a type of message

**f.      Draw up an overall project plan -** by including all the activities it will make it easier to envision their interconnections, as well as to achieve a feasible plan with deadlines, responsibilities and costs**.**

**g.      Don't underestimate the time and money needed** - budget it (human resources, equipment, specialized services, materials, etc.**)**

**h.      Make sure you fulfil the EC obligations:** Developing (at the pre-award stage) and implementing (at the post-award stage) a communication, dissemination and exploitation plan is a contractual obligation that comes with the EU R&I funding. Here are the most important obligations to acknowledge, most of them already included at the Annotated Model Grant Agreement (AGA):

1. Each beneficiary must – as soon as possible – disseminate its results by appropriate means including scientific publications (Art. 29.1, AGA).
2. All peer-reviewed publications must be accessible either by green or gold open access (Art. 29.2, Model Grant Agreement, see Guidelines to the Rules on Open Access to Scientific Publications and Open Access to Research Data in Horizon 2020)
3. Each beneficiary must – up to four years after the end of the project – take measures to ensure exploitation of its results (art. 28.1, AGA ).
4. Each Beneficiary must promote the project and its results by providing targeted information to multiple audiences in a strategic and effective manner (Art. 38.1, AGA).
5. All Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation activities as well as all equipment, infrastructure and major results financed by the project needs to acknowledge the EU funding by using the wording and criteria specified in the AGA (Articles 27, 28, 29, 38)**.**

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