

Deer Industry Leadership: Design Thinking for Communication and Engagement

A project as part of the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme



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“The art of communication is the
language of leadership”

James Humes

Executive Summary

The deer industry in New Zealand is renowned in the primary sector for its innovation and passion. Deer Industry New Zealand and the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association provide leadership and initiatives to grow the deer industry on behalf of their stakeholders. A vital facet of industry leadership is building capability through fostering a culture of continuous improvement. It is this spirit of striving for continuous improvement, coupled with the acknowledgement that the ability of an organisation to communicate effectively with stakeholders affects the achievement of business objectives, that inspired this project.

The aims of this project were to learn about the world of communications, discover what can be learned from other primary sector organisations, find out what farmers' and other end users' preferences are for communications from their industry organisation, and to provide a set of recommendations arising from this research.

The key learnings from this project are:

- Communications both underpins and is overarching of an organisation's strategic objectives.
- To get the most benefit, communications needs to be a role within the organisation which sits at a high level and is performed by a professional with specific skillsets and specialist knowledge.
- Content consumption habits and preferences of farmers are diverse and rapidly changing.
- The level of connectedness and engagement amongst the farming population should not be underestimated.
- It is necessary to provide a suite of platforms for communications to provide choice to the diverse demographic of farmers/stakeholders, but start with a 'digital first' mentality, as this is, and will increasingly be, the dominant preference for content consumption.
- Engagement is not the end goal of communication, but a live, ongoing relationship that needs to be nurtured, with effective communication being the enabler for this.

- More than ever before, organisations need to understand social stresses and demands on farmers and other stakeholders, and place that forefront of mind, using a design-thinking approach to communications.

Summary and recommendations: Industry-good organisations such as Deer Industry New Zealand need to adopt communication strategies that are designed with the end user in mind. The content consumption habits of farmers and the way they prefer to receive information should be driving the way the deer industry communicates. Commissioning an independent audit of an organisation's communications is valuable, especially for smaller organisations with a limited budget. In a world experiencing an exponential rate of change, how individuals communicate and consume content is changing rapidly. Focussed attention is needed to ensure organisations stay relevant to their stakeholders and communicate effectively in the future.

Introduction

The deer industry in New Zealand is going through a challenging time. The national farmed deer herd has been contracting towards an unsustainable number. Currently there are 1700 farmer participants and approximately 1500 commercial/stud deer farms. However, national hind retention figures indicate that the nadir has likely been reached, herds are rebuilding and the industry is in good heart. Returns are higher in the last seven years than in earlier periods and re-investment in infrastructure is occurring.

Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) is the levy funded organisation responsible for promoting and assisting the development of the New Zealand Deer Industry.

The overarching vision of Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) is a “confident and growing industry”. Figure 1 shows the Vision and Strategic Objectives in the 2015-2020 Five Year Strategy available on the DINZ website.

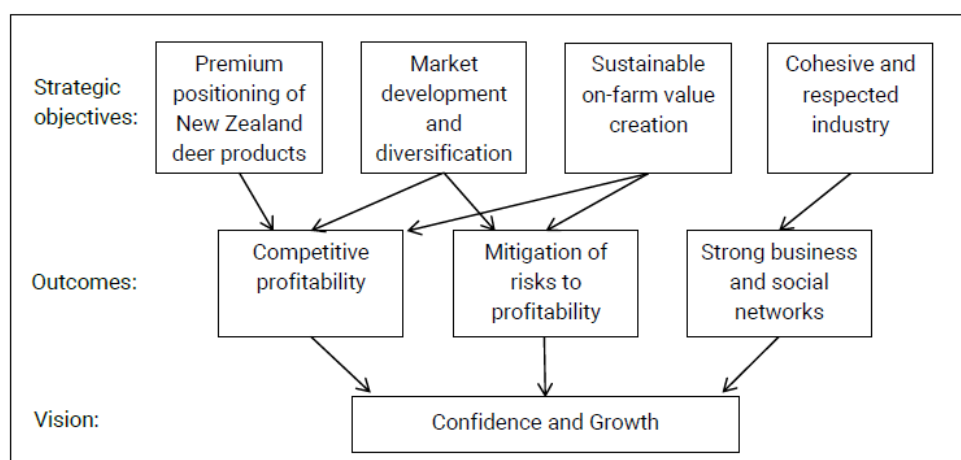


Figure 1: DINZ’ Vision and Strategic Objectives.

Within objective 4 of the strategy (Cohesive and respected industry) there is an acknowledgement that effective communications are a critical enabler to industry confidence and growth.

As part of the current five-year strategy DINZ plans to

- Tailor the communications approach, using technology, to deal with farmers on an individualised basis where possible, rather than one size-fits all

- Invest in a communications programme targeted at the broader agricultural and rural support sector, highlighting the innovative and progressive nature of the deer industry

The vision to have a 'confident and growing industry' requires new investment into deer by parties not currently deer farming, for the growth to be sustainable. While the expansion of existing deer farms contributes to the vision this will not be enough to effectively grow the industry. For this reason, one of the key priorities for DINZ has been to have a communications strategy targeted at increasing the coverage of deer farming and the industry in wider agricultural media. This has been successful, and therefore is not a focus of this study.

This report examines communications as a subject in today's world, in the context of the primary sector. The focus for this project is communications between industry organisations and their primary stakeholders, with the emphasis on farmers. It should be acknowledged that processors and marketers are also key stakeholders within the industry. While this project does not focus on communications in that sector the learnings are certainly applicable.

Commentators such as Satell (2015) are calling communications "today's most important skill". Communication is at the heart of virtually every action within an organisation and the relationship between an organisation and those it serves. For an industry to grow, confidence and trust are essential, and effective communication underpins the development of both. In today's world, people are time poor, attention spans are shortening, and the volume of content being pushed is overwhelming. Having a communications strategy that is designed to ensure communications are effective in the face of these challenges is vital for the success of industry-good organisations.

Industry Background

The following small section briefly introduces Deer Industry New Zealand, The New Zealand Deer Farmers Association, and the Industry's Primary Growth Partnership; the Passion 2 Profit Programme. This is to provide context, and is not a comprehensive overview of the whole industry. More information can be found on www.deernz.org.

Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ)

DINZ is the deer industry's levy-funded organisation. Its overall mission is:

"To promote and assist the development of the New Zealand deer industry. A strong, stable, profitable industry for all participants".

The DINZ Board of Directors is comprised of four farmer representatives and four processor appointed representatives. This structure, having 50% producer appointments and 50% processor appointments is unique in the red meat sector, and shows the progressive nature and leadership of the deer industry.

New Zealand Deer Farmers Association (NZDFA)

The NZDFA was formed to assist in maximising sustainable benefits for all deer farmers and to provide linkage to the agricultural industry and the public.

With the change of the NZ Game Industry Board to Deer Industry New Zealand in October 2002, the DINZ office now carries out the administrative operations of the NZDFA. This provides support for the local branches. The Association has a four-person Executive Committee, serviced in turn by a full-time professional executive, the Producer Manager, and a full-time Communications and Administration Coordinator.

NZDFA Mission statement: A strong visionary association providing effective leadership and representation that inspires profitable growth and a sustainable future for all deer farmers.

The NZDFA logo: Your voice – our future.

Passion 2 Profit Programme

The deer industry has its own Primary Growth Partnership (PGP), called Passion2Profit (P2P). P2P is a seven year programme, jointly funded by the Deer Industry (through levies) and The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). The total budget is \$15 million NZD over the seven years. The programme started in 2015, and Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) have been contracted to deliver the programme. The objective of P2P is to grow the deer industry and increase its profitability. P2P is 50% Market Activity and 50% On-farm focus.

The P2P programme has been hugely successful in increasing engagement with deer farmers through its initiative called Advance Parties (AP). An AP is a well-supported group of motivated deer farmers who identify and implement focussed opportunities to lift profit on their individual farms, in line with the P2P mission of “more deer, heavier, earlier, and better”. The aim is for AP members to demonstrate the gains they have made to their wider community, and nationally, to encourage wider adoption of improved practices. APs were set up acknowledging that farmers are collaborative by nature, and want to learn from each other. It has also been demonstrated that most deer farmers tend to learn best when they can see changes, relate them to their own farms, and can trial the change themselves. AP groups develop a supportive and encouraging culture, and result in practice change, due to farmers developing the confidence to try things they otherwise may not. APs can be describes as being about identifying the possible, demonstrating the achievable, explaining the how, and instilling the confidence to make profitable changes on farm. This people to people form of extension is resulting in a high level of industry engagement and confidence.

Advance Parties cater to building confidence and knowledge of farmer participants. It is fair to say that these farmers are already motivated. The challenge is to raise engagement levels with the “late majority” who are less likely to be involved in APs.

As of 31st May 2017, there were 25 APs throughout New Zealand, with two more in development. They involve approximately 250 individual deer farming properties, meaning 17% of commercial/stud deer properties are represented in APs.

To address the issue of information sharing between APs and other deer farmers in the wider industry, DINZ has set up a website to hold information from AP meetings. An initiative called Regional Workshops brings together AP farmers and non-AP farmers to share knowledge and

insights around chosen topics. DINZ also reports on AP meetings and gains being made as a result of AP involvement in mainstream media, as well as in the industry's electronic communications and social media platforms. DINZ also organised an annual Advance Party National Workshop, where APs get together and have an opportunity to present on practice changes and projects that have taken place in their group.

A database of projects within APs has been created but is still in prototype form, and not widely available. The greatest frustration within APs is that duplication of effort may be occurring due to learnings from AP's and project outcomes not being well shared between groups.

Deer Industry Communications

Publications and Communications

DINZ has multiple platforms for communications, the main forms being detailed below:

Deer Industry News is a print publication that comes out bimonthly. It is well respected as a quality publication in the wider agricultural sector.

DINZ e-News is a monthly electronic newsletter that features market updates, industry news, upcoming and past events, useful tools for farmers, and links to further content on the DINZ website.

Stagline online is the monthly electronic newsletter for the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association (NZDFA). It contains reports from the DFA executive, issues in the industry, news on upcoming events and wide coverage of industry-related activity.

'Breeding, Feeding, Healthy Deer' is a monthly email focused on P2P activities, timely reminders of important seasonal issues, and useful information including tools coming out of the P2P programme.

Social Media

Next Generation NZ Deer Farmers is a closed Facebook group, which was initiated by farmers rather than Deer Industry New Zealand. It has developed into a key means of feeling connected and for sharing news in the industry. It has evolved into a true forum where members seek advice from others in the group. During the Kaikoura earthquake in 2016 this group was used to share information quickly on deer farmers who may need checking on and requiring assistance. At the time of writing this group had 322 members.

DINZ has a Facebook page, and has used a conservative slow-start approach to social media. At the time of writing the page had 298 followers. It is mainly used to push content, such as media stories and event notifications, news, and releases of new tools for farmers. Posts can be commented on.

To date DINZ does not have a social media policy or strategy, but it is being considered.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this project are to

- Examine how other levy-funded organisations, member-based associations and sector groups manage communications to identify opportunities for the deer industry
 - Strategy, Policy, Skillsets, Measurement
- Learn from farmers and members of various primary industry sectors in New Zealand about their needs, wants and preferences for communications from their industry body
- Learn from literature about communications and engagement
- Look at how DINZ and NZDFA can design communications with the end user at the centre.
- Develop a set of recommendations for DINZ and NZDFA around communications management

Overall objectives:

To explore how the deer industry can create effective communications with farmer stakeholders in the future, and

To investigate and propose potential efficiencies in how communications as a subject is coordinated to ensure industry objectives are being met.

Due to the complexity in terms of the number of different stakeholders, and project time constraints, the focus in this project is communication with, and engagement of, farmers. It is hoped that the learnings and recommendations that come out of this project will have relevance to the way in which the industry structures its communications with other stakeholders.

Literature Review

This literature review was undertaken to provide background and context to the project. The subject area of communications is vast and this was an opportunity to learn about the definitions of communication and engagement, the theory of communications as a subject within organisations, theory on learning styles and practice change, and applied areas that address the challenges of this subject in today's world. Many theories exist in this subject area and the literature is full of the philosophy of communication. This review focusses on points of interest directly relevant to this project.

Communication

Communication can be defined as the imparting or exchanging of information, and is derived from the Latin *communicare* "to share" (Wikipedia).

For the purposes of this study, communication is used as a generic inclusive term that describes a broad range of interactions between people or between people and an organisation.

Communication can include a variety of definitions such as one-way-communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision-making, and empowered action.

Communications as a subject in a business context includes, but is not restricted to topics such as written, oral, visual and digital communication. It is a discipline that concentrates on the creation, management, distribution and consumption of information.

Engagement

Engagement is a difficult term to define. Hockenson (2013) commented that while the word engagement has been in the communications lexicon since the early 2000s, the ways in which the term is used and defined varies enormously.

There seems to be two main usages of engagement in this context. Organisations refer to 'stakeholder engagement', by which they use the term to describe a mechanism of feedback to get a sense of sentiment and opinion among those they serve. It can be thought of as fairly one dimensional and two-way. Macnamara (2015) comments that "engagement is mostly interpreted as engagement by stakeholders and publics with an organisation, rather than a two-way street. Most organisations fail to see a need for them to genuinely engage with their stakeholders and publics. Engagement needs to be re-thought in most organisations and recognised as a two-way process". The other main way in which 'engagement' is used when talking about stakeholders is a more holistic interpretation, an umbrella term for the level of interaction individuals have with their organisation, other individuals and groups, and how immersed and involved they are within the organisation.

In industry-good bodies, engagement is not simply receiving feedback on the functioning of the organisation. Rather, or perhaps in addition, engagement represents "buy-in" to the organisation's direction on behalf of stakeholders, engagement within the sector and with other stakeholders, and interaction for the benefit of the stakeholder (levy payer) and the wider sector.

The ability to distinguish between audiences and stakeholders is critical to successful stakeholder engagement and to reputation management. Steininger (2013) states that while audiences are the receivers of messages, from whom no feedback is necessary at that time, stakeholders are directly impacted by the decisions and actions of an organisation and they actively participate in the organisation's reputational management

Wikipedia defines stakeholder engagement as the process by which an organisation involves people who may be affected by the decisions it makes or can influence the implementation of its decisions. Another way of phrasing it would be to say stakeholder engagement is “to understand, by listening, and having ongoing and open dialogue, the needs and expectations of those impacted by the actions and decisions of an organisation” (Steininger, 2013).

Agricultural organisations need to identify stakeholders, and then meet them where they are. By taking a people centric approach, organisations can create relevant dialogue with stakeholders, and ensure all parties have a voice in the conversation.

An essential part of developing a communications strategy for an organisation is to have a clear map of all stakeholders. This can be used to tailor communications to the needs of different groups.

Listening

Macnamara (2015) wrote that “organisations extensively ‘talk the talk’ of two-way communication, engagement, dialogue, conversation, consultation, collaboration and relationships with their stakeholders”. He follows with “Terms such as ‘engagement’ are buzzwords in professional marketing and communication literature, however communication is still overwhelmingly ‘broadcast’ in nature. Even social media, which was developed specifically for two-way interaction, are used by organisations primarily to disseminate their messages”. When discussing what makes listening work at an operational level Macnamara (2015) says “the most important single factor in creating an open listening culture is a progressive CEO who is supportive of two-way communication”.

Communications in businesses and organisations

In 2013 The Project Management Institute (PMI) published a piece in their Pulse of the Profession in-depth report titled “The high cost of low performance: the essential role of communications”. In this paper, PMI states that “communications is a core competency that,

when properly executed, connects every member of a project team to a common set of strategies, goals and actions. Unless these components are shared and understood by stakeholders, project outcomes are jeopardised and budgets incur unnecessary risk". This paper also states that "high performing organisations are using formal communications plans more frequently and more effectively".

The Forbes Insights 2010/11 Strategic Initiatives Study "Adapting Corporate Strategy to the Changing Economy," found that nine out of ten CEOs believe that communications is critical to the success of their strategic initiatives, and nearly half of respondents cite communications as an integral and active component of their strategic planning and execution process.

Communications Roles

The responsibilities of communications professionals vary greatly depending on the organisation they are working for. Depending on the size of a company or organisation, and other roles in place, communications managers have primary responsibility for tasks including, but not limited to internal and external communications, branding, public relations, content creation, social media and event support. Communications professionals utilise traditional and digital communications channels to reach target audiences and elicit responses.

Conducting analytics and reporting on engagement levels to board level is often a primary responsibility of communications managers.

To a large extent, the CEO's role in execution is communication. They are the glue and energy that keeps the organisation aligned and inspired to make things happen. Communication for a CEO is about three things: right messages, right cadence and right stakeholders. There is a well-known marketing maxim: everything communicates.

Communication Strategies and Planning

A communications strategy is designed to help an organisation communicate effectively and meet organisational strategic goals and objectives.

There are many ways to structure a communications strategy, and it may be seen as an art rather than a science. The key elements of a communications strategy establish the following:

- Objectives
 - Aligning with organisational objectives
- Audiences
 - Create a stakeholder map (See Appendix 1 for a map of Deer Industry Stakeholders developed for this project)
- Messages
 - Maximising impact and utilising design thinking
- Tools and activities
 - What platforms are appropriate as suggested by your audiences and messages
- Resources
 - Personnel, financial and physical resources
- Timeframes
 - Realistic expectations - project management
- Evaluation and amendment
 - Analytics to measure project success
 - Communications audits can be used to assess the effectiveness of the strategy with both internal and external audiences

Often, organisations have a concise one page Communications Strategy, and a more detailed Communications Plan.

Further strategies that organisations may wish to consider developing are:

- A digital strategy (including a social media strategy)
- A crisis management communications strategy

All strategies should consider risk management.

How Farmers Learn

Lee (2015) discussed the VARK method of categorising learning preferences. Neil Flemming, an educational specialist in Christchurch, New Zealand, developed the VARK questionnaire and support tools for use in education and business. VARK stands for Visual, Aural, Reader-writer, and Kinaesthetic. While four are listed, only about a third of the population will have a strong preference for just one way of learning (Lee, 2015).

Mcleod (2015) studied the learning styles of dairy farmers in New Zealand. She found that the farmers surveyed displayed single mode preferences for Read/write and Kinaesthetic learning styles under the VARK model. This was unexpected and at-odds with how most extension programmes and activities are designed in that sector.

Lee (2015) quoted the VARK creator Flemming as saying “one of the most common misconceptions is that people who like to see or watch things on a screen are visual learners. They are actually more likely to be Kinaesthetic learners. Video’s such as Youtube give people that hands on experience even though they are not actually doing it themselves”. This goes a long way to explain why Mcleod (2015) found farmers to be a combination of Read/write and Kinaesthetic, and why vicarious learning through video content is a favoured mode of learning.

Gibson (2006) as part of a Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme project, looked at VARK learning styles. Her study examined how to flex style to work with farmer learning preferences to get the best out of, and to assist with learning in, farm employees with any of the given styles. The study, whilst looking at employer-employee interactions, had valid lessons for anyone crafting learning material for farmers.

Extension/Practice Change

Communication forms an essential component when looking to affect practice change. A change of terminology from “extension”, to “technology transfer” to more recently “practice change” was discussed by O’Connor and Byrne (2012). Their study categorised deer farmers into the categories in figure 2. It is important to know where a target audience sits on this bell curve, to tailor messaging accordingly.

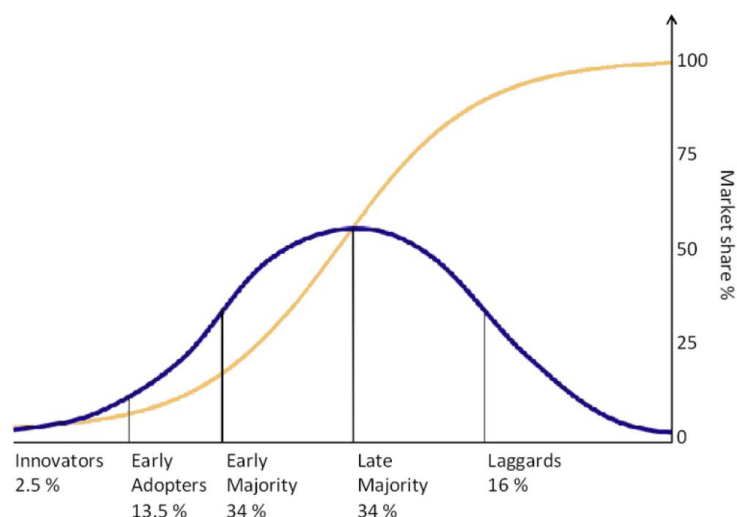


Figure 2: Diffusion of Innovation Curve

Wilson et al (2015) discussed factors affecting practice change among farmers. Vicarious experience, obtained through observation of successful or unsuccessful performance of others is a potent component in the decision matrix of taking on a change in practice. Vicarious experience can come in many forms, including personal account and case studies. Communications designed to elicit practice change can utilise the concept of vicarious learning to instil confidence in the reader/viewer.

The Generations

The farmer/member interviews conducted in this project were designed to ensure a spread of ages specifically to find out whether age influenced content consumption preferences. To add context to that the following are definitions of groups commonly referred to when discussing generations (Note: different sources had slightly different cut off dates)

Silent Generation or Traditionalists: Born in 1945 and before

Baby Boomers: Born from 1946 to 1964

Generation X: Born from 1965 to 1976

Generation Y: Born from 1977 to 1995

Generation Z (iGen, or true digital natives): born after 1996, also referred to as Millennials

Generation F (Facebook): those who have grown up immersed in social media.

Whilst it is true that communications need to be designed to provide a range of options for end users, a lot can be learned from younger generations in terms of emerging dominant preferences for content consumption which will drive how communications are created in the future.

Simon Sinek's book 'Leaders Eat Last' has been released with a new expanded chapter on leading Millennials. In it he explicitly states "more companies would benefit directly by taking advantage of the skills and perspectives Millennials bring to the table" (Sinek, 2017).

This is particularly true when it comes to communications and engagement with stakeholders.

Social Media

Social Media for Smaller Organisations and Businesses

Communications professionals who have been successful in implementing interactive social media practices in conservative companies use a 'start small and roll out' approach. This can involve having a small team of staff who act as champions, advocates and trainers for others. According to Macnamara (2015) private coaching for senior management in social media substantially changes the culture of an organisation and its social media engagement.

Social Media and Risk Management

When looking at social media strategies, it is advisable to first understand all of the types of risks that may come into play. Moller (2013) gave a few examples:

- The loss of valuable intellectual property through users' sharing of copyright and trademark information
- Personal injury (defamation risk) as a result of an individual's defamatory social media remarks for which the employer is held responsible
- Negative and quickly spreading commentary about a company's business practices

- The spread of inaccurate or intentionally false information about a company's operations, particularly during critical periods such as earnings announcements or following a natural disaster.

Organisations who actively use social media are advised to provide training to the people assigned as administrators. The informal nature of these sites can lead to an informal approach to posting messages. However, they are subject to the same laws regarding defamation and intellectual property rights as any other broadcast content (Moller 2013).

In terms of cover, it is recommended that social media forms part of an organisation's broader cyber risk policy as traditional liability policies will not provide cover (Moller, 2013).

Social Media and Crisis Management

An organisation's reputation is particularly at risk during a crisis when social media activity can be heightened. Managing the impact of social media relies on the crisis management practices already in place, including communications policies. Social media exacerbates risk but it can also be a useful tool to engage directly with stakeholders, as well as identifying emerging risks through monitoring (Moller 2013).

Design Thinking

What is Design Thinking?

The way we design communications requires a praxis (theory-informed action) approach. Design thinking is a theory or concept that has huge relevance to communications, particularly to designing and tailoring novel communication and engagement initiatives. Design thinking is a methodology used by designers to solve complex problems, and find desirable solutions for clients. A design mindset is not problem-focussed, it is solution-focussed and action-oriented towards creating a preferred future. Design thinking draws upon logic, imagination, intuition, and systemic reasoning, to explore possibilities of what could be, to create desired outcomes that benefit the end user (Naiman, 2017).

Naiman (2017) also points out that design thinking is widely applicable because “you don’t have to be a designer to think like one. While learning to be a good designer takes years, you can think like a designer and design the way you lead, manage, create, and innovate. Design begins with setting a strategic intention. If you are mapping out a strategy, you are designing.”

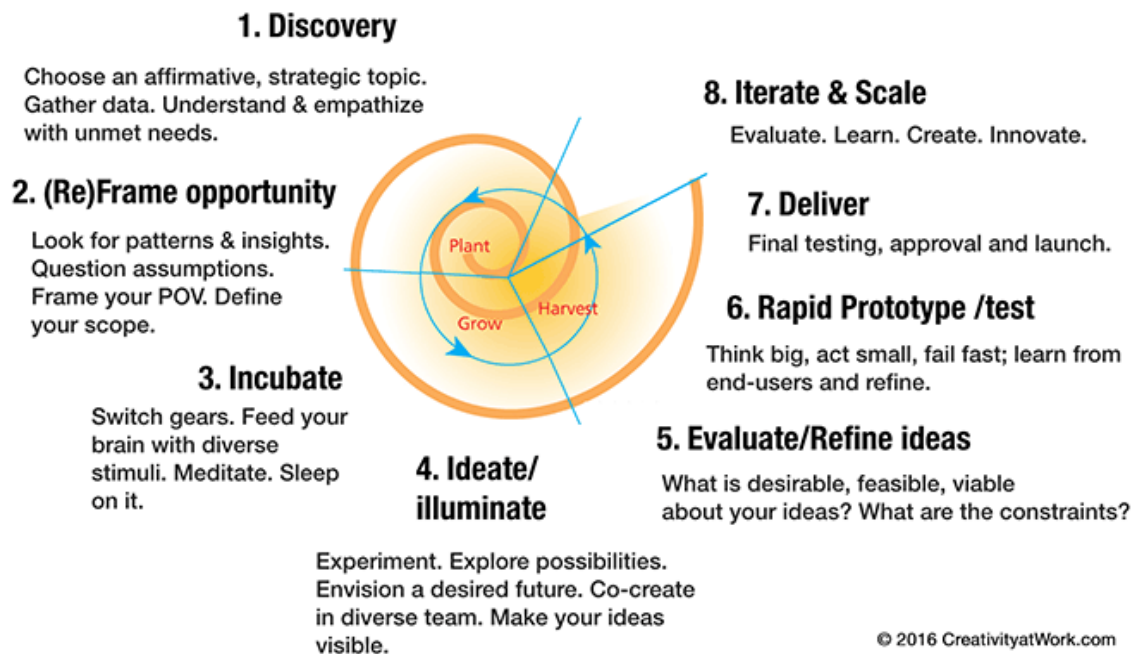


Figure 3: A Design Thinking Framework

Figure 3 describes in detail a framework for applying design thinking. One of the most important parts of the process is described in step 1; “understand and empathise with unmet needs”. This can be applied in the context of communications, by understanding and empathising with the practical, social and intellectual needs of end users, and the complex social issues driving content consumption preferences and habits.

Young (2014) stated “you must consider how you are going to reach your consumers before you decide what you are going to say”. The unique form and function of different platforms for delivery of content require very different approaches – it is not a ‘one size fits all’ situation. Generally, communications are initiated because there is a message to be conveyed, in which case Young’s opinion may be flexed to say “you must consider how you are going to reach your customers with your message before you decide how you are going to say it”.

Communication is designed to create spaces for engagement. The goal is to design communication that engenders behaviours, not just attitudes, and fosters engagement and dialogic communications (Persuit and McDowell-Marinchak, 2016).

Digital Disruption and Exponential Rate of Change

The world is experiencing digital disruption at an exponential rate of change. In a blog on digital disruption, Le Cren (2017) presented some staggering facts:

- The world has 3 billion active social media users
- Internet users have an average of 5+ social media accounts, with even the 55-64 year age bracket having 2.85 accounts
- Facebook messenger and Whatsapp handle 60 billion messages per day
- More than 300 Virtual Reality (VR) apps have been created for Oculus (virtual reality product)

The reality is, there are now so many ways to communicate, and to be connected, and it is more global than ever. Five or ten years ago we used text to communicate. Today we communicate and share with photos and videos. Tomorrow, with VR and AR we will be able to communicate with experience.

Now, Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), and Mixed Reality (MR) are already becoming increasingly common and on the verge of being mainstream. In what is already an outdated blog, Sena (2016) stated that “the future of communication will be defined by virtual, augmented and mixed reality experiences that provide value. To pigeon-hole this collision of our physical and digital worlds for solely play and entertainment is to miss one of the great upcoming technological evolutions”.

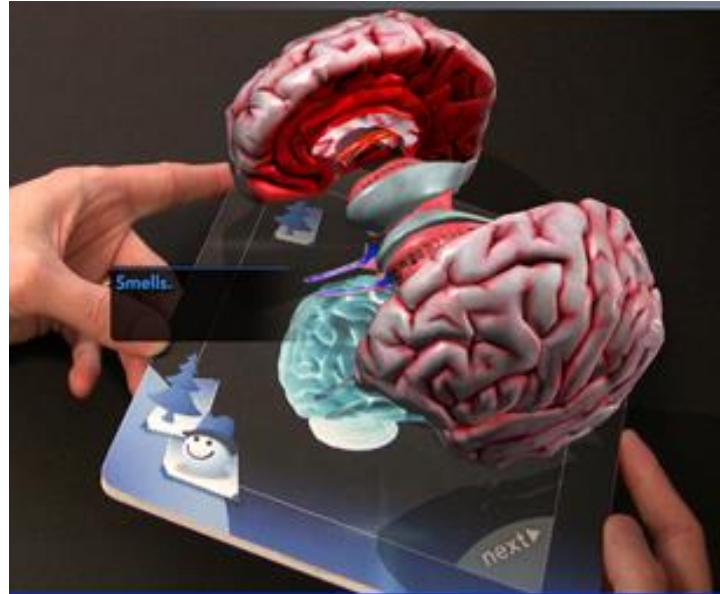


Figure 4: Augmented Reality is already revolutionising education

(http://www.perfectprototype.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/ARbrain_thumb.jpg)



Figure 5: Augmented Reality is well-used in sport (Olivier Morin/AFP/Getty Images)

We will see virtual farm tours and demonstrations, tutorials in augmented reality, and an ability to connect and bring together people regardless of location, in a virtual, augmented or holographic way.

It is a lot to take in, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that new technologies are going to be available to share stories, messages, and to connect.

With change happening so rapidly, it is important to embrace new platforms. Whatever the platform, Le Cren (2007) recommends remembering three key points:

1. Embrace content creation
 - Quality and relevance – in order to get this right, you have to know your target audience
2. Tell the story
 - Stories are the most powerful way to connect people to each other, to your organisation and to a common goal
3. Collaborate with influencers
 - Who can you involve to help tell your story and share your news? The right influencers will help you reach and connect with your audience, and the audience is more trusting of the information. Influencers do not need to be famous, in fact the more similar they are to the target audience the better.

It is clear that digital disruption and the rate of change in the ways we communicate will have an overwhelming impact on this subject area. The theories explored in this review will still hold true but, excitingly, there will be more opportunities to embrace technologies which will revolutionise the way people interact, enabling a more multi-dimensional way of learning and sharing information. The technologies that are becoming mainstream will remove barriers to communication such as distance and the need for physical office location, and will be utilised not just within sectors, but to link the primary sector with consumers in an immersive vibrant way.

The literature reviewed for this project supports the need for organisations to create and implement strategies to ensure existing methods of communication are being utilised optimally, using design thinking, to drive success in strategic objectives. This will act as an enabler to be positioned to embrace and adopt newer communication platforms that will further enhance the communication experience of all users.

Methodology

General method

The research question for this project evolved throughout both the planning process and the data collection. The decision was made not to complete the literature review in advance of the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that a more inductive approach would be enhanced by not engaging with the literature in the early stages of analysis.

Interviews (data collection)

The decision to conduct interviews rather than a survey was based upon the desire to have a rich data corpus. The author wanted to have the flexibility to question interviewees further on topics of interest as they arose, so a semi-structured interview method was chosen. A list of questions was generated (Appendix 2), with the acknowledgement that more questions would develop organically during the discussion. Prior to conducting the interviews, the questions were further refined to ensure they were well crafted to elicit detailed answers. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the opportunity to diverge to pursue an idea or response in more detail as described in Gill et al (2008). Interviews were booked for a time convenient to the interviewee, and at the time of booking permission to record the interview was sought, alongside an assurance of data confidentiality and security, the right to withdraw, and the right to comment under Chatham House rule.

Interviews were conducted by phone, and recorded using a recording app to allow transcription in full.

Interviewees

Brainstorming who to interview for this study resulted in mind mapping the groups of interest. A compromise had to be made between interviewing a large number of people, and allowing enough time for collection and analysis of the gathered data.

To better-understand the role of communications within other organisations the author selected levy-funded organisations and membership-based associations. The decision was

made to interview a range of roles within these organisations. The roles selected were Communications Manager, CEO and Chair of the Board of Directors. Due to time constraints, not all the roles were interviewed for each organisation.

Organisations interviewed: (n=14)

- Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ)
- Beef and Lamb New Zealand
- DairyNZ
- New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA)
- Federated Farmers
- Foundation for Arable Research (FAR)
- Tomatoes New Zealand
- Red Meat Profit Partnership (RMPP)

A selection of communications professionals were interviewed to gain perspective on what organisations need to be thinking about when constructing a communications plan, what works well and what does not, and the role consultants play in communications audits. The author selected the following companies to give a broad perspective on public relations, digital media, and marketing:

Communications Consultant Companies (n=3)

- Matai Partners – Public relations
- Grass Roots Media – Communication consultancy, digital media
- Richards Partners - Marketing

The farmer/end user interviewees were selected to provide a range in background and experience. There was a conscious effort to select a range of age, level of industry involvement, level of digital usage, and gender. The age groups interviewed for this project can be broken down to “50 years of age and over” and “under 50 years of age”. This delineation was chosen due to the distribution in ages of the population interviewed and the desire to only have two age groups for ease of reporting.

Farmers/End users (n=26)

- Deer Farmers
- Dairy Farmers
- Sheep and Beef Farmers
- Veterinarians
- Arable/Cropping Farmers

Analysis

For this qualitative study thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used. Voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed. These transcriptions (and reflective notes taken during the interviews) were read and re-read. Developing a systematic coding system was challenging, and the coding system evolved as the author refined the technique. Once the coding of the data was complete, the data extracts were sorted and collated.

The coded data extracts were repeatedly reviewed, and with each sub-question in mind, the author looked at frequency of a code occurring and identified patterns, to start picking out potential themes. This was a process that took longer than anticipated. Reviewing the themes to ensure they accurately reflected the data involved discarding some initial themes, as linkages were identified. The author decided to merge some themes and create an overarching theme title. Once the main themes had been identified and named appropriately, the data sets and extracts were re-examined to verify that the themes appropriately reflected the data.

There was an overwhelming willingness of individuals in organisations to be interviewed for this project. A proportion of the interviewees from organisations requested that Chatham House rule apply to some or all of what they said. For this reason, out of respect for this wish and out of gratitude for their generosity, the author has decided to report on interview content without any reference to the organisation, or even the sector. The author feels this does not detract from the usefulness of the insights provided.

Due to the larger numbers involved, the farmers and members were happy to be associated with their industry, allowing a breakdown of comments by industry.

Results

Thematic Maps

The following two thematic maps (one for farmer-derived data and one for organisation-derived data) display the five main themes that were developed from the interview data corpus. Each theme has four sub-themes, which reflect the key areas that make up the overarching theme.

The development of the themes and subthemes from the primary data demonstrates the complexity of this topic area. Figure 6 shows a breakdown of the themes and subthemes developed during analysis of the data from the interviews. Rather than a verbose repetition of all data, the author has captured the essence of what was discussed.

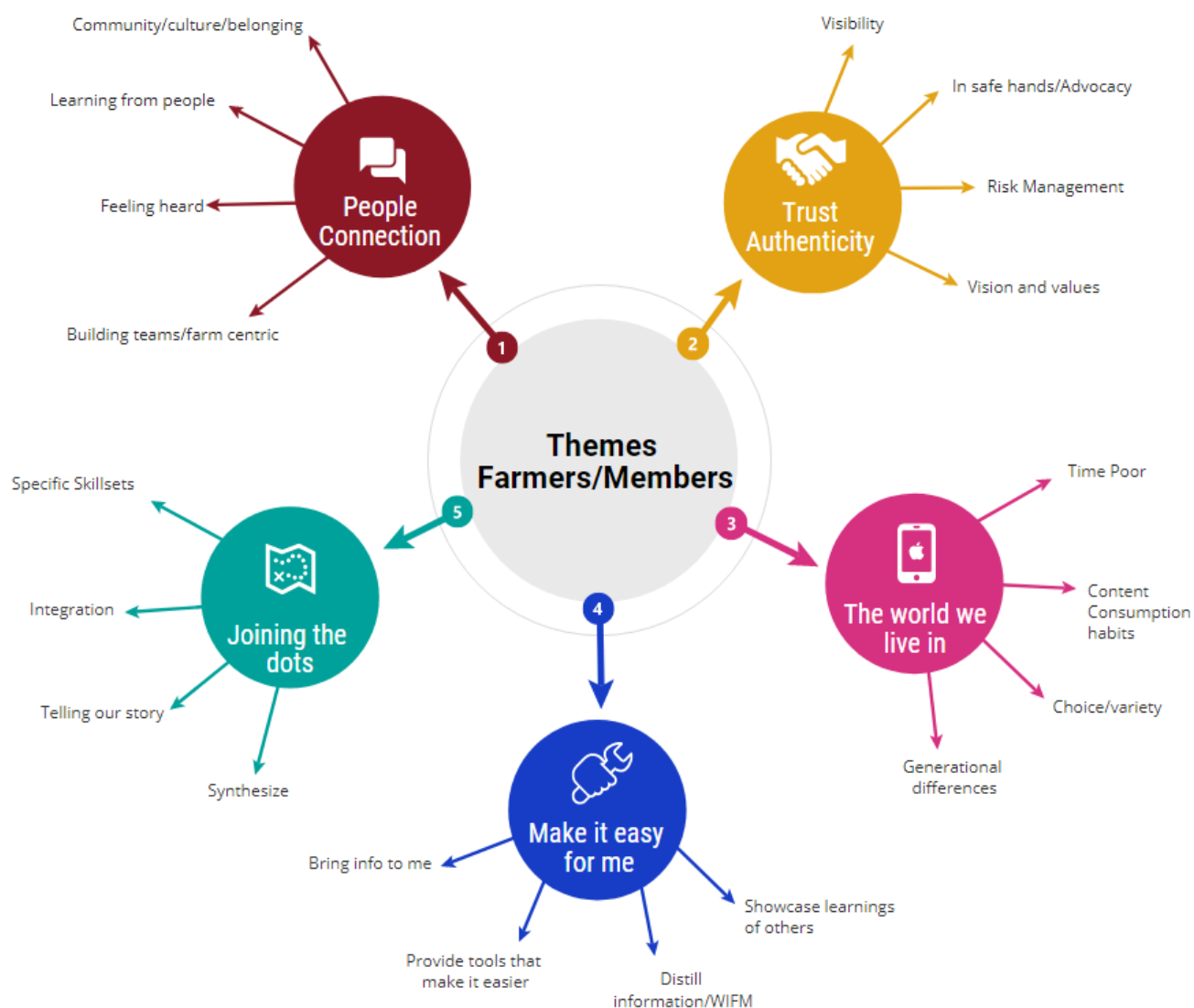


Figure 6: Thematic Map for Farmer/Member Interviews

Farmers/Members

1. People/Connection

a. Community/Culture/Belonging

- Communications from organisations play a significant role in culturing a sense of camaraderie among its levy-payers/members. Social media has enabled a level of connectedness and peer-support that acts to

counter feelings of isolation that can result from geographical isolation or the demands of modern life. Part of this is the 'real-time' nature of social media. Questions can be asked to a group, resulting in many more replies and opinions than would be possible using other forms of communication. There was a great desire to feel part of the wider industry, to feel connected and to know what was going on. Interviewees discussed appreciating communications that reported on industry events and what groups and individuals are doing.

b. Learning from people

- The desire to learn vicariously through reading/hearing what others are doing was strongly reported within the interviews. Peer to peer learning is powerful and interviewees appreciated and wanted more opportunities through multiple media platforms to learn from their peers. There was a desire to make better use of digital communication tools and platforms. With farmers being very visual/kinaesthetic people, watching videos (preferably while being able to submit questions) which connected information to people was valued. This is especially so when it comes to research extension. Personalising research by having the researchers present the material in person or in a visual digital way, farmers felt they could retain the information better and relate to the person delivering it.

c. Feeling heard

- It was repeatedly touched on that most communications coming from industry bodies and organisations is one way. There was great variation between industries in terms of whether the farmers/members felt that their collective voice was heard at organisational level. There was a sense of wariness about 'feedback opportunities'. The difference between organisations 'being seen to be listening' as opposed to 'truly hearing and taking on board' was discussed.

d. Building teams/farm-centric

- There was a common comment from interviewees that they wanted their organisation to support supply of information to rural

professionals that made up the support team for their farm or business. Digital communication enables easier sharing of information between parties.

2. Trust/Authenticity

a. Visibility

- A desire to know what is happening at an organisation level was expressed. It seems it is no longer enough for organisations to be working on behalf of their levy-payers/members. There is a desire from farmers/members now to see evidence of this in action in a more real-time way than has been traditionally used. Linking to the theme of people/connection, it was commented that updates from key personnel within the organisation in a digital/video format would allow members to put 'faces to names' and get short snappy updates on industry activities. The presence of executives and board members at events feeds in to visibility and trust.

b. In safe hands/advocacy

- Interviewees expected that their organisation was acting on their behalf in terms of advocacy on important issues. This was seen as a key role of the organisations. There was a need expressed to being told the truth from organisations, not a 'rose tinted' version of given situations. Personal authenticity was greatly valued by interviewees.

c. Risk management

- Interviewees wanted their organisations to be anticipating future risks to the industry and putting practices in place proactively to mitigate these risks.

d. Vision and values

- It was important to interviewees that their organisation had a vision that they themselves bought into. There was discontent expressed when there was a mismatch between an organisation's vision and expectations of the interviewees.

3. The world we live in

a. Time poor

- This was one of the most frequently mentioned issues. Interviewees expressed that they had very little time to be reading communications from their industry or attending events, so they wanted these to be well designed to be most impactful and efficient to read. Being time poor was a driver for choices of media and content consumption habits.

b. Content consumption habits

- There was a preference for content that is easy to filter, with short informative headlines that allow users to click to learn more if they desire. Social media was utilised by interviewees but Facebook is being used less than Twitter by under 50s, with the exception of using Facebook groups they had opted to join. These gave interviewees a sense of community that was treasured. General industry posts on Facebook were read less. Electronic content was generally consumed between 6.00am and 7.30am and 6.00pm and 8.30pm with more under 50s having access to Facebook throughout the day than over 50s (likely a reflection of smartphone ownership). In under 50s most content was consumed on a smartphone/tablet. While this was also a common way for content to be consumed in over 50s, hard copy print and using a personal computer was also a common way to view content in that group. Videos were a preferred way of receiving content as they match the 'face to the name', make it more personal and meet multiple learning style requirements. Short videos should have subtitles so that users can know what is being said with the sound off, which is more convenient in many situations. Video content is actually more trusted if it is not over-produced but is more raw and authentic, making it more achievable for organisations with limited budgets. There was a desire for content consumption to be an enjoyable experience rather than a chore.

c. Choice/Variety

- Individuals expressed a desire for choice to remain in terms of how they receive content. Some preferred to read technical material digitally so it could be saved for later, while others preferred to mull over technical material in hard copy form. Individuals said they liked to skim digital versions of content but enjoyed reading more in depth articles in print when time allowed. Particularly for conferences and workshops interviewees expressed a desire for more digital experience around conference material and feedback.

d. Generational differences

- There were some noticeable difference in the responses of the under 50 years old group verses the 50 years and older group. Both groups utilised social media and had similar constraints around time and quantity of content they could consume. 50 years old and over interviewees felt less need to see what was happening all the time, compared to under 50 year olds. 50 years and over interviewees relied less on digital forms of communication for a feeling of social connectedness. The under 50 years old group were less happy with their organisation's communication efforts and expected more from them in terms of content design and quality. Interviewees commonly had a sense of 'information overload' and wanted an efficient way of having information brought to them (push), without having to wade through heavy material.

4. Make it easy for me

a. Showcase learnings of others

- Farmers interviewed rated highly case studies and opportunities to learn from other farmers. While this is preferred in person, time wise, and geographically this is not always possible so interviewees looked to their organisations to share this information.

b. Distil information/WIFM

- Most interviewees feel a sense of being bombarded with information that is often hard to sift through to find the 'gold nuggets' that are

relevant and applicable to them. They therefore prefer communications that are outcome focussed, with the key messages at the very beginning, allowing a reader to read on if they want to.

c. Provide tools that make it easier

- Interviewees appreciate tools that come from their organisations that make their lives easier. Most appreciated that this was a good spend of their levy/membership. It was often noted though that it was commonly difficult to locate these tools in an electronic form on websites. Too many clicks were needed to find handy resources. Hard copies of tools and apps for smartphones were also enjoyed.

d. Bring info to me

- A common comment was that interviewees rarely visit websites. They prefer information to be brought to their attention as time does not permit going looking for it. For this reason, email news that contain links to information is much preferred. Interviewees appreciated the fine line between being bombarded with information and the desire to have information brought to them.

5. Joining the dots

a. Synthesize

- With all the information coming out of organisations, initiatives and wider industry, there was a desire from interviewees to have their organisation synthesise this into a bigger picture to present balanced views.

b. Telling our story

- Interviewees all mentioned that they felt their organisation had a major role to play in telling the story of their industry. They felt more examples of farmers doing outstanding thing in agriculture was needed and industry good bodies had a responsibility to do this more. Over 50s were more content their industry organisation was doing this well than under 50s.

c. Integration

- There was expression of enthusiasm for industry organisations to work together more to solve issue and tell the collective story better. Also, a desire for tools to be shared between industries and learning from initiatives shared. More collaborative funding models were mentioned and less ‘reinventing the wheel’ in each individual industry.

d. Specific skillsets

- The under 50 interviewees placed more emphasis on needing the appropriate people with the right skill sets working in these organisations, particularly when it comes to extension/practice change. Initiatives can fall flat without the right people driving them.



Figure 7: Thematic Map - Organisations

Organisations

1. Strategy

a. Organisational vision

- Many communications managers and CEOs felt strongly that having a communications strategy that tied directly to the organisational vision was vital to meet business objectives. Communications is both overarching and underpinning of overall strategy

b. High level management

- All comms managers and CEOs that were interviewed indicated that having a comms person sitting at the ‘top table’ of management is hugely beneficial, meaning communications can sit alongside projects from their inception. It was felt that a lot of efficiency is gained from having a clear marketing communications plan in place prior to projects starting, or events happening.
- c. Risk Management
- An important part of a communications strategy is anticipating future potential risks and acting upon these to mitigate the risk, especially when using social media.
- d. Policy
- Having policies in place as part of any strategy is essential. Social media policies outline what a predetermined course of action will be for anticipated situations,

2. Skillsets

- a. Marketing/Journalism
- There was a clear message coming from both communications managers and CEOs that the division between communications and marketing is narrowing. Having a marketing background is beneficial in structuring and executing communications plans.
- b. Energy/Extroverted
- Not everyone has the natural skillset to communicate effectively. The skillsets that make great executives are not necessarily the same as what makes great communicators. But it also takes a lot of energy to be producing content when already performing a busy role. More naturally extroverted people (common in marketing professionals) have an advantage in the communications role.
- c. Developing capability
- It is not always within budget to have an on-staff communications professional. Small organisations can have an external comms audit commissioned, which identifies areas of opportunity. Then individuals

within an organisation can upskill to create content and deliver it, measure engagement and adapt. In most cases in small organisations, communications is a lower priority as workload and role sharing are often high.

d. Connected

- Communications professionals develop and maintain support networks. They are familiar with all the stakeholder groups for an organisation, and can ensure a plan is in place to keep each group appropriately engaged. Networks can be leveraged off to share communications more widely.

3. Opportunities

a. Anticipate

- Forecast what is needed ahead of issues/projects and plan ahead of time for best results. Anticipate issues and plan proactive solutions, not just responses.

b. Create

- Create platforms and processes to develop content.

c. Maximise

- Maximise opportunities. Use challenges as opportunities and maximise engagement by giving multiple options to cater to the differencing needs and preference of target audiences. Have plans in place to make the most of every opportunity for a communication 'touch point'.

d. Leverage

- Use networks to amplify messages, and work reciprocally to promote activities and initiatives.

4. Design thinking

a. Layering

- Give snapshots/headlines (informative) and allow those consuming the content to dig to deeper layers as and when they choose. This provides an efficient read for those skimming through to find the content relevant to them.

b. Anticipation

- Decide how you are going to reach the target segment of audience before deciding on what to say.

c. Audience segment

- Tailored messaging for different groups or platforms. Audience segmentation can be regional, by production system, by demographic, by learning style or by level of risk averseness.

d. User-focus

- Design with the end user in mind. Make the content relevant with an obvious “what’s in it for me”. It was stressed to think about who the desired target audience is and how content should be designed with that in mind. There was a desire for content to be well constructed to prevent trawling through information. There was a distinct preference for content to be less filled with corporate jargon like ‘silo’ and ‘space’ and use straightforward language.

5. Review and measure

a. Report

- Reporting of outcomes to senior management/board level – having efficient systems for reporting

b. Alignment

- Strong alignment of the communications strategy with overall business strategy is critical for success

c. Checking and rechecking

- Don’t presume to know your audience. The platforms and styles of communication that got you here will no longer be relevant going forward in a lot of cases.

d. Tracking/analysis

- Analytics is much simpler when working in digital communication. Tracking clicks and hits for reporting is beneficial. Whilst informative, this type of analytics is limited and one cannot tell what action resulted from the information delivered. Other methods of tracking and analysis

discussed were surveys, membership rates, or degree of approval for levy changes. Coverage in mainstream media can be tracked and sentiment assessed.

Further Insights from Interviews

The semi-structured interviews permitted not only the prepared questions to be asked but also allowed ideas to be pursued in more detail in an organic, unplanned way. Some of the most valuable insights came once the main body of the interview had finished, and natural conversation flowed.

The following quotes are from the interviews. These are formatted as discrete snippets and quotes, which will be built on in the Discussion section of this report. To respect discussions under Chatham House Rule, the quotes will remain unattributed.

“Fresh thinking at a strategic level is more important now than it ever was. The world is a different place and what got us here is not going to get us there”.

“From a marketing perspective, industry communications are often uninspiring.”

“If an organisation is serious about engaging with its stakeholders, then communications professionals need to be part of the strategic team at a high level, and report directly to the board”.

“Independent comms audits are extremely valuable, otherwise organisations can get quite captured internally, and be dazzled by their own brilliance”.

“Comms is about joining dots: dots being people, science, sentiment, projects...it’s all about making connections”.

“Vision drives everything. You need to see the possibilities for what they can be.

“Most businesses and associations are centred on people. Communications is the glue that joins people together”.

“The issue is blockages in information flow that occur as a result of misalignment of professional skillsets”.

Discussion

The major findings of this project can be broadly categorised as

- Content consumption preferences
- The challenges involved in modern communications
- How communications sits within an organisation

This section of the report critically analyses the findings from the project and takes selected concepts further through reflection.

Trust

The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer states that ‘peers are now as credible as experts’. Also, “No longer is it effective for organisations to work autonomously, using a traditional top-down approach. A flatter more participative model is necessary to generate support from stakeholders”. “At its essence, the model that we prescribe moves beyond “for the people” to “with the people” placing people squarely at the centre. This sentiment was strong in many of the farmer interviewees, who wanted to feel involved and well informed about the what those in their organisation were doing for the betterment of the industry.

Covey (2013) discussed thirteen behaviours of high trust, one of which is straight talk. This mirrored the message received from interviewees for this project that didn’t want ‘spin’ from their industry bodies, or to be bombarded with corporate jargon.

Engagement

It is too simplistic to say that the end goal of communications is engagement. It is true in that the desired effect of most communications is to elicit a response, however calling it an end goal implies that it is a product of actions rather than an ongoing practice.

The deer Industry’s Advance Parties fall into a category often described as engagement initiatives. Increasing uptake and participation in APs could be used as an indicator to say the deer industry is “doing engagement well”. Poor communication is the most cited reason for project failure, and the deer industry has worked hard to mitigate this risk through providing

multiple platforms for communication for and about APs. The challenge will persist, and as the number of APs grows, and as APs have been going for longer, the challenge to effectively communicate and share learnings to the wider industry will become tougher. This is an example of a plan needing to be refreshed throughout the life of a project.

Strategy

Assuming you know what people want is very easy to do. Strategies need to be ground-checked. Know your audience. Peoples' trigger points are very different, and what they are interested in changes with time. Often, a carefully crafted 500-word email just won't get read. Email is still a core channel, however the absorption of information within an email is getting lower. Attention spans are getting shorter, the pull on people's time is getting stronger. People are time-poor. Crafting messages with that in mind is critical to messages getting read.

Leaders need to be adaptable and accept that the world is changing fast. Recognising people are time poor, a two-minute video or a two-minute voice presentation can be an effective way of connecting with people in a short period. Recordings can be shared in many ways: traditional email, direct message, or posted on a social media platform are a few examples.

Opportunities

One of the most striking things that came through when talking with farmer interviewees was the number of missed or poorly executed communication opportunities identified. Across all sectors interviewed there were many examples given of situations where poor communications impacted on the event or experience. It appeared much easier to provide examples of when communication was executed poorly than of examples of excellent communication. Perhaps this is a recall bias, with negative experiences being easier to remember. Having a communications plan that anticipates and lays out touchpoints is critical for project success.

Whether it be group initiatives, conferences or industry collaboration the most common feedback comment received is that the communication 'could have been better'. What was

not done for this project, which would have been interesting would be to compare by way of a scoring system, how an industry rated itself in terms of effective communication and engagement, and how stakeholders rated the same things. The anticipated gap would justify further study in this area to identify specifics around where organisations were deemed to be ‘falling short’.

Skillsets

All interview groups (farmers/members, organisations and communications consultants) placed a high importance on ensuring the people in charge of communications and engagement initiatives had the appropriate skill sets to do a great job. To create and coordinate the execution of an effective communications plan within the modern context requires professional knowledge of traditional and digital platforms, a high functioning level of emotional intelligence and people skills, extroverted nature, excellent project management skills, and a working knowledge of analytics. Many of these same skills were mentioned when farmers discussed the attributes of effective extension or practice change facilitators. Across all the sectors interviewed, farmers interviewed identified that a proportion of people in extension/facilitation roles within the organisation that served them were lacking some of the skillsets mentioned above. It was felt that the success of good initiatives was suffering due to a mismatch of skillsets. This points to a wider issue of sector capability. For the primary industry in New Zealand to make significant gains in on-farm profitability through practice-change initiatives, there needs to be concerted effort put to recruiting people with the appropriate skillsets for these roles. Providing training for incumbent people in these roles is not effective if they have a personality type that is misaligned with the role they have taken on.

In smaller organisations with limited budgets it could be said that justifying a dedicated communications manager role is hard to do. Arguably, it is even more crucial for smaller organisations to have its communications and engagement as efficiently run as possible rather than in a fragmented way that is often costlier in the long term. Judicious spend of budget in this case could be to commission an independent communications audit. This was recommended by all of the communications managers and many of the CEOs interviewed for

this project. The auditor can make assessments unbiased by existing legacies, and can provide a set of recommendations, of which the organisation can take on all or just some. Organisations can be quite 'captured' internally and 'dazzled by their own brilliance'. A 'fresh set of eyes' can be invaluable in this respect.

On reflection, the interviews with communications managers provided a fascinating insight into how career background influences execution of the role. There was a distinct difference in approaches between those with a marketing background and those with a journalist background. It appeared that a marketing background was advantageous for communications, with the two disciplines seemingly becoming more intertwined in this digital age. So much so that much of the North American business literature has adopted the linguistic portmanteau 'marcom', although this term seems to be used most often in the context of sales marketing. Public relations, journalism and marketing are different fields with different specialisations, training and theoretical underpinnings, but in an organisation they can, and do, work hand in hand for an integrated purpose. In small organisation a combination of these disciplines is essential.

A common criticism by sceptics of the importance of having a dedicated communications management role, is that they do not need someone to tell them how to talk to their stakeholders. Another criticism is that they feel they do well without a dedicated person in that role. Organisations with a dedicated communications manager stated that the key justification is efficiency.

Audience Segmentation

End users have different needs and preferences for communication content, design, frequency and platform. Communications designed to accommodate every type of preference become mediocre for all. Organisations need to abandon homogenous communication methods and adopt strategies that (within budget) can be segmented by audience, to deliver a higher quality experience for all.

The importance of understanding your audience is not a new concept to Deer Industry New Zealand. O'Connor and Byrne (2012) described the results of research commissioned by DINZ to understand more deeply deer farmers' attitude to risk and change. A survey was conducted and the responses were used to categorise farmers into innovators, early adopters, early/late majority, laggards and disengaged. The results included displaying what proportion of the national herd was farmed by farmers in each category. The study also identified what motivated farmers to change. The information arising from the study reported by O'Connor and Byrne (2012) has equipped DINZ to tailor its design and delivery of practice change initiatives to the needs of particular segments of the farming community.

Some of the organisations interviewed for this project audience-segment by region, to tailor communications. Others have taken a step further and segmented their target audience by profiling them into categories based on a matrix including farming business size and intensity, stage of life, attitudes to risk, learning styles and what their primary motivations are, using customer relationship management software to store the information.

This project enabled a glimpse into another way of segmenting an audience, by way of content consumption preferences, but it would not be advantageous to take such a split literally. What this project has done is highlight that a suite of media platforms is needed to cater to the varied preferences of even a relatively small group.

Design Thinking

In all the industries interviewed, there has been a big change to benefit-led content, focussing on the WHY?

Organisations are designing content in three main ways:

1. Showing where their levy goes – linking this in the minds of levy payers/members, connecting the value they are getting with the strategic investments made
2. Value – demonstrating what the value is for individual businesses (What's in it for me? WIIFM)

3. Behaviour change – Tailoring to different needs and categories of adoption. Unpicking barriers, and designing content based on what motivates different groups.

This, while beneficial, is only part of the scope of a communications plan, which should comprehensively cover all possible touchpoints and opportunities to communicate and add to engagement.

We are operating in a ‘real time’ environment now. People want to be ‘in the know’ about things as they happen or almost immediately after. Reporting on something that happened a month ago is not how people want to consume content. When acknowledging that people are time poor, we also must acknowledge that this dictates how many stories they will read at any one time. A print publication with many articles, while still valued, struggles to get articles read. We are in an instant feedback environment where print media cannot keep up. To cater to this, online, real time reporting is needed with small, easily digested pieces that are published more frequently, rather than saved up for a bigger print issue.

The Digital World

It is undeniable that a ‘digital first’ mentality is needed in today’s world. Due to the preferences captured in this study, which spanned generations, the preferences of mobile friendly content, easily digested, and with layering to allow rapid assessment of content with choices to delve deeper available, need to be front of mind.

Users want a greater digital experience, and above all it must be fast and easy. The number of clicks matters more and more to users.

Clickbait is an unfortunate term but in this context it applies, as readers want to be able to see at a glance (one or two sentences maximum) whether they want to click to read an item or not. It has to be immediately appealing for someone to bother to read further, or be clear that it is important enough to be opened.

With a tidal wave of information coming at farmers, including emails, farming papers, and social media posts, there is a desire for their industry organisation to distil the ‘noise’. Farmers struggle with decision fatigue, and as a result, prefer bitesize pieces of information more

frequently than a lot of information infrequently, purely because of the time it takes to get through.

The original aim when this study began was to explore how communications from DINZ and DFA could be better tailored to suit the younger generation (Gen X, Gen Y (millennials, and a new definition Gen F), and how they consume content currently and into the future. The responses from the farmers interviewed led the acknowledgement on behalf of the author that the way in which end users consume content is not defined by age. There was an appetite for more digital communications from all the ages of interviewees.

In fact, from all age groups of end users interviewed, the preference for a wide range of communication styles was expressed. Print media was still valued by all age groups, which should be noted. Nearly all interviewees expressed that they wanted a full range of communication channels.

The conclusion drawn from this is that the pendulum should not swing too far towards digital communication that print is overlooked. Across all age groups, there was a preference for technical information to be in hard copy. The reasons given for this were mostly as interviewees felt they could digest and absorb technical information better when reading it in hard copy. However, it was also acknowledging that many GEN Y interviewees also wanted the functionality of being able to easily search for the same technical information electronically when they needed to refer to it again.

Social Media

Social media still used more to push information than elicit genuine two-way communication and feedback. With social media being an elevator technology to more advanced forms of communication, organisations cannot risk being left behind. In an instant world, organisations need to think about how to refresh their approach, image and build up real-time credibility. Whichever social media platforms are used, there needs to be clarity on why it is being used. It should not be used just to get followers or so that people recognise the organisation's name, but be used to present the organisation as in-touch, active, engaging and consulting. Then the challenge is to execute this well.

What are the risks of failure?

Disengagement, disillusionment and farmers leaving the industry are real risks of not getting this right. No matter how well performing an industry may be, people are what make an industry. Every missed or mishandled opportunity compounds the effect of poor communication.

With every risk, there lies opportunity. This project has highlighted there is huge opportunity within not just the deer industry, but the primary sector, to embrace design thinking and digital disruption to develop communication strategies that inspire and cultivate deep engagement. The primary sector as a whole will benefit from not only deep and living engagement within industries, but between its industries, which would lift collaboration and grow the capability and performance of the sector as a whole.

Conclusions

Communications both underpins and is overarching of an organisation's strategic objectives.

To get the most benefit, communications needs to be a role within the organisation which sits at a high level, and is performed by a professional with specific skillsets and specialist knowledge.

It is necessary to provide a suite of platforms for communications but start with a 'digital first' mentality.

Engagement is not the end goal of communication, but a live, ongoing relationship that needs to be nurtured, with effective communication being the enabler for this.

Content consumption habits and preferences of farmers are diverse and rapidly changing.

More than ever before organisations need to understand social stresses and demands on farmers and other stakeholders, and place that forefront of mind, using a design-thinking approach to communications.

Everything communicates. You can either make choices in advance about what and how you are going to communicate, or react to what others do. Identify your target audience, then craft and leverage your core message and master narrative. Monitor and adjust as appropriate on an ongoing basis.

There is much more to comms than eliciting engagement. Communications is a tool to holistically manage the brand of an organisation and influence the reputation of the industry.

Recommendations

1. Independent Communications Audit
2. Senior Communications Manager
3. Comprehensive Communications Strategy including Social Media Policy

This is a summary of the recommendations which will be made privately to DINZ.

Next Steps

Present to DINZ Board and Executive

Publish a detailed synopsis in the farming press.

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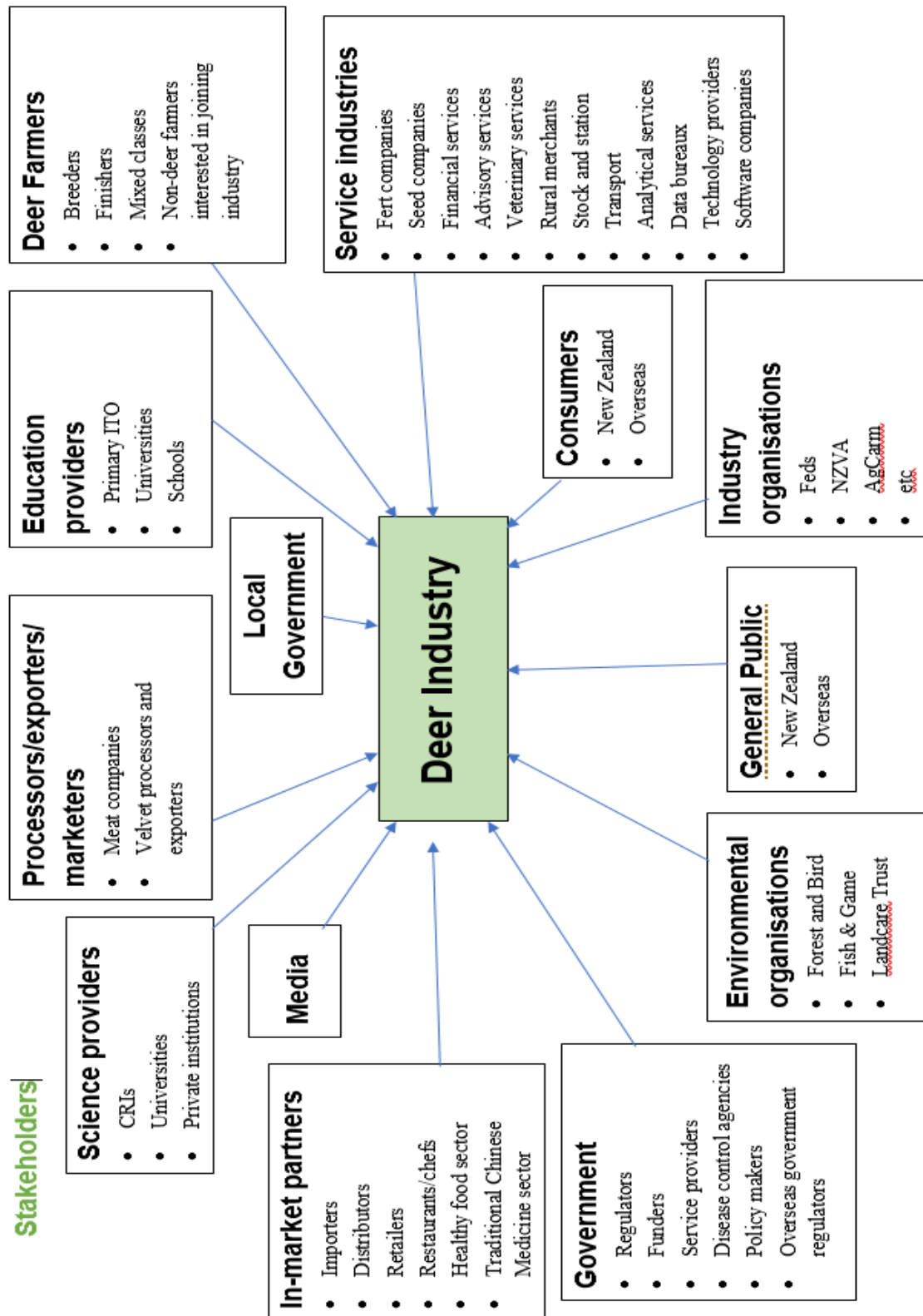
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Stakeholder Diagram



Appendix 2: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

Can I please record our interview? Completely private and for project use only.

Right to pull out at any time or make a comment under Chatham house rule

Can I send you some follow-up questions if the need arises?

These questions are to provide a guide to a semi-structured interview. It is anticipated the conversation will develop organically using these questions a starting point.

CEOs/Chairs/Comms managers

1. Is communication a strategic focus for the exec team?
2. Do you have a WRITTEN comms strategy? How is it tied to the overall vision of the organisation?
3. What are the key strands/areas of focus for the comms plan? – e.g. internal with members, external with customers, degree of stakeholder engagement (and importance/focus of these relative to the others)
4. What are the key skillsets important for a communications professional?
5. How have you gone about ensuring your organisation has the most appropriate communications strategy possible?
6. What have you identified as important to your stakeholders in terms of communication?
7. How has your organisation changed in terms of how it communicates in the last two-five years?
8. What does good engagement look like to you? Across sectors ie end users, markets, internal staff and partner style
9. How do you measure engagement in your organisation? (of levy/payers/members)

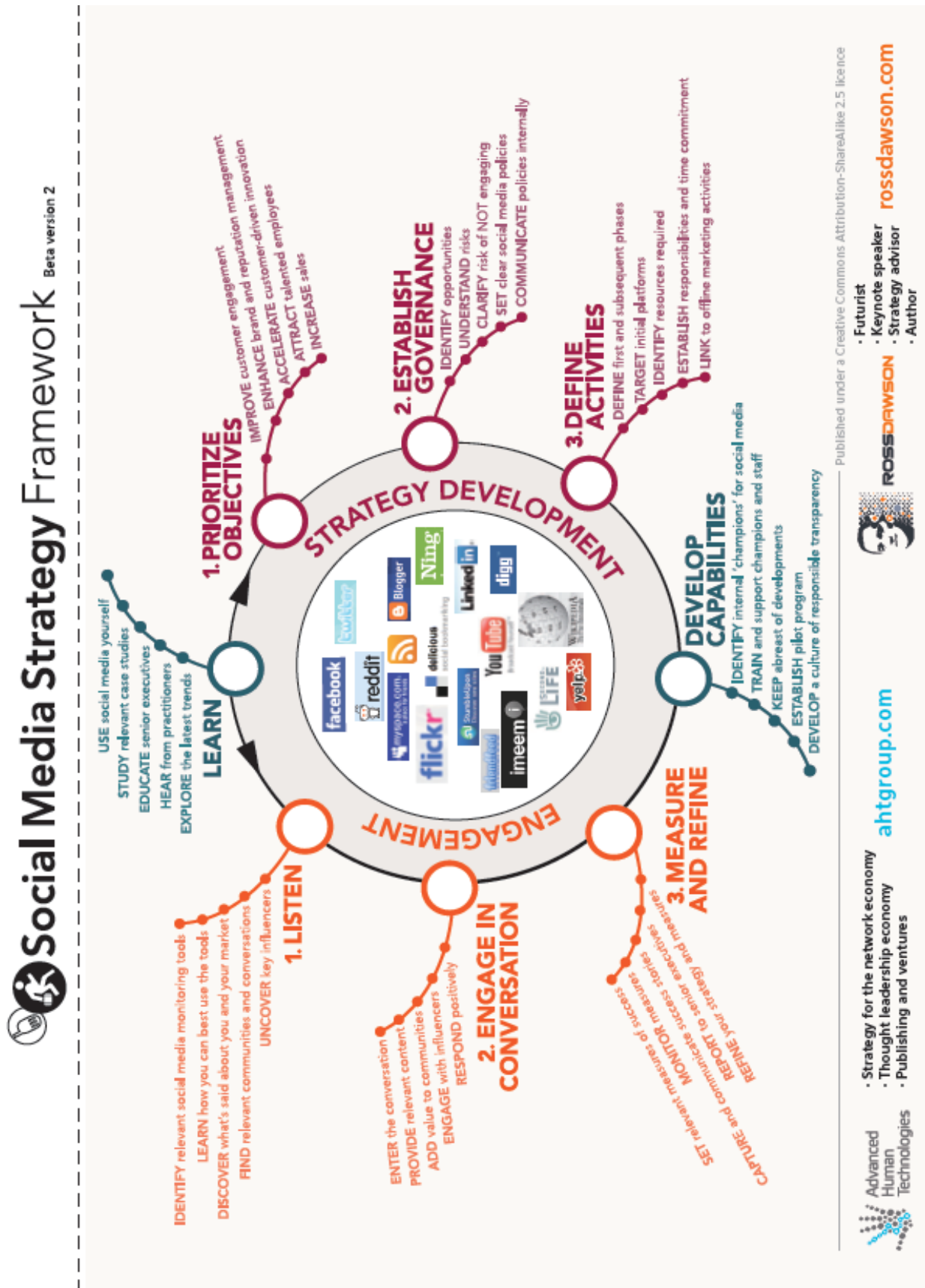
Stakeholders/Levy payers/Members

1. What do you want from your industry good body (IGB) or Association in terms of communication?
 - a. What matters most to you?
 - b. How do you prefer to receive information? (Website, emails, direct comms, social media...)
2. How good a job do you feel your IGB does in communicating to you?
3. What do you enjoy/like about the way the organisations communicates with you?
4. What do you wish it did more of?
5. How much does individual CEO style affect an organisation's comms strategy?
6. What changes have you noticed in the way your organisation communicates with you lately?

7. How active are you within your industry?

To Communications experts/consultants

1. What do organisations/associations need to think about when designing comms strategies?
2. What do companies get wrong when communicating?
3. How can organisations/associations meet the needs of their target audiences?
4. How much does individual CEO style affect an organisation's comms strategy?
5. How can they best measure engagement?



There are three key components to thought leadership
and change facilitation:

Understanding the past

Being dissatisfied with the present

and

Seeing the world as it isn't.... yet.