Training in communication planning

Patron, Josefina S

1979

Patron, J. S. (1979). Training in communication planning. In AMIC-EWCI Conference on Approaches to Communication Planning : Solo, Nov 4-8, 1979. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/91735>

Training In Communication Planning

By

Josefina S Patron

AMIC - EWCI REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON
"APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION PLANNING"

in cooperation with
PRESS COUNCIL OF INDONESIA & INDONESIAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION
SOLO, Indonesia, 4 - 8 November 1979

AMIC (16) d

659.3.001.1
PAT

TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION PLANNING

943

by: Dr. Josefina S. Patron

The subject of training in communication planning has been, as we all know, a much-explored and much-discussed area in the past several years as evidenced by various seminars and workshops that have been organised and conducted on the topic both on international and national levels. The Unesco, sponsored meeting held in Kuala Lumpur on 16 to 21 December, 1974 was probably the first most comprehensive discussion of the subject. It has since been followed by many such seminars and workshops in various parts of the world. In our Asian countries, the training of communication planners has, of late, emerged as a priority area of consideration especially since communication planning - integrated, systematic, forward-looking - has become a recognized necessity in the total communication activities of a country.

It might be well to establish, at the outset four major premises which will serve as basis for ideas, ~~views~~ and recommendations to be advanced in this paper. There are:

1. that communication is a key component of development and as such is an active and dynamic participant in the total development process;
2. that communications planning, in whatever form it might take, or whatever approach it might use, is an indispensable requirement in a country's usage of its communication resources;

3. that communication planning must necessarily be within the perspective of a country's social, economic, political and cultural realities as well as its development plans; and

4. that training in and for communications planning for a particular country must necessarily be set within these perspective and hence should be appropriate, relevant, practical and applicable.

It would also be useful at this point to ask ourselves: "What do we mean by "communication planner#?"

Are we in this conference targetting ourselves primarily to what we might want to call the total communications planner#? The communications planner# who sits with policymakers to situate communication within the national development plan?

Or shall we not also consider those who are involved with planning at whatever level and with whatever form of communication activity?

For certainly, anyone who is entrusted with the task of critically looking at, or managing any aspect of communication resource or activity, whether it is from the international/national/regional/provincial/municipal point of view, or whether it is from a program or a project point of view, or whether it is ~~from~~ source/medium/message/audience point of view or whether it is ~~from~~ a technical or creative point of view, is a communications planner in more ways than one. I trust that we, around this table, are agreed on that point.

I feel it is so basic to our discussions in this conference if we come to some agreement on certain basic assumptions because I am convinced, having been in communications planning on a national level in my country for the past six years, that it is not at all that easy to peg or to set strictly-defined boundaries for communication planning and to be able to say who are the communication planners in the country.

It might be appropriate to look at the definition agreed upon at the Unesco meeting in KL in 1974 on the role and training of communication planners. The seminar settled on the following definition:

"Communication planners are persons or groups of persons, at various levels of responsibility, who, having gathered information about past and current communication needs, activities and resources, and future possibilities, process and integrate these, and then formulate viable alternative plans or programs to meet anticipated communication needs and promote constructive activities for the total well-being of communities and individuals."

With due respect to the 1974 Unesco meeting, I am not quite sure whether this is a definition which we might want to adopt at this conference. For, to my mind, as I indicated earlier, a communications planner is anyone who is entrusted with the task of critically looking at or managing any aspect of communication resource or activity and this can be on any level or any form. A communication planner is one who brings his thinking to bear on the systematic, appropriate, relevant and effective use of available communication facilities -- infrastructure and facilities, manpower, funds and materials. A communications planner is one who will also be able to explore various communication means, approaches and options, examine technological developments that might affect communications and be constantly aware of possible shifts and changes in his society's values and directions which may alter the needs for communication.

It is not my intention to force this definition in our conference. Rather, I would like to seek the indulgence of this conference in using this definition as my frame of reference for proposing possible training guidelines for communication planners.

The first consideration is: Who are we going to train?

Maybe we could list down several groups or categories of communication planners. Let me first focus on government communication planners, more specifically those involved in the use of communication in support of development programs.

1. The first group would be those who sit at high levels as with national policymakers and planners. This group necessarily should have access to top leadership.
2. The second group would be those who work closely with the first group and serve as special technical staff or as heads of communications planning offices/divisions or units not only in the Ministry of Information (or its equivalent) but also in various ministries bureaus and agencies. Included in this group (depending on how high the staff or office/unit is) would be communication planning specialist in media utilization, software development and utilization, hardware use and forecasting, management and budget analysis and forecasting, and evaluation. This group is expected to work closely with the media implementors or if I may be allowed to introduce a term, "media managers".
3. The third group would be the "media managers". At this level, specific program/project planning is the major involvement. Included in this group are heads of production divisions and units and other special staff that are assigned planning functions.
4. The fourth group ^{vs} ~~are~~ what I might want to call the "delivery" group. These are the people who are part of the entire delivery system of a communications agency or program implementing agency. They are a crucial part of the total planning process since, through them, national communication programs are brought to the grassroots and through them, too, feedback is brought to the national agencies and to top leadership.

5. I would like to add a fifth group, which this conference might find debatable. I would like to refer to them as "managers of development resources". These are composed of those who are in key positions in sectoral development programs and as such have a big say in how their programs are to be communicated to the public. To my mind, they again form a crucial part of the total communication planning process and certainly the success of a communication campaign, to a great extent, hinges on ^{their} ~~the~~ full understanding of the channels, media, messages and approaches utilized. I strongly feel that this group needs some form of training in communications planning if they are to be effective components in the total communications network.

These five groups of "communication planners" would, invariably, have some counterpart or other in the private sector especially for national organizations/agencies that are involved in national development programs or projects or in countries where media such as radio and television, film and press and publications are in the hands of the private sector. Where it has come to be accepted that media is a partner in development, then the training requirements for communication planners in the private sector should in many ways, be parallel to, ^{if not necessarily the same as,} the training for communication planners in government.

We now come to the second and more important question: What types and forms of training are to be given to these groups?

Unlike in the Unesco meeting in 1974, I shall not, in this paper, attempt to stipulate specific training schemes. What I would like to do, however, is to list certain qualities and competencies which, to my mind, are basic to a communications planner~~s~~ at whatever level.

For my list, I have taken the prerogative of adopting the eight qualities agreed upon in the 1974 Unesco meeting with some revisions as well as added a few more of my own. The qualities are:

1. A keen understanding of development -- its new elements, themes and perspectives -- on the international and national levels.
2. Political consciousness as well as an understanding of the country's goals and directions.
3. A sense of social responsibility.
4. A good knowledge of institutional settings.
5. A full appreciation of the country's history, culture and heritage
6. A sharp understanding of realities that have shaped the media systems and forms of the country.
7. A skilled and intuitive ability to assess various media forms, channels and tools and to determine which to use in specific situations.
8. Ability to translate development concepts into practical and applicable terms.
9. Ability to understand human behavior as well as adaptability, flexibility and innovativeness in mind and attitude.
10. A creative approach to problem-solving as well as some basic creative skills or and understanding of creative processes on media.
11. Forecasting and fiscal planning skills.
12. Evaluative and analytical skills.

Too much, we might say. True. But these, to me, are qualities that communications planners should have. If some of the qualities are not present, then appropriate training, including self-training, should help in the formation of a communications planners.

The qualities listed above are, I would like to think, self-explanatory and therefore need not require elaboration. Maybe I would just like to stress some points brought up in the Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Asia and Oceania held in Kuala Lumpur from 5 to 14 November, 1979. I feel they are crucial to

our discussions in this conference because of their implications for training especially of communication planners, some of the most relevant are:

1. An understanding of the communication systems of development, ^{a country whose} like their overall social and economic development, ^{should be} viewed against their historical part.
2. The relationship between state and mass media/ the role media are to play in development.
3. Consideration of mixed media systems - state-owned/private-owned.
4. The need for integrated communications planning.
5. The urban-rural dichotomy - the need for integrated approaches and for efficient information delivery and management of information flow to the grassroots.
6. A wise choice of communications technology and understanding of the problems of technology transfer.
7. Promotion and wider use of folk/traditional media forms
8. Stress on interpersonal and intergroup communication and small group or small format media.
9. Creation of sufficient facilities to become self-sufficient in the production of indigenous programs and materials.
10. Promotion of information systems and services at the national, regional and international levels.
11. Evolving special methods of communication research and evaluation in consonance with the unique characteristics of each country.

These points culled from the 51 recommendations of the Intergovernmental Conference should be very helpful guideposts for us in our considerations of content of training programs for communication planners.

Finally, we come to the third question. How do we go about training communication planners?

First, formal training.

To my mind, training for communications planning should begin on the undergraduate level. A new graduate in mass communications should be able to bring with him into his first job some basic integrative, evaluative, planning and creative skills as well as sufficient grounding in the social and behavioral sciences. The undergraduate curricula in communication should, therefore, start taking this need into consideration.

On the graduate level, I feel that planning approaches and strategies should be a strong part of the curriculum along with research. This could also be interwoven in various courses - theory, production and writing.

Now, for informal training or in-service training.

To my mind, training for communications planning is actually best done in-service and should be on-going and continuing. Thus seminars and workshops, conferences and meetings would be most appropriate. ~~These~~ can be done on international, national, regional, provincial, municipal levels depending on needs and resources.

Existing training institutions and resources within the country and in the Asian region should be identified and, where necessary and possible, further developed to provide for the suitable training needs.

I have endeavored to present in this paper some views and suggestions on training in communications planning. The views and suggestions cull from previous meetings and conferences on the subject as well as from my experiences as a communications planner in my country

for some years now. I trust that my experiences find similarities with yours in your own countries. I trust, too, that you feel with me the need to come down to basics and specifics in discussing a most important topic such as training for a country's communication planners.

May I end by saying that communication in development should assume a role as a "liberating force" for individuals and society and should facilitate and promote the development of self-awareness and self-growth which are the essence of an enlightened national public. In this context, therefore, the role ^{and training} of the communications planner, is, indeed, a most crucial one.