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Communication quality measurement of Councils

By Marita Vos, Research Group for Governmental Communication, Faculty of Communication and Journalism, Utrecht University of Professional Education, The Netherlands

Content

Summary

1. Introduction
 2. Communication quality
 3. Balanced scorecard
 4. Quality indicators
 5. Dimensions of communication quality
 6. The weight of the indicators
 7. In conclusion
- Attachment

Summary

The Research Group for Governmental Communication has developed a tool to measure the quality of Council communication. This new instrument, which is based on the Kaplan and Norton's 'balanced scorecard', is intended to help Councils communicate more effectively with citizens.

The publication describes the tool in detail to enable communication experts to utilise it within their own Council. The instrument does not only focus on the activities of communication departments, but on all Council communication. It will help communication experts increase the value of their consultancy within the Council organisation.

The quality of three communication functions is researched; namely corporate communication, policy communication and organisation-related communication, each of which is carefully measured using 12 variables. The Council's end results can be compared with a previous year's results or with that of other Councils. In order to obtain a clear view of the options available for further improvement, the results are itemised on several dimensions such as the transparency of governmental information and policy, the responsiveness of the organisation, interactive policy and the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication. The developed tool can be used for detailed measurements as well as for discussion about the required communication priorities.

Marita Vos Ph.D. is a part time lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Communication and Journalism, Utrecht University of Professional Education, The Netherlands. She studied Sociology with a major in Communication Studies and took her doctoral degree in the field of image policy. She has a consultancy and wrote several books, e.g. about Integrated Communication, see www.accede.nl.

*This is a short version of a Dutch research report (1) published by the Faculty of Communication and Journalism. A recent book title gives you more background information: M. Vos & H. Schoemaker, *Accountability of Communication Management; a balanced scorecard for communication quality*, ISBN 9059312996, www.lemma.nl.*

1. Introduction

For many years, Councils have been working on renewing their administration with the purpose of getting closer to citizens and further improve its functionality. Attention to quality care and performance measurements certainly applies within this climate.

Attitude, with respect to the Government, has been subject to change for some time. In the Netherlands in the 60's and 70's, the creation of the welfare state was coupled with high expectations (2). However, many problems appeared to be difficult to control due to their size and nature, such as the environment and unemployment for example. These are complex, internationally related problems that are difficult to solve by the Government alone. However, citizens were disappointed and hardly noticed what was actually achieved (3).

In order to increase policy effectiveness, Government organisations worked together with other parties on complex problems. Firstly, that occurred by means of covenants and subsequently by co-productions. One example is the National collaboration of business community sectors, which was set up in order to realise energy saving costs. Collaboration also gained much attention at regional and local levels. This intensive joint consultation also required the Councils to produce different procedures, aimed at interactive policy making. More consideration was given to a city or district viewpoint. Some of the Councils overturned the organisational structure because they believed that the concern model utilised to organise many of the Councils was too centralised and internally focused. Others were also working hard on cultural change (4), to become an open organisation that reacted better to what occurred within society. These innovations, however, did not result in a better Government image; high expectations are not easy to meet.

How exactly do citizens react towards the municipal government? In general, people are happy with the place in which they live, e.g. the greenery, the maintenance and shopping facilities, although people are somewhat concerned about safety. Furthermore, people are also happy with the direct contact with governmental organisations. However, the overall assessment of the Councils is not high (5). Confidence in politics is particularly low (6). Local administrators do not always appear to be closer than the nationals because they are often less well known.

There is a small group of people who feel allied to the Council and Management. A larger group does not feel this quite so strongly and a smaller group is indifferent (7). Many citizens prefer to pass policy management over to the elected authorities and if they have a problem then they know where to find them. In previous years, approximately half of the citizens initiated an action to bring something to the attention of the municipal authorities and the vast majority felt that they had been taken seriously (8).

The Government addresses people in different ways. Many consider the Government to be a **multi-pigheaded monster** (9). Various governmental organisations and divisions address citizens; the government does not speak with one voice. During time, consistency is not always great, particularly when policy changes due to a new political line (10).

Accordingly, an **integral approach** to communication is required as well as paying more attention to the receiver (11). With the aid of the developed communication quality measurement, we can look integrally at Council communication. Thereafter we will explain why it is important to take a wide look at communication.

2. Communication quality

Communication is *one* of the **functional areas** utilised by an organisation in order to solve or prevent problems (12). It is a telescope for looking with a certain expertise at the organisation and its social environment. Previously, finance, marketing and human resource were all particularly considered to be functional areas but nowadays it is also important to look at the functioning of the organisation from a communication viewpoint because the interdependency of society has increased. Dependency accordingly assumes that attention is given to inter-relations and with that communication. Top Management integrates all these functional area approaches and evaluates the various forms of contribution. Furthermore, Top Management also needs to have sufficient insight into the viewpoint that communication offers.

Communication is therefore not just a collection of operational activities executed by communication experts. It is an **approach** that is important for many within the organisation. Communication experts inspire others within the organisation to apply this approach in their behaviour and encourage others to be equipped for it. The whole organisation needs to have communication skills and think from the target groups viewpoint.

It is not only the communication department that needs to communicate well but also the organisation and its employees (13). In fact everyone within their own network of internal and external relations. What is important is to have **an eye for the receiver**, be concrete and subsequently, pay attention to **contact opportunities** and **information carriers** (14). In addition communication experts ensure that the communication policy supports the general policy and they implement part of the communication activities. Generally, these are activities that require specialised knowledge and have a high associated risk because they make such an impact (e.g. media contacts and crisis communication).

Communication quality does not only mean considering the quality of work done by the communication experts. On the contrary, we mean the whole communication within the municipal organisation and the way the quality can be improved upon. For this purpose, the communication quality measurement can be a useful tool. Communication experts can use it as an auditor (someone who collects and examines information) in order to give more substance to their **advisory function**. The communication expert who has clarity regarding the communication quality criteria, can take more initiative.

Now that organisations are increasingly realising the power of communication, communication experts are receiving more requests from within the organisation. However, these internal requests are not always the most important items for the communication adviser to focus attention upon. Furthermore, problems really requiring communication advice are not always being addressed to the communication experts. Accordingly, they need to pro-actively monitor this. In addition, it helps if managers have a better insight into what communication can or cannot contribute.

As a functional area, communication **promotes interaction between the organisation and the social environment**. Maintaining open communication channels offers a basis for organisations to jointly function with other parties. Information exchange is also necessary for co-operation within the organisation. In addition, communication can increase the effectiveness of the performance as well as other Council measures, such as regulations and facilities.

The core competencies are (15):

- consistently confronting Government organisations with the perspective of the outside world;
- rendering significant information because information often needs to be adapted in order to be useful to the outside world.

Communication quality can be approached from different **perspectives**, i.e. from the organisational policy, the profession or from the target groups. We have embedded all three approaches within the communication quality measurement.

The quality criteria stem firstly from Council policy. Our understanding of 'communication quality' is; **the degree to which communication contributes towards the effectiveness of Council policy and how it strengthens the relationship between citizens and Council organisations**.

Accordingly, the measurement tool is based upon this.

We also utilise general quality criteria that originate from the communication profession. Furthermore, we ensure that the citizens' perspective and that of other target groups is sufficiently represented within the communication measurement. In this way we can take a detailed look at the Councils communication quality.

3. Balanced scorecard

The *balanced scorecard* is a **measuring and improvement system** focussed upon translating strategies into concrete actions (16). Kaplan and Norton provide four focus areas that interpret an organisation's performance, i.e. financial, customers, internal business management and the learning curve or growth (17). This is a useful method because it not only looks at the organisation's performance but also at the engines that power this performance. Therefore, possible actions are promptly obtained from the analysis. However, Kaplan and Norton really have a Company in mind rather than a Council.

We utilise the philosophy behind the *balanced scorecard* in order to optimise and describe the contribution that communication offers to the organisation. Becker already produced something similar for the 'Human Resource' area of expertise (18). Accordingly, the method can be used for the organisational policy as a whole or that of a Company division. It can also be used to describe and optimise the contribution of a certain area of expertise to the organisation. We will carry out the latter for the communication area of expertise.

Initially, we will consider the Council organisation as a whole, but the method can also be adapted for a core service within the Council.

The contribution of communication

Kaplan and Norton's focus areas need to be translated and adapted for the Council. It particularly concerns the **contribution of communication** towards the functioning of the Council. This leads us to the following four focus areas regarding the contribution of communication within the organisation: corporate communication (the total image), policy communication (policy items) and organisation-bound communication (internal processes). Within the Kaplan and Norton analogy (19), we could also mention a fourth focus area namely; communication research for collecting and utilising feedback. We chose not to name communication research as a separate area, but to approach it integrally. In this way, the research becomes directly linked to the utilisation.

Accordingly, we will base the communication quality measurement upon the **three functions** of Government communication in which communication research will constantly be included as a part. We will now explain the three functions. Their descriptions have been chosen in such a way as to tie into the Councils.

A. Corporate communication

This supports the presentation of the organisation as a whole, its objectives and results. Middel (20) describes this as:

- positioning, main line and co-ordinating policy commissioning, board agreement slogan, mission;
- communication regarding the intention and establishment of the government organisation, the 'company behind the brand';
- the organisation of the communication function, in which the common starting points (21) and principles are determined.

These communication functions are concerned with the total image and not, in essence, policy items.

B. Policy communication

This is the type of communication that supports the various policy areas. These can be divided as follows:

- communication **regarding** policy items: making public and explaining policy in all policy phases;
- communication **as** a policy: chief or supporting instrument alongside regulating and facilitating in order to realise policy goals;
- communication **for** policy: the development of policy together with citizens and/or organisations via interactive policy making;

- communication *in* policy: integral approach of all policy products for community service by the Councils.

C. Organisation-bound communication

This supports the internal processes of a Council and focuses upon the continuity of the municipal organisation. Middel (22) mentions the following:

- internal communication;
- labour market communication;
- crisis communication.

All three communication functions can be found within the communication quality measurement.

4. Quality indicators

Indicators are provided for each communication function, which according to the balanced scorecard method should define very definite results. The communication contribution can then be optimised. The measurement is based upon the *expert opinion* of internal and/or external auditors, who collect material and utilise existing research within the organisation in order to form an opinion.

The communication quality measurement provides communication experts with a broad basis in order to give substance to their advisory role to the Council. The tool can be applied as a *detailed measurement* offering comparative information. It can also be used in outline as a starting point for a *collective census* of Council communication staff who wish to discuss which aspects require more attention within a given period.

The basis of the measurement tool is a collection of indicators for communication quality. The auditor needs a foundation to assess the indicators. Accordingly we will explain which aspects need to be researched for each indicator. Every aspect requires a compilation of arguments relating to the strengths and weaknesses of that point for the Council concerned.

The indicators and aspects are the result of literature research combined with interviews with communication experts of Dutch Councils. The next step will be to evaluate and further adapt them in a dialogue. We will also consult some communication experts in neighbouring countries to discuss if the approach chosen differs from what would be needed elsewhere.

You will see a letter code after every indicator (as shown below) which denotes the nature of the indicator. These codes will be explained in the next chapter. Thereafter we will also discuss the weight of the indicators (the percentage behind the code) as not every indicator carries the same weight in the total.

A. Indicators for corporate communication

1. The Council is visibly result-focussed and works within clear priorities - T 100%

Aspects:

- The Council sets clear and measurable policy objectives.
- It is important for results to be clearly presented. In this way citizens are not vague about what improvements have been made and what needs to be worked on (justification).
- The policy priorities are clearly shown; there is a compact list of priorities instead of a long list with attention points that is difficult to convey to citizens.

2. The Council is accessible for citizens and organisations – A 30%

Aspects:

- The procedures and structure of the Council organisation promotes approachability (e.g. turning the organisation to target groups, city areas/districts, business communities and bringing together the counters/info points of the various services).
- The most important buildings have good access for citizens (esp. city area offices or district shops; public transport and parking facilities) and are accessible for the disabled (no hindrances with stairs or thresholds; lower counters etc).
- Board members and council members are known and approachable.

3. General information about the Council is readily available – A 40%

Aspects:

- Corporate media exists such as a Council page/newspaper, a citizen annual report, a Council guide and a short Council programme. These media are currently being evaluated.
- Within communication, consideration is being given to a compilation of the population (diversity, multi-cultural society).
- New residents automatically receive information to get to know the community.
- Much information has been released on the Internet.
- This information is presented in a user-friendly manner, with the majority of information being obtainable within three mouse-clicks and a search engine available.
- The organisation behind the Internet site is organised well so that keeping the information up-to-date can be guaranteed.

4. There is a central information point available for people – A 30%

Aspects:

- Citizens and other target groups can go to an information point for advice, which are easy to find (e.g. target group counters for the districts and business community).
- The information point can actually provide answers to questions without passing them on.
- Less than 30% of telephone enquiry callers are put in a queue.
- Citizens' responses are used as input within the organisation.

5. The procedures regarding media contact are clear – P 100%

Aspects:

- There are clear agreements within the Council regarding spokesmen and procedures (e.g. which subjects are looked after by which board members or civil servants).
- The procedures are evaluated in consultation with the media.
- The communication experts advice and support the board members in press relations and regularly evaluate their role with those concerned.

6. The Council is notably demand focussed – R 60%

Aspects:

- The Council has mapped out what it understands to be demand focussed.
- The Council has put definite steps in place in order to increase its demand focussed service.
- The Council is looking at making internal adjustments particularly for those users involved with various services.

7. Regular image research is carried out with citizens and organisations – R 40%

Aspects:

- Collecting information regarding how citizens and other target groups see the Council is a regular activity (e.g. in the form of questionnaires, panels or district meetings).
- The content of this consultation relates to Council-wide subjects in addition to projects and current issues. The results are utilised within the policy.

8. Citizens and other target groups are involved in future developments – I 100%

Aspects:

- Citizens and organisations within the District Council will be invited to participate in the thought process regarding the Council's future.
- The city area/district focussed procedures will take an interactive form (e.g. involvement in the policy choices for city area/district development plans).

9. The profile and house style are clear – C 30%

Aspects:

- The Council profile has a limited number of clear characteristics.
- These are aligned to reality and the preferences of the target groups (citizens, companies, tourists).
- The house style is recognisable and fits clearly within the chosen profile.
- Within the organisation's presentation, the identity structures (such as monolithic or umbrella identity) are well chosen, clear and substantiated.
- The sender is always recognisable and a contact point is given in the communication media.

10. The communication policy aligns closely with the organisational policy – C 70%

Aspects:

- There is a Council-wide communication policy vision and this is translated into Council-wide frameworks and guidelines for communication.

- The corporate communication policy is confirmed by board members and is periodically evaluated and amended.
- Regular direct contact takes place between the communication experts and Council board members.
- The organisational embedding of communication is logical. The relationship between central and de-central communication tasks align with the total municipal organisation; the same for strategic and executive tasks and, respectively, the relationship between personal execution and outsourcing of activities.

11. The communication department's procedures promote the effectiveness of the communication – E 50%

Aspects:

- Communication experts work in a planned way and thereby handle the agreed procedures.
- Communication plans are frequently created for important projects where attention is paid to: target group focus and dosage (preventing 'overload', phasing information).
- The convincing powers of the communication consultants ensure that the most important advice is adopted (e.g. training in consultancy skills).
- The communication policy is permanently led by professional development.

12. The communication department's procedures promote the efficiency of the communication – E 50%

Aspects:

- The communication department works not only on the basis of a year plan within a yearly budget but also on project coupled plans with budgets.
- Communication experts are aware of their core tasks and priorities.
- Procedures promote an efficient and perceptive use of budgeting.
- Time-allocation is utilised.
- Procedures are in place for efficient purchasing.

B. Indicators for policy communication

1. New policies will be clearly and actively communicated – T 60%

Aspects:

- The Council will endeavour to actively make new policies known and be pro-active.
- Decisions will be supplied with an explanation as to why they were made.

2. Citizens and organisations know where they stand – unambiguous regulations – T 40%

Aspects:

- The Council will make clear regulations, containing clear content and form (this is currently being looked at for new regulations, e.g. permits).
- Communication regarding regulations promotes clarity.
- Application procedures (e.g. permits) are user-friendly (easy to complete, online).

3. Easy access service – A 100%

Aspects:

- Citizens and other target groups have easy access to the Council for various types of service (e.g. identity papers).
- The relevant communication is easy to find and clearly stated.
- The service value will be regularly assessed by citizens, for example via a yearly Council questionnaire.
- Council services correspondence will be characterised by a clear use of language (specific writing training for civil servants).

4. Pro-active media policy – P 40%

Aspects:

- The Council will take the initiative when contacting representatives of the written press and other media, by providing press releases for example.
- The Council will actively go out and explain policies, starting with what is of interest to citizens and (also) to announce positive news.

5. Journalists questions will get an adequate response – P 40%

Aspects:

- The Council will be as open as possible to information requests from the media (telephone questions and interview requests).
- High availability (e.g. 24 hour).
- Following information requests, contact will be made as quickly as possible with the requester.

6. The Council will follow the media coverage – P 20%

Aspects:

- Any incorrect coverage will be quickly amended.
- Media publications will be followed and inventoried.
- A material analysis will be applied to important subjects.
- The analysis will have associated consequences.

7. The Council will have a customer-friendly response to questions and complaints – R 100%

Aspects:

- Letters and e-mail messages will be answered within 3 weeks.
- Handling complaints is clearly regulated, independent and quickly executed.

8. Target groups will be involved in policy subjects – I 70%

Aspects:

- Interactive policy will be actively applied.
- Clear guidelines for interactive policy have been determined in writing within the organisation.
- Staff know the guidelines and possibilities (e.g. internal publications, courses).

9. Attention will be given to 'difficult to reach' target groups– I 30%

Aspects:

- The Council is committed to approaching those target groups who are difficult to reach. Specific attention will be given to foreigners, the elderly, the young or lower-income groups.

10. The communication contribution will be assessed for all subjects – C 60%

Aspects:

- Communication is an integral part of every policy dossier so that the deployment of communication media needs to be timely compared to other policy tools such as regulations and facilities.
- In every phase of the policy cycle, it will be determined if and in which way communication will contribute to a policy dossier.

11. There is regular direct discussion between the communication experts and the policy managers regarding the priority choices – C 40%

Aspects:

- Regular contact times promote harmony regarding what the communication priorities should be.
- The communication experts have access to important management discussions.
- Agreements have been made between the managers and the communication experts regarding where the communication responsibilities lie and the deployment of communication for important projects; managers understand what communication may or may not accomplish.

12. The effectiveness of communication as policy is furthered by research – E 100%

Aspects:

- Procedures such as 'pre-tests' within the target groups and retrospective measurement are regularly used.

C. Indicators for organisation-bound communication:

1. There is an active introduction programme for new staff – T 20%

Aspects:

- Following their appointment, new staff quickly receive an introduction programme which extends beyond their own department.

- They get to know the district Council and municipal organisation so that they can find whatever information they need.
- The participants evaluate the introduction programme.

2. Staff are well aware of Council and Organisational policies – T 60%

Aspects:

- Staff regularly receive suffice in-depth information about Council policy and organisational policy (via internal media and work discussion).
- They are encouraged to constantly keep each other informed and accordingly contribute to the latter.
- Staff receive timely advanced information when important information is to be sent to external relations (e.g. in the event of a new municipal campaign).

3. The relationship between the Civil Service, Management and City Council is clear – T 20%

Aspects:

- Much attention is given to good collaboration between Management and the Civil Service.
- Board members have a clear insight into the organisation.
- Agreement has been reached between the Board and the Council regarding the form of communication and how to make contact (e.g. questions from Council members go via the Alderman to the Civil Servants).

4. An internal information system provides staff with easy access to much information – A 100%

Aspects:

- Much information has been made easily available to staff, e.g. in the form of an Intranet that can also be consulted outside the internal network.
- The method of management ensures that this information remains up-to-date.
- Information about communication can also be found on the Intranet.

5. Within the internal communication, attention is given to publicity via the media – P 100%

Aspects:

- The contents of press releases are also directly made known internally (e.g. by highlighting it on the Intranet and linking it to the municipal Internet site).
- Staff are aware of the internal handling of procedures and job divisions relating to spokespersons (e.g. when certain project leaders will act as spokespersons).
- Staff will receive current information when important subjects are in force (e.g. calamities) so that they know how to respond.

6. The Council regularly researches the internal image of the organisation – R 100%

Aspects:

- The Council regularly research the internal image, or rather how the staff see their own organisation.
- There is a form of employee-satisfaction research where the organisation frequently enquires about staff well-being and working conditions.
- This information (regarding what is experienced within its organisation) is utilised by the Council to improve its functionality.

7. Staff feel involved within the organisation – I 40%

Aspects:

- In general, staff feel that their input is listened to and their feedback improves the functioning of the organisation.
- Internal media, work and functioning discussions fulfil a positive role herein.
- Communication by the Staff Council is clear.
- Confidants are appointed that can be approached by the staff.

8. An open attitude and communicative skills are very important within the organisation – I 60%

Aspects:

- An open communicative attitude is encouraged within the organisation (organisational culture), including being aware of the consequences of the measures taken for the individual citizens.
- Senior executives and staff receive training in communicative skills.

- Communicative skills and attitude play an important role when assessing senior executives and functional discussions.

9. Managers receive advice about internal communication – C 70%

Aspects:

- The responsibilities of line management are determined with respect to internal communication and how the P&O and communication tasks align with each other.
- Sufficient expertise exists for internal communication.
- Managers actively appeal for advice about internal communication.
- Communication expertise is specifically deployed in order to realise important internal changes.

10. The labour market communication corresponds to the corporate communication – C 10%

Aspects:

- The content and form of advertisements and other forms of labour market communication correspond to the common starting points for corporate communication (presentation of the organisation).
- The mix of deployed media has been well considered, e.g. the coherence of advertisement and website.
- The positive aspects of working in a municipal organisation are put forward within the labour market communication, such as arrangements for parents of young children.

11. Communication aspects are given much attention in crisis planning – C 20%

Aspects:

- Communication with the various target groups is sufficiently developed in crisis planning
- The scenarios are sufficiently known by those concerned and are practised.
- The internal communication experts actively contribute to the internal and external processes in crisis situations.
- The staff is also considered in crisis situations and there is a form of aftercare.

12. Research is being done on the functioning of important internal communication media – E 100%

Aspects:

- Parallel communication media exists within the organisation (internal media such as an internal magazine or Intranet).
- The value of the internal communication media and their effectiveness is regularly researched (e.g. by means of a questionnaire, interviews or a sounding-board group).
- A 'pre-test' is carried out for all important internal media.

The auditor examines the nominated aspects for each indicator and provides concrete examples of how each aspect is applied within the Council. Subsequently, the auditor provides a **total impression** of the indicator as a whole. This is done using a scale because this fact may be more or less applicable for certain municipal organisations. This five-point scale consists of values 1 (weak), 2 (moderate), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (good), 5 (very good). The choice needs to be carefully deliberated and, in order to be reliable, should not vary too much between different auditors.

In order to support the assessment relating to policy issues, the auditor constantly asks the following:

- Is the policy sufficiently substantiated?
- Is the policy actually secured?
- Is it structural and not only incidental?
- Is it consistent, sufficiently attuned?

When it concerns performance issues, the auditor checks are:

- Is it striking, does it stand out from the crowd?
- Is it clarified, is it clear to the target groups?
- Is it creative or innovative?
- Is the operation systematically verified?

The indicator measurements can act as a one-time analysis. However, the 'balanced scorecard' method is intended to provide an impulse to the cycle of continuous improvement. Accordingly, space needs to be allocated within the indicator reports to describe the **improvement activities** and status. When the Council works on a certain indicator, the auditor subsequently keeps note of this.

It is asking a lot of the auditor to provide a controllable and comparative assessment. This can only be expected from a **senior** communication expert who has learnt to take a wide view within the professional area. Subject to discussion, we recommend that two experienced (internal or external) communication experts should carry out the measurement.

A communication department could therefore choose not to use this tool for actual measurement but to utilise it for their own train of thought. Accordingly, no ranked assessment need be made and the subsequent weighting and calculating of results (in chapter 7) is not important. The objective is then to gain a **joint vision** regarding the communication quality. The indicators per function can be placed on a poster on which staff can indicate, by means of coloured stickers, what they consider to be the most important indicators and those that need an improvement impulse in the near future within their Council. The dimensions of communication quality can also be included in the discussion (the letter codes previously mentioned which were placed after every indicator). These will be explained in the following chapter.

5. Dimensions of communication quality

In the communication profession, certain criteria are frequently mentioned when relating to good quality communication. We refer to this as “the dimensions of communication quality”.

- **Transparency:** clarity of the message and policy; this requires a culture focussed on simplicity and justification.
- **Accessibility of information and organisation:** citizens and organisations can find what and who they are looking for, such as providing digital sources and contact people e.g. neighbourhood management; this demands a good information system and a clear organisation structure as well as an open culture.
- **Publicity via the media:** the Council is active with respect to media contacts and is as open as possible in supplying information.
- **Responsiveness:** observing feedback and applying it for improvement; this requires a monitoring system and the willingness to use feedback.
- **Interactive policy:** the active involvement of target groups (also those difficult to reach) in policy projects; this requires procedures and rules and a culture focussed on collaboration.
- **Communication policy:** a well considered embedded communication such as a policy tool in addition to other instruments; this requires strategic consideration and the determining of factual choices and procedures.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency of communication:** a result-focussed and efficient deployment of communication; this requires well-considered forms of research and cost-conscious procedures.

Statements obtained from citizens during open in-depth interviews, such as those given below, support the dimensions of communication quality:

- Transparency: “No choices have been made”
- Accessibility: “They send you from one place to another”
- Publicity via the media: “The Council comes off badly in the newspaper”
- Responsiveness: “They do listen, but do they do anything about it?”
- Interactive policy: “You really need to shout in order to get involved as an organisation”
- Communication policy: “The Council has an unclear face”
- Effectiveness and efficiency of communication: “They place a prohibition sign in the park but not in the place where people dump their rubbish”.

All of the indicators mentioned in the previous chapter relate to one of the communication quality dimensions, which are constantly shown using the relevant first letters. Each indicator has been given such a code. A total score is also produced from the indicator measurements for the communication quality dimensions. These are calculated from all the indicator scores that measure this performance. The final result can be shown in a cob web (see figure 1, next page). The points for the scores are connected with a line on the scale. Accordingly, the result for the different dimensions can be seen simply at a glance.

The final result of the auditor's measurement can be compared with the previously demanded management *endeavours* or with *previous years'* results or *other measurements*. Various lines exist in the star and comparisons make the measurement more binding. The results can also be compared with those of the image research from citizens and organisations within the district council. In order to derive a line for the star, the image measurement needs to take account of the various dimensions.

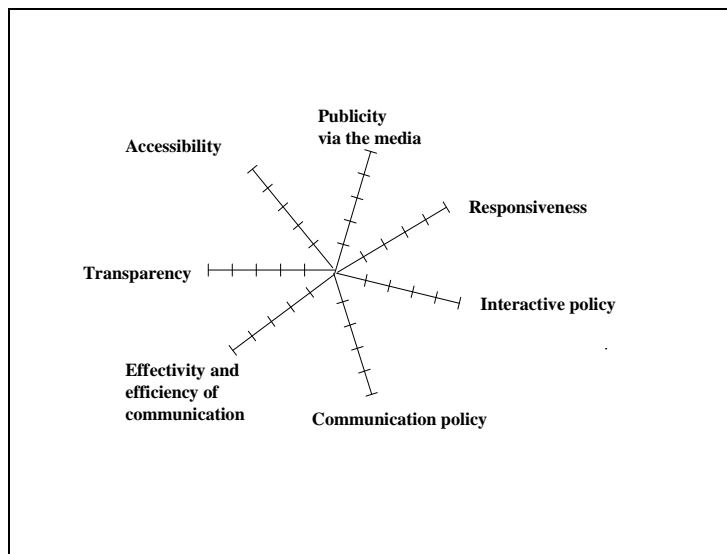


Figure 1. The cob web within the dimensions of communication quality

6. The weight of the indicators

The auditor provides an **expert-opinion**, a professional assessment. This occurs per indicator on a five-point scale using the following values; 1 (weak), 2 (moderate), 3 (satisfactory), 4 (good), 5 (very good). The value of an indicator is always a whole number.

We recommend that **two senior auditors** should always carry out this assessment. They can be either internal or external communication experts or, alternatively, an internal and an external auditor who collaboratively carry out the measurement. When the auditors are not directly in agreement, they should try and resolve this through argued discussion. If this does not succeed, it may be necessary to involve a third auditor. Material needs to be collected first before the indicators can be assessed.

The indicators do not all have the same weight. Furthermore, the three groups of indicators representing the communication functions all have a different weight. We will shortly explain exactly how the calculation takes place. What is important is to be able to determine not only an **overall score** from the calculation, but to make it more precise by calculating a total score per communication function and subsequently per dimension. The dimensions re-appear in every communication function (see figure 2, next page).

When interpreting the final result, the organisation's communication **functions** are examined to see which ones have a proportionally low score. The same is also done for the **dimensions** of communication quality. It then becomes clear to the Council concerned what priorities are required in order to improve the communication quality.

If necessary, a **database** can be set up to illustrate whether a Council scores high or low on a certain point with respect to the overall image. In this way, the measuring system has the characteristics of a comparative research – a **benchmark**.

Corporate communication	Policy communication	Organ.-bound communication
Transparency		
Accessibility		
Publicity via the media		
Responsivity		
Interactive policy		
Communication policy		
Effectivity and efficiency		

Figure 2. The dimensions re-appear in every communication function

Weights are allocated to both the communication functions and the separate indicators for communication quality. When relating the communication functions, B (policy subjects) has proportionally the heaviest weight, followed by A (corporate communication) and then C (organisation-related). The ratio between A, B, and C has been allocated as 3.5 : 4 : 2.5 respectively.

We have set out the dimensions within the communication functions as being all equally weighted. The one dimension is measured with more indicators than the other, so that we need to make the appropriate adjustments. The percentage determined by an indicator for a certain dimension was previously illustrated. This determines the factor by which the indicator scores should be multiplied. Accordingly, the **factor** illustrates the weight of the indicator. A percentage of say 30% is changed into a factor 3. A formula for the calculation method is given in the attachment.

Calculating and interpreting measurement information

Those wishing to use the measurement system for comparative information firstly need to note the value **per indicator** on a scale from 1 to 5 (as a whole number). This is the value that the auditors need to agree on. Subsequently, this value is multiplied by 20, so that the score then lies between 20 and 100. The critical line lies at 70 so that all the scores below this require attention.

Subsequently, the total score can be calculated per **communication function**. Firstly, the weighted score for the indicator is calculated by multiplying the result with the given indicator factor, which will be different for every request. The total communication function score is the sum of the weighted scores per indicator divided by the factor total, namely 70. The total score for a communication function will vary between 20 and 100. The critical value is always 70. Everything below this will require extra attention.

The **overall score** is the weighted average of the three communication functions. The total score of A is accordingly multiplied by the factor 3.5, the total score of B with 4 and C with 2.5 respectively. The sum of these total scores is then divided by 10. Therefore, the overall score will always lie between 20 and 100. These overall scores can be compared with those of other organisations or with the Council's own results from previous years.

Thereafter, the total scores for every **communication dimension** can be calculated. For this purpose the weighted scores of all the indicators, which measured this dimension in all three communication functions, needs to be added up. The result then needs to be divided by the total of the relevant factors, namely 30. The scores for a dimension will vary between 20 and 100. The critical value is again 70, and all dimensions under this will require extra attention.

Accordingly, this tool does not only calculate an overall score for communication quality. It also highlights which communication functions and dimensions require improvement. Accordingly, the measurement stimulates action. A score list for the auditor is provided in attachment 3 to aid calculation.

7. In conclusion

The communication quality measurement can provide comparative measurement results. The overall scores can be compared but, more importantly, the council can ascertain which communication functions and dimensions are responsible for that result and, subsequently, implement improvements. In addition, the progress over time can be followed.

The choice is up to the communication departments. How will they utilise this tool? That can be done **very generally** during an allotted day by discussing the various indicators and jointly deciding which of them will have priority. This then relates to the quality of the discussions and the chosen direction following discussion. A list of indicators then results, which may be expanded to include dimensions. The tool can also be **comprehensively** utilised, producing detailed information such as described above.

There is a saying that quality becomes a quantity when you want to measure it. However, communication is particularly qualitative data. It is not so much about the numbers provided by the communication quality measurement, but more the recommendations that the communication experts can derive from it. The recommendations that can strengthen the communication quality of the Council.

Notes

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Attachment: Form for the communication quality measurement

Calculation of the total score per communication function

Function A:

Indicator	Dimension	Value 1 – 5	Score (x5) 20 - 100	Factor	Weighted score (x factor)
1	T			10	
2	A			3	
3	A			4	
4	A			3	
5	P			10	
6	R			6	
7	R			4	
8	I			10	
9	C			3	
10	C			7	
11	E			5	
12	E			5	_____

Total sum of the weighted scores =
 This total: 70 = **total score function A =**

Function B:

Indicator	Dimension	Value 1 – 5	Score (x5) 20 - 100	Factor	Weighted score (x factor)
1	T			6	
2	T			4	
3	A			10	
4	P			4	
5	P			4	
6	P			2	
7	R			10	
8	I			7	
9	I			3	
10	C			6	
11	C			4	
12	E			10	_____

Total sum of the weighted scores =
 This total: 70 = **total score function B =**

Function C:

Indicator	Dimension	Value 1 – 5	Score (x5) 20 - 100	Factor	Weighted score (x factor)
1	T			2	
2	T			6	
3	T			2	
4	A			10	
5	P			10	
6	R			10	
7	I			4	
8	I			6	
9	C			6	
10	C			2	
11	C			2	
12	E			10	_____

Total sum of the weighted scores =
 This total: 70 = **total score function C =**

Calculation of the total score for the dimensions

Sum of weighted scores for T = This sum: 30 = **Total score T**
Sum of weighted scores for A = This sum: 30 = **Total score A**
Sum of weighted scores for P = This sum: 30 = **Total score P**
Sum of weighted scores for R = This sum: 30 = **Total score R**
Sum of weighted scores for I = This sum: 30 = **Total score I**
Sum of weighted scores for C = This sum: 30 = **Total score C**
Sum of weighted scores for E = This sum: 30 = **Total score E**

Calculation of overall score

Total score communication function A = This sum x 3,5 =
Total score communication function B = This sum x 4,0 =
Total score communication function C = This sum x 2,5 =

Total =

Total: 10 = **Overall score**