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SmartLessons

real experiences, real development

Lost at Sea? Navigate! Using Metrics and Results to Establish the Value of Communications and Knowledge in Sanitation and Water Service Delivery

The communications and knowledge work of the World Bank Group takes many shapes; and although one commonality is its enhancement and support of the institutional mission and development objectives, communications and knowledge work is not always subject to monitoring processes as is the case with its operations counterpart. Similar to a ship's captain navigating by starlight, communications and knowledge work can be well guided by undefined indicators and tacit knowledge of what successful communications campaigns and knowledge management look like; however, if there were ever a time to develop and use more precise navigational instruments, now is that time.

This SmartLesson explores how the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), a global partnership administered by the World Bank, developed such navigational instruments for communications and knowledge. By explicitly tying communications and knowledge activities to development objectives and taking time to identify, aggregate, and monitor outputs, qualitative and quantitative indicators, and assumptions, WSP helped quantify the contribution of communications and knowledge to the achievement of the program's business and development objectives.

Background

In 2008, WSP, a global partnership program administered by the World Bank, began to develop a program-wide results framework,¹ which articulated the links between program outputs and expected results for the 24 countries where WSP works, while also offering indicators for difficult-to-measure areas like capacity building and technical assistance in helping governments scale up improved water, sanitation, and hygiene services to poor people, thereby helping them obtain affordable, safe, and sustainable access to water and sanitation services. When the global economic crisis started later that year, putting increased pressure on donors to justify and reduce allocations, WSP found its results framework especially valuable in helping donors make the case for investing in sanitation and water service delivery.

¹ Co-authored by Sheryl Silverman.

Communications and knowledge are essential components of WSP's work; not only for their support of program activities, but because they play a real part in improving services. Although WSP has helped bring access to improved services to 8 million people in India, Indonesia, Peru, and Tanzania, its real strength is in articulating the knowledge it acquired through that work, and then sharing it effectively and widely so that the 2.6 billion people still without sanitation can also be reached. To help demonstrate this connection, the WSP communications and knowledge team decided to build on this results framework and explicitly draw out the outputs, indicators, and results that directly support the program's objectives.

Here are some lessons learned from developing and implementing these communications and knowledge navigational tools.

Lessons Learned

1) Find your bearings; identify and adopt the unit's business and development objectives to ensure relevance of communications and knowledge metrics.

Because communications and knowledge work is often managed separately from that of technical specialists, there are often instances where objectives can go unidentified, or may be different or too far removed from those of the business unit. Not only can such incongruity lead to difficulties in prioritizing activities and time management, it also can call into question the value of those activities.

An essential goal of the WSP team was for the communications and knowledge activities to *tie explicitly and directly* to the program's overall business and development objectives in order for value to be clearly articulated. The team did this by identifying both the explicit program objectives, which had been vetted by WSP in its recent development of a program-wide results framework, and the level(s) at which communications and knowledge activities contributed to those objectives.

For example, the principal objective for WSP is to support governments in scaling up improved water, sanitation, and hygiene services for poor people. Team discussions with this objective in mind helped reveal communications and knowledge activities and approaches that contributed to attaining it. However, many activities, such as packaging and disseminating knowledge, seemed to contribute only indirectly. It became clear that to make a direct connection, which would be essential for relevant metrics, a second-level or sub-objective would have to be identified. To find it, the team examined the results and intended results of everyday communications activities, and concluded that these activities helped strengthen the knowledge and advocacy of the water and sanitation sector, which, in turn, contributed more directly to governments' scaling up of improved services. Finding and articulating a direct connection opened the door to identifying metrics that would determine progress in achieving the objectives.

2) Build navigational instruments by condensing outputs into three or four broad categories.

With activities in 24 countries and globally, WSP has a high rate of productivity when looking at the number of advocacy materials, events, and multimedia products it produces each year. Because of the sheer number of activities, it was a challenge to specifically identify how they all contribute to strengthening the knowledge and advocacy of the sector.

To meet that challenge, WSP identified and mapped out each activity, and found its connection to the objectives (see Box 1). During that exercise, four categories emerged under which each of the activities could fall:

- *Generation and production: activities such as knowledge generation, processing, packaging, and branding.*

Box 1: Make the Time

To ensure synergy with the business unit, WSP's communications and knowledge team identified individual staff to participate in an informal focus group to develop the link between communications and knowledge activities and the program's objectives.

The group spent roughly five to seven hours a week for six weeks mapping out WSP's activities, grouping them into emerging categories, and identifying indicators and responsible parties for each.

The group benefited from meetings with the program's results specialist, who had led the program manager's initiative to develop a results framework for WSP. The specialist focused the discussion by asking questions and evoking thought about linkage between outputs and clients.

- *Dissemination: knowledge dissemination activities, such as events, Web site, and other multimedia; blast news releases; and media relations.*
- *Evaluation and adaptation: surveys and other ways to capture and implement feedback from stakeholders to improve quality.*
- *Advocacy: partnerships and activities that contribute to sector-related awareness and other campaigns.*

By grouping the activities into four categories, it became easier to draw links to the objective (see Figure 1).

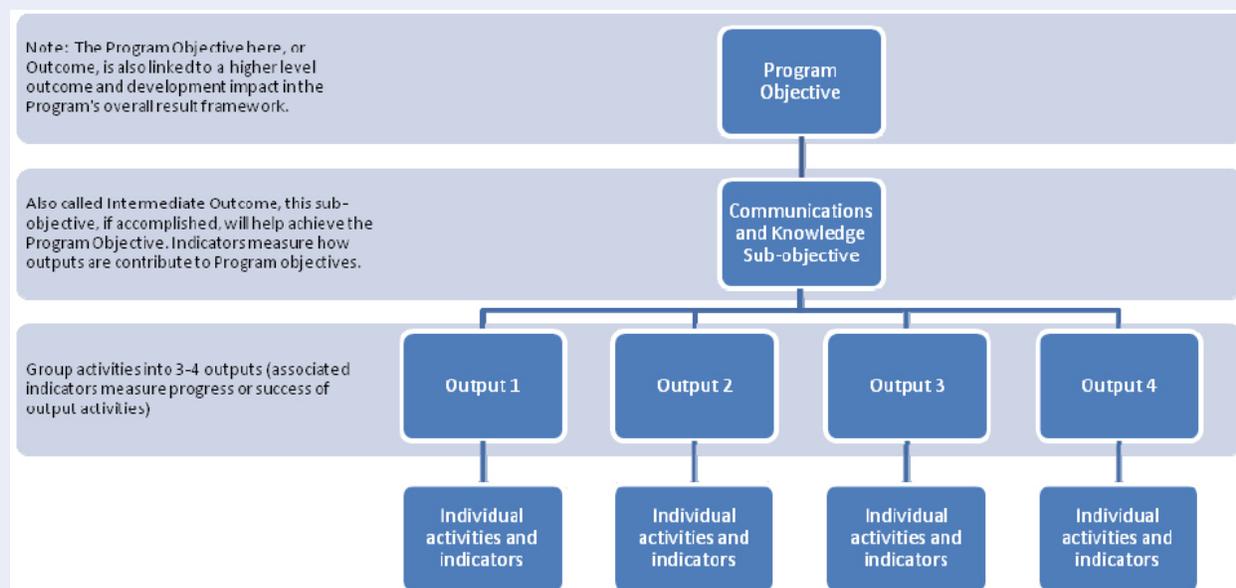
3) Trust your instruments by listing assumptions and accepting various levels of a measurement's attainability, evolution, and longevity to identify both qualitative and quantitative indicators.

To identify communications and knowledge indicators, WSP examined the activities under each of the four output categories and asked one question for each: How will we know we have succeeded? Through brainstorming and iteration, the group identified a thorough selection of indicators.

The exercise produced indicators with varying levels of attainability and longevity—that is, it became clear that capturing 100 percent of the indicators over time might not be realistic. For example, an indicator such as “the number of sector interventions identified that use program knowledge” combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to try to capture the impact of knowledge contributions to the sector. Finding all of these interventions and distilling the portion of the work attributable to WSP would be challenging, to say the least.

That said, it was important to list such indicators for several reasons: to provide a more comprehensive list from which to select realistic indicators; to give context to the more basic, but consistently measurable, indicators (such as number of products disseminated), and to foster awareness of ideal target indicators that, if and when captured, would best measure progress in achieving the communications and

Figure 1. Communications and Knowledge Results Chain



knowledge sub-objectives. The team also found that explicitly noting the assumptions on which the indicators are based greatly contributed to the indicators' credibility and relevance.

Further, the exercise revealed activities, such as informal conversations and networking, that are significant in achieving objectives at all levels. Anecdotal evidence of impact from knowledge is not often systematically reported and is difficult to capture in a monitoring system. However, WSP identified some qualitative indicators that can be used, such as an instance where knowledge generated by WSP led to a microfinance solution for sanitation entrepreneurs in Indonesia; and another instance in India, where nationwide, the government is rolling out a WSP-produced manual to guide villages on ways of improving water quality.

These activities are clearly valuable for strengthening water and sanitation sector knowledge, and are worth tracking as

a way to measure and report on the strength of WSP as a thought leader.

Below are some examples of indicators at each category and level. Note that for the first year, some indicators had to reflect attaining a baseline against which to compare future data. Over time, the team expects that the indicators should evolve and become more refined.

4) Plot the course and dedicate a realistic amount of time to track the indicators.

Because the list of indicators grew beyond 30, the new challenge was how logistically to appropriately track them. WSP developed a tracking system that plotted each indicator in an excel spreadsheet. Roughly 15 percent of one team member's time is dedicated to collecting the indicators through research and staff correspondence and assigning the information to the appropriate indicator(s) in relatively real time.

By assigning a percentage of one staff member's time to ensure that the indicators are tracked as comprehensively as possible, the program can monitor progress regularly, provide feedback on implementation, and guide future communications and knowledge activities.

To maximize the effectiveness of the tracking system, all program staff should become familiar with and buy into the indicators. This is because many of the indicators have to do with the technical work staff perform each day, and therefore they will likely be more aware of instances of results that correspond to tracked indicators.

Conclusion

In the past, perhaps for several good reasons, communications and knowledge activities have not

Figure 2. Indicators at the sub-objective or intermediate outcome level

Sector knowledge and evidence-based advocacy to deliver improved water supply and sanitation services and hygiene programs for poor people strengthened

- Number of sector interventions identified that use WSP knowledge
- Quality of impact from WSP knowledge instance
- Number of citations from third party sources
- Observations of influence of WSP knowledge on decisions by key decision-makers
- Number of strategic engagements and increased coordination with partners

Figure 3. Indicators at the output level

Generate/Package	Disseminate	Evaluate/Adapt	Advocate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and knowledge publishing system implemented • Number of knowledge products generated • Professional visual identity updated and implemented in 100% of Program materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent increase in number of citations by independent news media • Percent increase in number of academic journal citations • Percent increase in web visitors • Percent increase in Youtube, Twitter followers • Percent increase in newsletter pageviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain average newsletter read time above 3 mins. • Number of award submissions rendered/won • Baseline survey of quality and relevance of WSP knowledge products conducted • Descriptive feedback from internal and external audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of instances of researched strategic partnerships/joint development of products • Number of times approached as event/interview speaker/contributor • Number of regional and global advocacy events organized/supported

generally been measured against pre-identified indicators. After all, to explicitly identify indicators that can be used to track progress in communications and knowledge is to expose an area traditionally perceived as an art to measurements that are more scientific in nature. This can be both frightening and exciting—frightening because naming indicators also opens an activity to failure, and exciting because it provides an opportunity to substantively demonstrate progress, success, and/or lessons.

By taking the time to identify and track appropriate indicators and corresponding assumptions, the communications and

knowledge team found that the framework could be used to more effectively and comprehensively articulate its work. Team members also envision eventually using the framework to help strategically prioritize and manage its activities.

In conclusion, for WSP, knowledge is the map to a massive scaling up of improved water and sanitation services for billions of poor people. By finding ways to measure communications and knowledge work and its impact at various levels, WSP has identified the navigational tools necessary to help plot the course in the hopes of reaching sooner that elusive destination.



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