SCHOOL for
THINKTANKERS

On Think Tanks

Session structure

- Why the boring stuff matters
- Which staffing approach is right for your organisation?
- Essential systems, policies and protocols
- Making the case for communications
- Next steps

WHY THE BORING STUFF MATTERS

List of ingredients

Strategy
Audience
Channels

effect communications

basic

communications channels are just one tactic

Tactics

Strategy

Objective
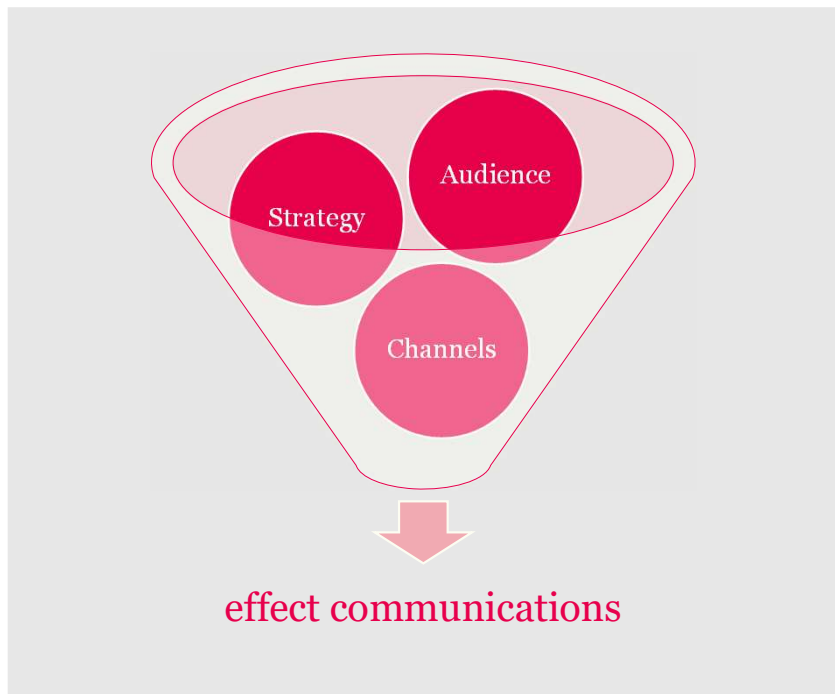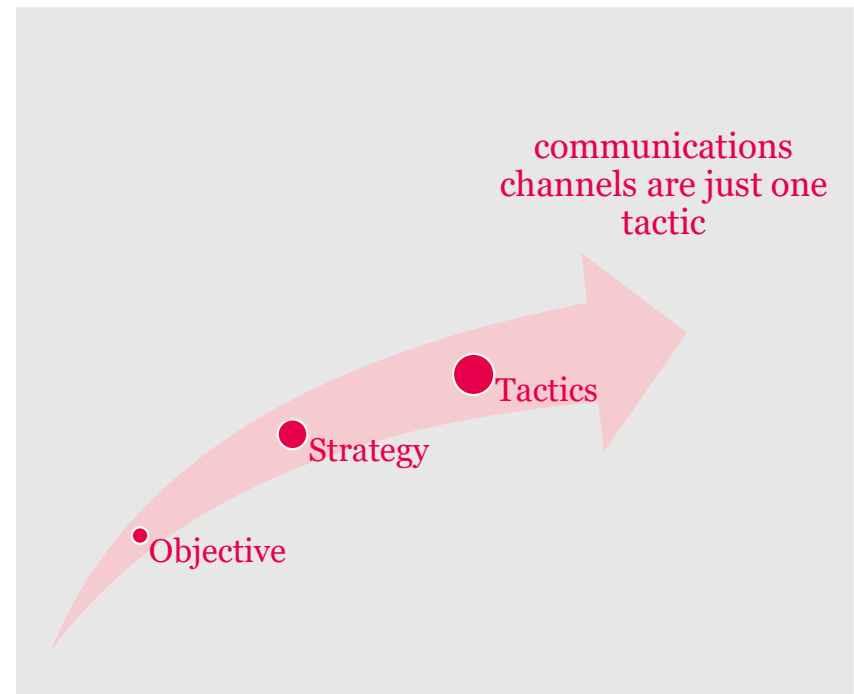
slightly more nuanced

Ignores what goes on behind the scenes.

The real list of ingredient

senior management buy-in

organisational strategic plan

staffing approach

budget (amount & structure)

comms representation on SMT

M&E feedback loop

capacity building

internal communication

Strategy

Audience

Channels

effect communication

stakeholder mapping

weekly planning meeting

database management

user privacy compliance

VfM assessments

social media policy

editorial and brand guidelines

crisis management plan

Being aware of this means you…

- Save time and money
- Avoid the 'bolt-on' approach
- Reduce risk
- Ensure compliance to law
- Boost credibility
- Increase staff morale
- Ensure consistency and sustainability
- Have the space to be more strategic

Start with staffing, systems and protocols

...then move to the fun stuff.

WHICH STAFFING APPROACH IS RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

Staffing: Common functions

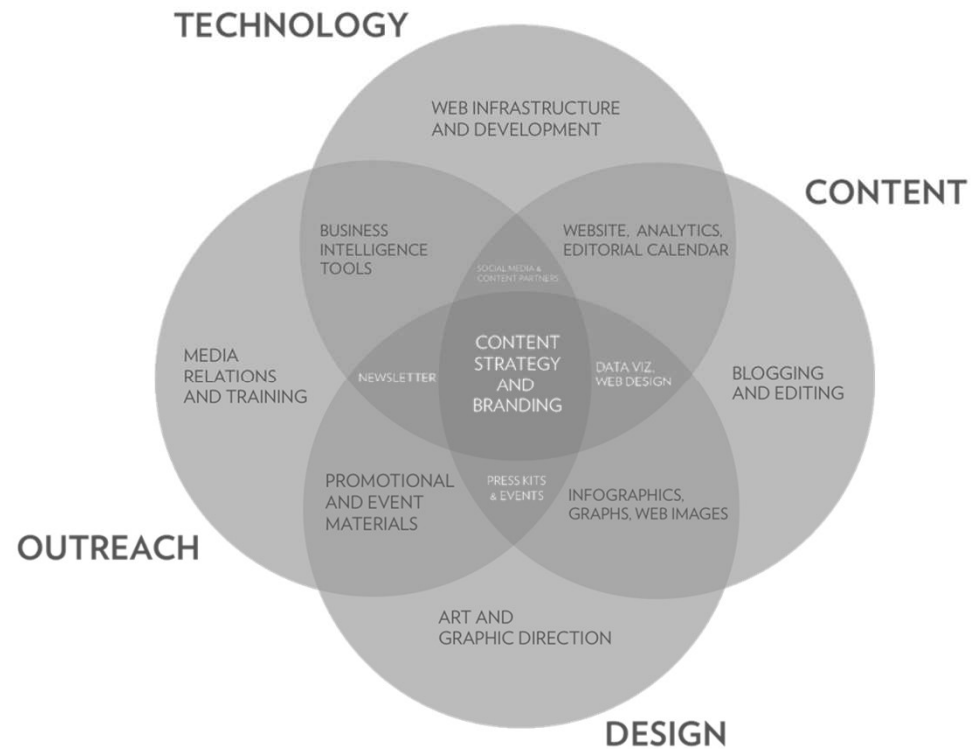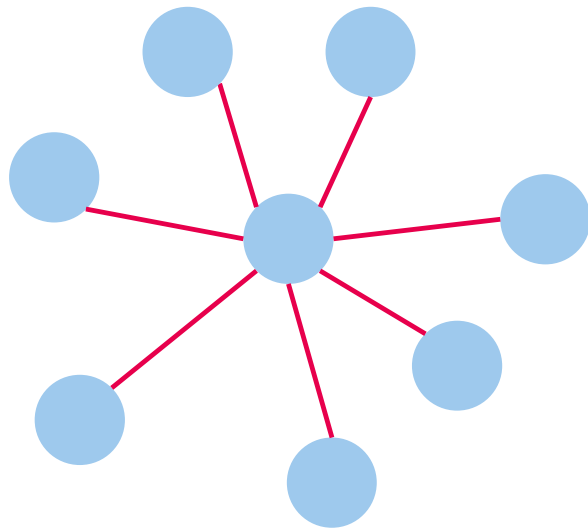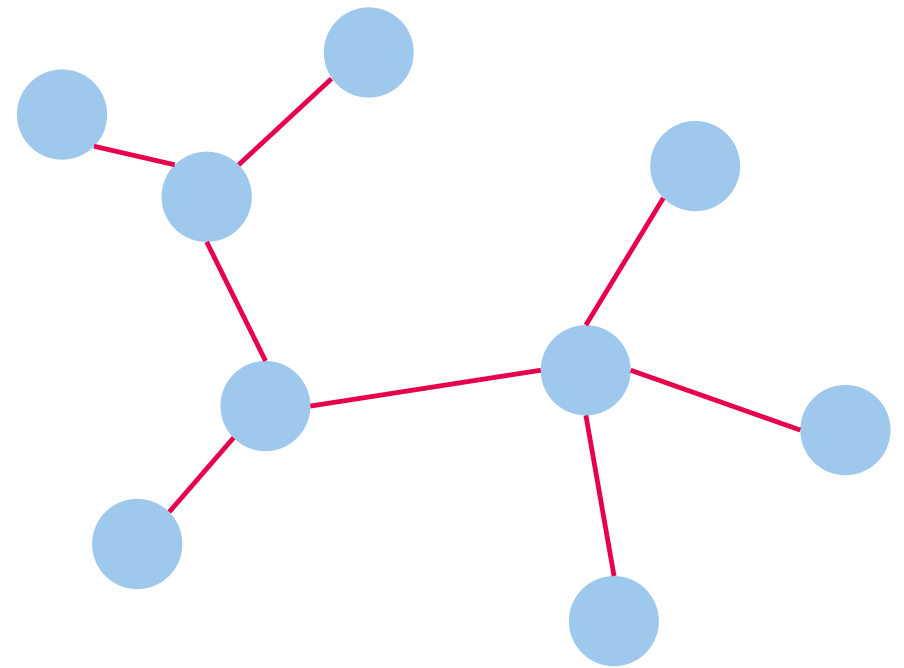|				
Events	Marketing	Digital	Social media	Content production
Editing	Press	Public affairs	Internal	Design

There's a difference between roles and functions.

How one organisation choose to do it
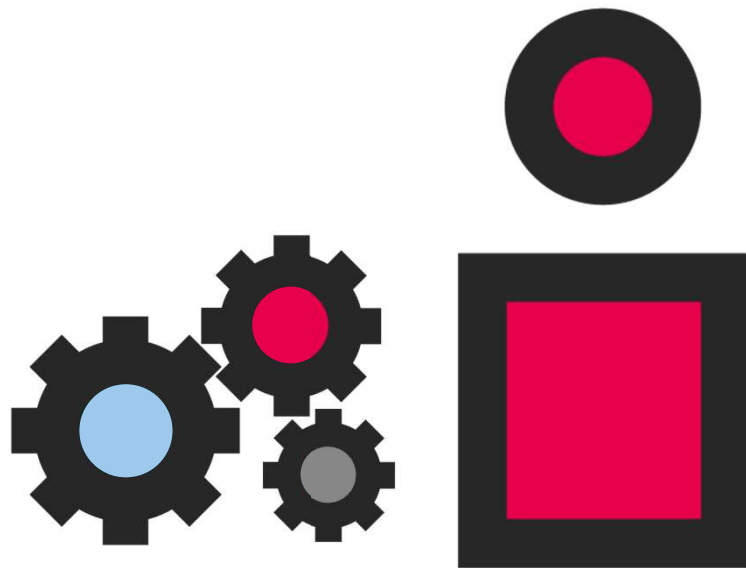
Staffing: Options for how to structure

Centralised

Devolved

Staffing: A third way?

Skill up

Poll

Staffing: What about outsourcing?

- Whatever functions you decide to prioritise or what structure you opt for, you will then have a decision to make about the balance between full or part-time staff vs. outsourcing

- Functions that can be outsourced quite well include:
  - Editing
  - Content production
  - Design

- Remember that you will need to commission and manage this quite closely – at least at first

ESSENTIAL SYSTEMS, POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS

Systems, policies and protocols

Publications policy & how tos	Content templates	Style guide	Brand guidelines/ information system	Events check-list & speaker guidance
Communications MEL system	Social media policy & plan	Shared planning grid/calendar	Communications Action Plans	Crisis management policy
Accessibility statement	Terms of use	Privacy & cookies policy	Blog disclaimer & commenting policy	Database maintenance & development plan

Poll

Systems, policies and protocols

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Social media is a powerful channel but can become a liability if not properly managed.

Social media: systems/policies/protocols

- Social media plan (statement of purpose, platform selection rationale, frequency, content type)

- Scheduling software (e.g. Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Loomly)

- Stock responses (automated replies on your social platforms)
  "Hello, @name. Thank you for your interest in our workshop. It will take place on 11 November at our offices in La Marsa, Rue Augustine. Please make sure to get there 15 minutes early. Thank you, @name."

- Social media guidelines for staff (rules of engagement, expectations, password protocols)

Systems, policies and protocols

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The publication process can be severely delayed without style guides and templates.

Publications: systems/policies/protocols

- Description of publication process (incl. roles and responsibilities)

- 'How to' write a working paper (with best practice example)

- Templates (Word and InDesign)

- Style guide (often called editorial guidelines)

Style guide

A common mistake with numbers:
In running text, give numbers zero to nine in words and 10 and higher in figures. The only exceptions are money, percentages and ages. For ages, always use numerals. Write out a number starting a sentence, if you cannot rephrase the sentence to avoid it.

Examples:
The physician saw nine patients on Tuesday and 10 on Wednesday.
In the past few years, 127 institutional lists of essential drugs have been updated.
Of the 17 samples tested, 15 were positive.
Samuel is 9 years old.
Twenty-four percent of sentinel specimens tested positive for influenza

African Population and Health Research Center

Systems, policies and protocols

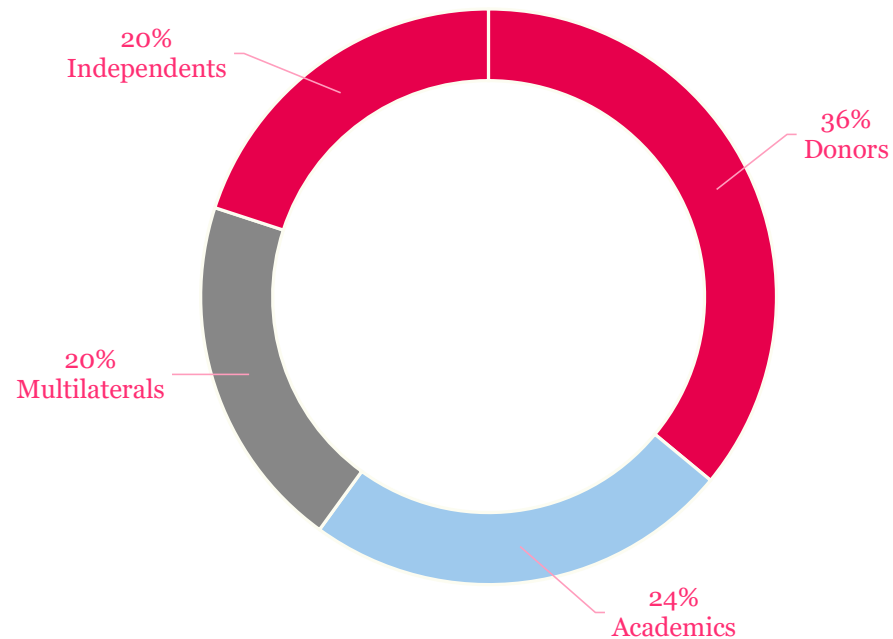|				
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Most organisations fail to make the most of their contacts database.

Database: systems/policies/protocols

- Database platform (function(s), type)

- Data management (tagging, cleaning, data source(s), password protocols)

- Engagement tracking (open rates, click-throughs)

- Development plans (audience segmentation, type and frequency of broadcasts, A/B testing)

Database composition

- Do you know the composition of your database?

- Have you tried tailoring content to different user groups?

- What user groups do you want to grow?

20%
Independents

36%
Donors

20%
Multilaterals

24%
Academics

Systems, policies and protocols

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Communications can't wait for M&E.
Priorise the 'L'.

MEL: systems/policies/protocols

- Digital metrics (downloads, click rates, mobile usage levels)
- Event metrics (attendance, dropout rate, gender composition)
- Impact log (impact@organisation.org)
- User surveys
- After action reviews
- Stories of change
- A space to discuss all of the above and feed it into planning!

MAKING THE CASE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Making the case for communications

- Think through your organisation's objective and what your donors require

- Understand staff capacity and their relationship with your audiences

- Focus on **functions** rather than **roles**

- Remember that technology and information consumption is changing, which means:
  - More actors in your space > need to work harder to be heard!
  - More expectation from your audience > conversation vs. broadcast

One last thing: Metrics are key for making the case for communications.

NEXT STEPS

Lots to do. Where to start?

- To get a general sense of which aspects of your communications need attention, take OTT's communications health check survey: https://onthinktanks.org/resources/think-tank-communications-health-check/

- Consider whether commissioning an independent consultant to do a communications audit makes sense at this stage

- Rule of thumb: Before adding anything to your communications operation, determine whether there are staff and systems in place to support it (oh, and budget)

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