The role of communication: raising knowledge among stakeholders and non-scientific people

2nd European Underground Energy Storage Workshop - Geothermal-DHC session

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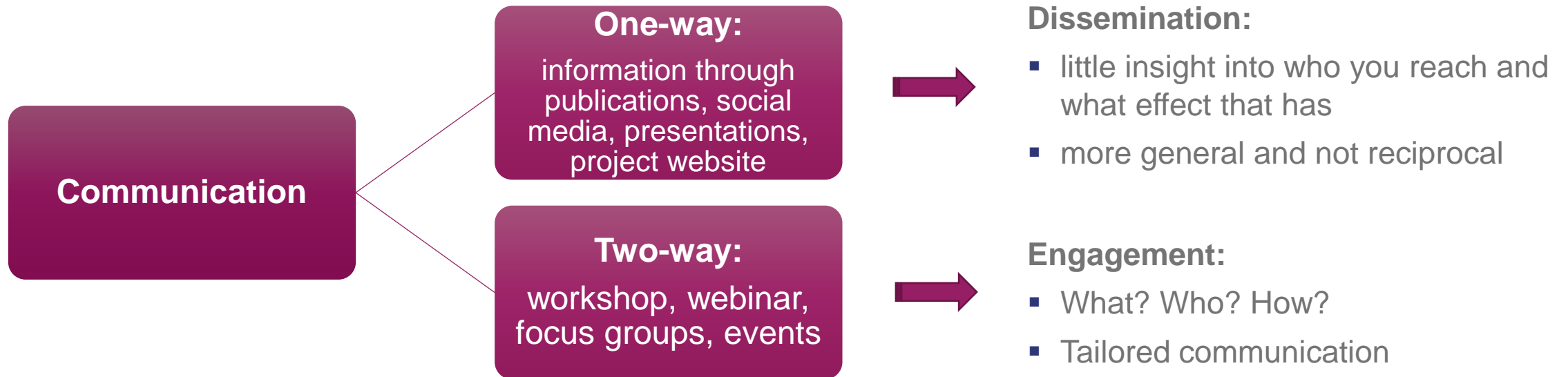
Initiating an energy project

Energy projects involve several **stakeholders**: the **scientific community**, the **authorities**, **private sector**, **civil society**, and **communities** with different interests.

Lack of understanding about the benefits, opportunities and capabilities of the project hinders the widespread adoption of an energy project. That is a **barrier** and relates to:

- **how the information is communicated**

- whether a **justification for the project** is made effectively

    → **why** the particular energy project **needs to be implemented** and **how**

Before any information on the project is shared, a **communication strategy** needs to be developed.

Communication vs Dissemination vs Engagement

Communication

One-way:
information through publications, social media, presentations, project website

➤ **Dissemination:**
- little insight into who you reach and what effect that has
- more general and not reciprocal

Two-way:
workshop, webinar, focus groups, events

➤ **Engagement:**
- What? Who? How?
- Tailored communication

Communication Strategy

A coherent narrative (i.e. a document) that describes the direction, the approach and the means to achieving the objectives/ goals identified. It is the base for the stakeholder engagement process.

A Communication Strategy includes:
- Clear justification of the problem
- Goals and objectives
- Identification and prioritization of key stakeholder groups
- Define key messages per stakeholder group
- Describes the approach and the timetable for engaging and sharing information/ results
- Indicates the resources and responsibilities for implementing the communication activities
- Specify how stakeholder feedback will be obtained.

** Important: **Set clear goals and objectives**.

Communication Strategy

Objectives of a communication strategy:

- Provide information

- Increasing awareness

- Encouraging action and participation

- Build consensus

Using a communication strategy:

- **Early in the process/ project:** It will allow the team/ consortium to better grasp the purpose and the goals the project wants to achieve.

- Show intentions

- Document successes and shortcomings to learn how your strategy might be improved.

- Revise the communication strategy, if it is not producing results.

Communication Strategy

Who	What	How
• Who is involved, affected, interested? • Are there others who may be affected, apart from the obvious, and are under-represented? • What information does each stakeholder already has? • What information does each stakeholder needs? • What are their concerns/ needs?	• Prioritization of the key messages • Association of the key messages with the specific stakeholder group.	• Events and workshops • Electronic media (e.g. email, website) • Social media tools, e.g., YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter • Physical meetings with key stakeholders • Focus groups • Media (e.g. TV, news & press conference • Public meetings (depending on maturity level of a project)

Communication Plan

It provides the means for the implementation of the aims of the Communication. It uses the information gathered during the identification and analysis of stakeholders. It also includes information that ensures the communication process can be executed.

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Communication objectives

For example, in the context of a research project:

Long-term These objectives relate to the vision of our project and are the general idea behind a UTES	Mid-term They mostly refer to and follow the S.M.A.R.T. concept (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely).	Short-term These might refer to reporting period level.
• To increase the level of knowledge on the underground thermal energy storage technologies • To facilitate knowledge exchange and lessons learnt from other underground storage projects (e.g. CCS) • To disseminate the role of UTES in the heating and cooling sector	• The overall number of visits in the project's website • The number of stakeholders reached for the promotions of UTES technologies • The content shared through the various established dissemination tools, the number of events organised/ participated in, etc.	• Development of the communication strategy and the communication plan • Creation of the visual identity and the branding of the project • Development of the project's website

Engagement for different purposes, research to practice
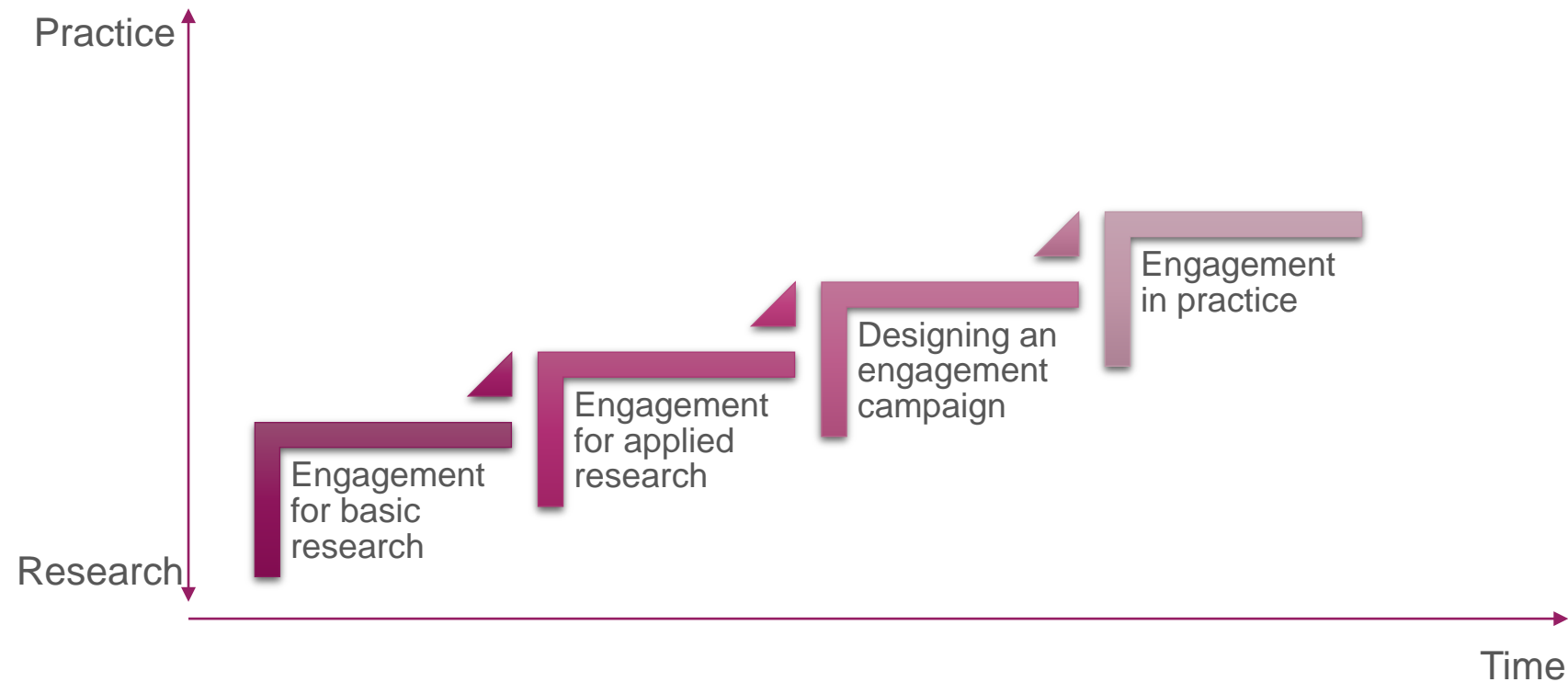
Adapted after Hammond, J. and Shackley, S. (2010), Towards a public communication and engagement strategy for Carbon Capture and Storage projects in Scotland.

Importance of a Communication Plan

- Dissemination and communication of scientific findings, use cases, and recommendations to stakeholders are often overlooked.

- Scientific methods and results are communicated through publication in peer-reviewed journals and written in technical language.

- Outreach and engagement were not (until recently) typically a component of traditional research.

- Energy research tends to lack integration of social science concepts because is viewed as secondary.

- Effective science communication advances research understanding, fosters trust in the scientific process, and builds stakeholder awareness of results or technology.

Importance of a Communication Plan

- Helps you to **clarify** the project's **goals** and **objectives:** it acts as a roadmap (i.e what is the target and how to achieve it)

- To **define** the **targeted stakeholder group, the message** to convey and the **means to do it (**i.e. channels, activities, and materials): tailored messages & communication tools

- To **define and assign** roles and responsibilities to the **consortium members** and the **stakeholders.**

- **Incorporate stakeholder input** in the communications process: receiving feedback allows for adjustment to make the plan as impactful as possible.

- It allows for **effective communication**.

- **Measure** your plan's **successes** and growth areas. It allows the communication manager to review the plan and implement new communication approaches.

Developing a Communication Plan

- Check for **existing strategies and materials**, which were proven **successful** in similar projects in the past. Evaluate and adapt them to your project's conditions and requirements.

- Set **SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)** goals for your communication.

- Identify your **target audience**

- Establish your **communication methods**. Once you define the target audience, consider their communication preferences i.e. the channels and platforms they use most and focus on them.

- Determine communication **frequency and timeline**. Depending on the goals, audience, and medium, the frequency of communication will vary widely.

- **Document** your plan in a format that can be easily **shared** and **updated**.

Types of content and communication platforms

The most effective approach for communicating research depends on the goal of the communication, the target audience, the type of research results and their end-users.

Example:
Academic audiences and experts within technical domains represent future partnerships, collaboration, and recruitment opportunities.

So, **traditional** communication channels such as **journal publications and conferences** play a role targeting traditional academic audiences.

Nevertheless, **non-traditional** channels such as **social media**, specifically Twitter, have an active academic presence and serve as opportunities to promote research.

Types of content and communication platforms

Each social media platform has strengths that can be used advantageously.

- **Twitter** has served as a preferred social network platform to engage people about the importance of science, disseminating scientific publications, and promoting project content.

- **Instagram** is a very visual platform and supports the building of high-level awareness of science topics

- **Facebook** allows flexibility in the types of sharable content, with the ability to share public or private posts that include links, photos, and videos, and

- **LinkedIn** is most successful for building professional relationships

- **Blogs** have a longer format and require dedication and consistency. Clog content can be widely disseminated using social media platforms and provide an informative resource.

- **Newsletters** have also long-term benefits but are less time-intensive and may include less technical detail.

Evaluating the effectiveness of communication and engagement strategies

Indicators to evaluate effectiveness, which are highly connected to:

- the **process** (Representativeness, inclusivity, transparency etc)

    → Was the message clear?

    → Were all the stakeholders, with interest in the project, identified?

    → When were they involved in the process?

- the **outcome**

    → It refers to the contractual impacts and objectives and to the social impacts

The Geothermal-DHC approach

- Definition of the **objective** of Geothermal-DHC – MC members participated in the approach to have a common understanding of geothermal energy in relation to the depth (Munich, February 2020)
- Development of a draft **CDE** (Communication – Dissemination – Exploitation) plan and asked the MC members to contribute. It is up to now a living document
- Creation of a **website** to host the news and all the updates. The website was **redeveloped** to make it more attractive and engage more stakeholders (either new MC members or Action participants)
- Creation of a **roll-up** and the **visual identity** of Geothermal-DHC
- Creation of **social media** accounts
- Creation of **newsletters** (external and internal)
- Organisation of **technical and non-technical webinars** to keep the interest of the people and engage others
- **Collaboration** with research projects, networks and other COST Actions

The Geothermal-DHC approach

- Organisation of **bonding events** during the Covid-19 pandemic, i.e. trivia quizzes, a virtual Christmas tour around Vienna etc

- Organisation of **summer schools** to attract young scientists in our Action

- Development of an **informative video**. An **educational** video mostly for young people is under development

- Organisation of **stakeholder days** (Vienna & Aarhus)

- Creation of a **blog** with different topics each month

- **Co-organisation of events** (Geothermal-PhD days, a CROWDTHERMAL/Geothermal-DHC session at the EGC, ENeRG workshop, SAPHEA)

- Development of a **position paper** and a **European roadmap** for the inclusion of geothermal energy into heating and cooling grids

- Development of a **publication strategy**

Geothermal-DHC's challenges and reassessment

- Difficult to keep the interest of the MC members without physical meetings
- Difficult to engage the members without any compensation – COST Actions are not projects
- MC meetings are having less participants each time (virtual)

- Next MC meeting will be a physical one.
    - → Updated communication plan
- Addressing specific persons for the "job" not a general call
- Development of the fact sheets by members of the COST Action
- Publication of a special issue

Thank you

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