

## **The importance of adapted and effective communication for coordination**



Coordination cannot be achieved without effective and regular communication between all the parties involved. Maps and 3W matrices are considered as essential components of coordination, but other vectors of information sharing such as websites and discussion groups can also prove themselves useful. These platforms can foster collaboration or identify gaps that may otherwise be missed.

A lack of effective communication may limit reach to different actors at the technical level<sup>1</sup>. Technical coordination has often been achieved through the creation of and participation in technical working groups. However, physical meetings have their limit and will only reach the participants who are attending.

The challenge of filling the gap in between technical coordination and strategic coordination can be addressed through online communication. Information will be capitalised and shared with the community of practice as a whole by allowing a wider panel of actors to participate, regardless of their geographical location or schedule.

However, specific conditions have to be met in order to set up appropriate platforms that will facilitate more effective coordination.

This guidance lays out some basic tips for communication through online platforms such as web pages or email discussion groups. This document is neither intended to be an exhaustive nor technical document; rather, it is intended to point out several things to keep in mind to facilitate effective communication for your coordination mechanism.

<sup>1</sup> Cash coordination encompasses a range of functions, from the technical (eg. a community of practice) to the strategic (determining when it is appropriate to deploy cash transfers). <http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/CaLP-Learning-Event-on-Cash-Coordination---Report.pdf>

## Managing a community through online platforms

CaLP cannot host these coordination platforms - they should be hosted by the leading organisation or one of its partners. A good example of an online coordination platform (although not specific to cash transfer programming) is <http://haiti.humanitarianresponse.info>

**Developing the appropriate platform** and **knowing how to animate the platform** are both key components to ensure an active community.

### **Developing the appropriate platform:**

There are 2 key components to successful online platforms: **information accessibility** and **knowledge management**.

#### *Information accessibility*

The online platform will be the tool the community refers to as primary source of guidance. Thus, the desired information needs to be **visible** and **clear**.

A thorough analysis of the community's needs and the message that needs to be delivered are of paramount importance in the decision-making process of how to set up an online platform. But sending out the right information through such platforms is half of the battle. Making sure it reaches its target is the other half. To ensure the users find an added value to the content, the structure of the platform needs to be adapted to other platforms your audience is accustomed to using.

The first visit is the most important; users who get confused on their first visit are very unlikely to come back. Hence the structure of the platform should enable the community to find answers to their requests quickly and extract the essential information easily.

#### **Key questions to be asked:**

- *Who is the audience?*
- *What information is the audience looking for?*
- *How does the audience usually get such information?*
- *Can the platform mirror the structure of other platforms the audience is already acquainted with?*

#### **Key success factors:**

- *New information should be differentiated from older entries*
- *The search process should be easy and quick*
- *The user should not be overwhelmed by the amount of information*
- *The platform should be visible to the targeted communities by promoting it through channels they use*

## ***Knowledge management***

Managing a community's knowledge is a crucial component of an effective platform. Information has to be **adapted** and **targeted** as well as **capitalised** upon. The assumption that, once released, all information will be absorbed by the community is unrealistic. However, to encourage this, online information platforms need to be conceived in a way that the members of this community have an easy access to the key messages.

Although the community may find the available information interesting, it needs to be presented in a way that will draw their attention. There are two sides to delivering a message that can be related to the “push” and “pull” strategy. Information can be delivered to the users (push) or the users can fetch the information by themselves (pull). The main thing to keep in mind is that coordination requires engaging very busy people; hence it is important to find the right balance in between the “push” and the “pull”. The messages that are directly delivered to them (emails, newsletter, etc.) need to be light and attractive, but with enough information that will make the audience want to find out more. It needs to be a gateway to a static platform where more information can be found.

### **Key questions to be asked:**

- *Is the platform proposing something that does not already exist?*
- *How does the audience usually get the information?*
- *How to monitor the way the community uses the information?*
- *How to collect feedback from the community?*
- *How can the shape of the communication be improved using the collected feedback?*

### **Key success factors:**

- The message needs to be adapted to the target
- The shape of the communication needs to mirror platforms that the audience is already acquainted with
- The platform needs to be flexible in order to adapt in the change in needs of the audience

## **Managing an online community**

This part presents a few tips and things to know on how to manage an online community. These are not a recipe for success, but a few things that have to be considered when managing an online community.

### **Identify a purpose**

- The purpose of the platform must be clearly stated
- Communicate and remind the purpose repeatedly

### **Repeatedly communicate**

- Users can easily forget the purpose of the group
- Communicate regularly through newsletters, discussion notifications, etc.

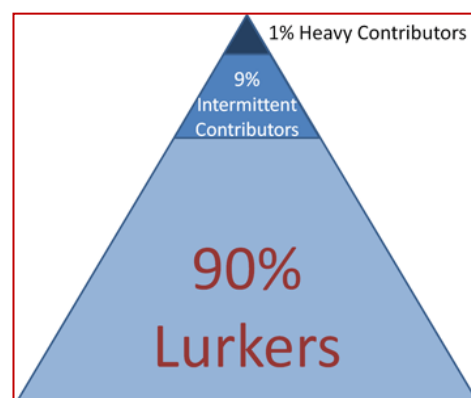
### Use high quality content

- Remember the needs of the community
- Submit your own content
- Encourage others to submit content
- Publicly welcome new members
- Solicit feedback from members

### The “90-9-1” rule<sup>2</sup>

In most online communities:

- **90%** of users are **lurkers** (i.e. read or observe, but don't contribute).
- **9%** of users contribute **from time to time**, but other priorities dominate their time.
- **1%** of users **participate a lot** and account for most contributions.



### Encourage active engagement

- Many **communities launch out successfully** only to fade out later on
- Promote and nurture the community's participation
- Develop a short post-launch strategy

### Kick out polluters

- Have clear guidelines stating what is the expected behaviour of the audience
- Immediately kick out those who post outside of the scope of the community or 'polluters'. The platform may lose credibility or seem neglected if it is used for something outside of its scope

### **Checklist of useful communication materials**

- ✓ Business cards with dedicated email address
- ✓ PowerPoint presentations
- ✓ Flyers/Brochures promoting the platforms
- ✓ Notes extracting key messages from the online platforms
- ✓ Cross-actor organizational chart of the coordination team with contact details

<sup>2</sup> Neilson Norman Group (2006), Participation Inequality: Encouraging More users to Contribute, <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/participation-inequality/>