



June 2021

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

*Lessons Learned From Those Outside
the US Government and Military*

A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA)
Integrating Information in Joint Operations (IIJO) Effort
Private Sector Summary Report

George Popp

NSI, Inc.

gpopp@nsiteam.com

Allison Astorino-Courtois, PhD

NSI, Inc.

aastorino@nsiteam.com



Background

This briefing integrates key insights and **lessons learned** from the SMA IIJO effort about how those outside of the US government and military (i.e., non-government and private sector organizations) use messaging and communication to influence and inform.

Ultimately, what emerges is a collection of **best practices for effective communication**.

The source material for this briefing consists of final deliverables produced as part of the SMA IIJO effort. In particular, the findings presented in this briefing are largely built upon the integration of the work done as part of the **IIJO Quick Looks** and **IIJO Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa)** lines of effort. These reports are cited throughout this briefing and links are provided in the references section.

To access IIJO and other SMA products:

- SMA Publications Webpage: <https://nsiteam.com/sma-publications/>
- NIPR Inteldocs: <https://go.intelink.gov/fSCVixQ>
- SMA Speaker Series: <https://nsiteam.com/sma-speaker-series/>

Introduction

Though some of the best practices outlined in this briefing may seem obvious, they are not always put into practice—even by experienced communicators.

Thus, it is important to frequently remind ourselves of these **7 core best practices for effective communication**.



Lessons Learned From Communication Experts:
7 Best Practices for Designing Effective Communication Campaigns

TARGET AND TAILOR

Tailor communication to its target audience and the specific behavior of interest rather than broad categories. Learn to think like the audience thinks.

SUPPORT

Supplement communication with the three complementary mechanisms of social behavioral change: engineering, enforcement, and education.

COMMIT

Effective communication requires commitment and repetition. Campaigns that are long-lived, high exposure, consistent and focused, multi-step, and multi-channel efforts tend to be more effective.



PREPARE

Begin with sufficient preparation and research to develop a communication plan from start to finish.

CONNECT

Strive to connect credibly, coherently, consistently, and emotionally with the audience with messages that are simple and interesting.

COUNTER WITH BALANCE

When counter messaging, strike a delicate balance between quick, aggressive response to counter false information, and communicating in ways that don't amplify the harmful information to the extent that it further resonates or indoctrinates the audience.

EVALUATE AND ASSESS

Evaluation and assessment of effectiveness are critical components of an effective communication effort. Evaluation should at the least include assessment of audience exposure (e.g., reach, frequency of contact) and impact (i.e., shift in perception and/or behavior following communication) of the communication effort.

Best Practice #1: PREPARE



PREPARE: Begin all communication efforts with sufficient preparation and research to develop a communication plan from start to finish.

- Develop a **communication plan and process** for implementation of the communication effort. The plan and process should be tailored to the specific effort, but any communication effort should generally consist of sequential phases for planning, development, execution, measurement, and optimization.
- Identify and define a **target audience** and do research to understand that audience.
- Outline **clear and measurable objectives** for the communication effort (e.g., What is the communication intended to do? What communication channels are available and applicable? Where does the audience stand in relation to the communication being sent? How can the impact and effect of the communication be evaluated?).
- Do **needs assessment research** to identify pressing needs of both the communication effort and targeted audience.
- Do **formative research** and **potential impact research** to test the communication and better understand how the communication effort will be perceived by the audience.

Effective communication is a complex and fragile human process that requires strategic design, careful monitoring, and responsive adaptation.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))

Effective communication efforts typically begin with a clear understanding of what the communication process will look like and what the objectives are.

—Popp et al. ([Insights From the Private Sector ViTTa](#))





PREPARED Communication in Practice

DOING THE RESEARCH AND HAVING A PLAN AND PROCESS:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SESAME STREET

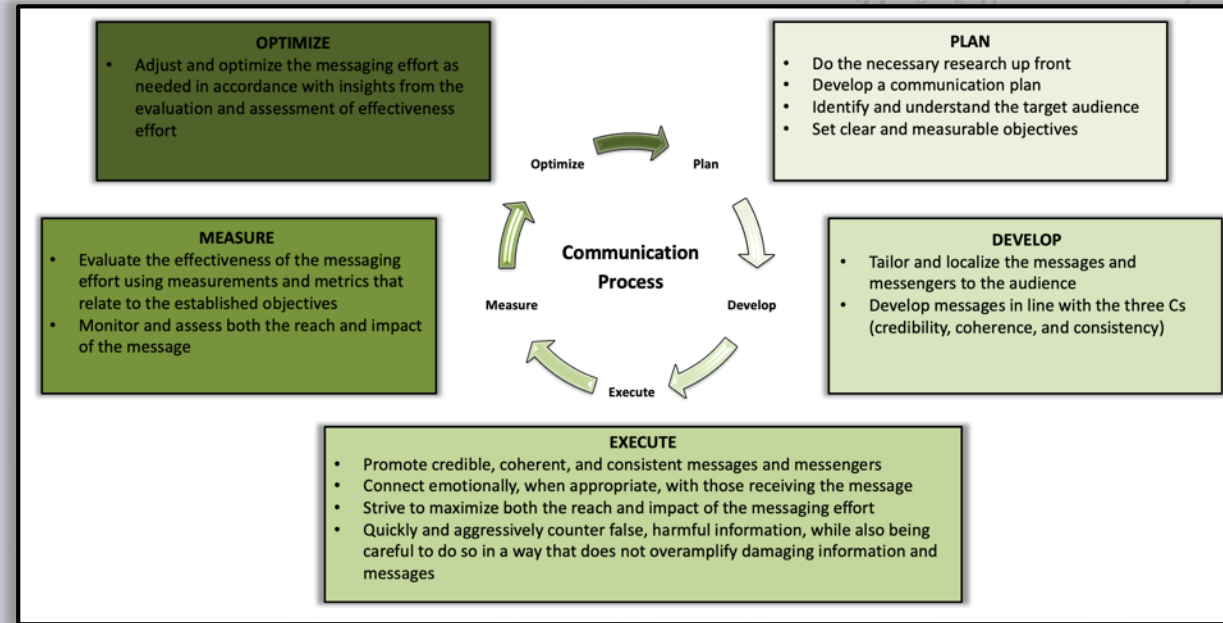
Research is baked into our process. We begin with research in the form of a needs assessment. Before we set out to do any project, we first identify the most pressing needs that are facing a particular population of children in a particular country, and then we create content. We create a curriculum to address those needs, then we create content based on the curriculum, and then we test the content to see if it delivers.

It's expensive to produce media content, so we want to make sure that it's going to work. We usually will do what we call 'formative research,' where we'll take storyboards and character designs out into the field and test them with kids to see if they resonate. And then once we produce it, then we'll go into the rigorous process of impact research to see if kids are engaged. We do something called 'eyes on screen testing.' We actually measure how kids are looking at the screen. Because in the words of our founder, Joan Ganz Cooney, 'if you can't reach them, you can't teach them.' Reaching them is paramount, and that's where the engagement comes in. And that's where the eyes on screen comes in.

We also test for comprehension because it's not enough to just engage them. They can be glued to the set, but if they don't learn what we're intending to teach, then we wouldn't have been successful.

So, every step of the way, we make sure that we are hitting the mark on the multiple dimensions that all ladder up to what makes Sesame Street so successful, in that it's incredibly engaging, the characters are enormously beloved by children and trusted by parents, and that it delivers on the educational impact. And that's why we've been around for more than 50 years.

—Sherrie Westin (President, Sesame Workshop), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)



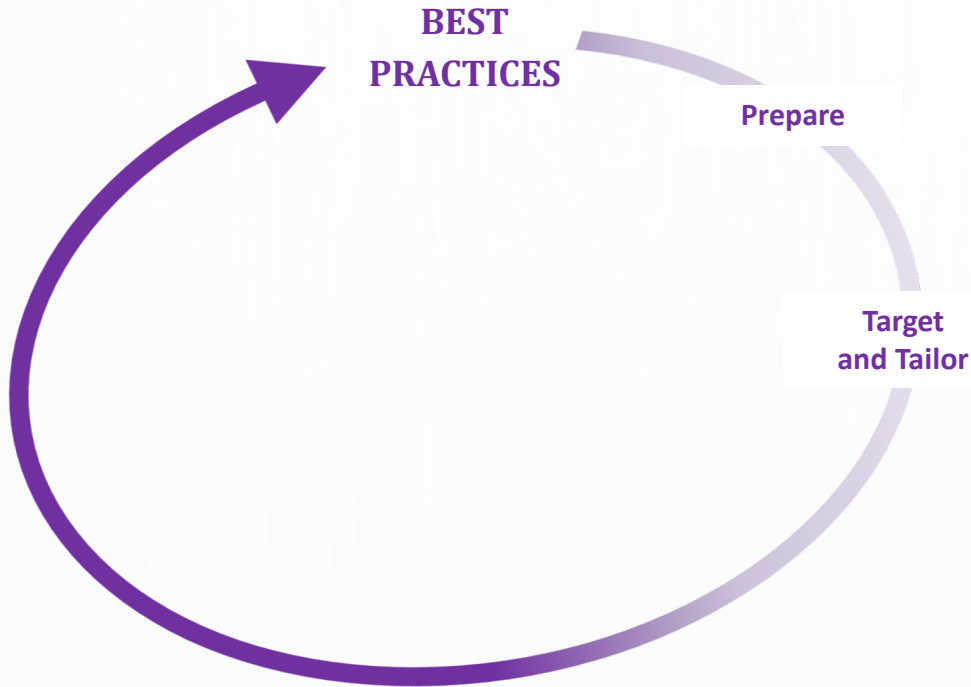
“PAINT THE TARGET. HIT THE TARGET”:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM STORYTELLING

When thinking about communication and audience, doing the research up front is really important. This entails seeing where priorities of opinion or prejudice might lie and understanding how people think. And in my company, our saying is very simple: 'Paint the target. Hit the target.' If you have a bow and arrow and you know what you're aiming at, it makes hitting the mark a lot easier. And that really gets to doing audience research and trying to understand how your audience is thinking from the start.

—John DeBello (President & Chief Creative Officer, Loma Media), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Best Practice #2: TARGET AND TAILOR



TARGET and TAILOR: Target and tailor the communication effort to its intended audience and outlined objectives.

- Very crisply define the target audience and ensure knowledge and understanding of that audience.
- Tailor and localize the communication to the targeted audience (e.g., communicate in a way that is familiar and through messengers and channels that are familiar).
- Target specific behavior change—communication that targets specific behavior change (e.g., smoking cessation, paper recycling, condom use) is often more effective than communication that targets categories of behavior (e.g., promoting healthy lifestyle, pro-environmental behavior, safe sex).

All communication efforts should begin with an understanding of the target audience and what they think and how they think.

—John DeBello (President & Chief Creative Officer, Loma Media), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

The key is to very crisply define who your target audience is and what your objectives are. And that sounds simple but, too frequently, companies and people overlook it ... Effective communicators typically have a very good understanding of who their target audience is, and it cannot and should not be everyone.

—Dr. William McEwen (Advertising Executive, Independent), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Audiences are most receptive to messages and messengers with whom they are familiar and can identify and connect directly with ... Communication experts emphasize the need for localized messaging and cultural sensitivity, highlighting the importance of listening to and learning from the communities in which messages are being targeted, reflecting the culture of the audience in the messages being sent, and using local spokespeople and influencers to convey the messages rather than dictating them from an outside voice.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))





TARGETED AND TAILORED Communication in Practice

TAILORING AND LOCALIZING THE MESSAGE TO THE AUDIENCE:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM SESAME STREET

Today, we're in about 150 countries, but I think where we learn the most is in our local productions. I think the secret to Sesame's success globally has been local. In a country like Afghanistan or South Africa or India or Bangladesh, we go in and create completely local adaptations designed to meet the needs of the children there, reflecting their culture and speaking their language. We partner with local Ministries of Education, local experts, and local educators so that if you're watching Sesame Street in Afghanistan, it's Baghch-e-Simsim, which means Sesame Garden in Dari and Pashto. The lead Muppets are even local characters—the lead Muppet in Afghanistan is a little girl named Zari—so that children can see themselves and so that we can address a curriculum through storylines, through live action film, through powerful characters that children can identify with.

In Afghanistan, where girls' education and gender equity is a key curricular goal, we work very hard from the modeling in terms of the Muppet Zari, being a little girl who wears her hijab and her school uniform and loves to go to school, but equally important, showing young boys that it's okay for Zari to go to school, for girls to have different roles and responsibilities. And in all of our research, it shows that Zari is the favorite character of little boys and girls. And when we test attitudes and behaviors, boys who watch test 29% higher on gender equity saying they think it's okay for girls to go to school. And it gets even better. The State Department did qualitative research with fathers and found that fathers said again and again, time and again, that they had changed their mind about permitting their daughters to go to school because of watching Baghch-e-Simsim.

—Sherrie Westin (President, Sesame Workshop), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)



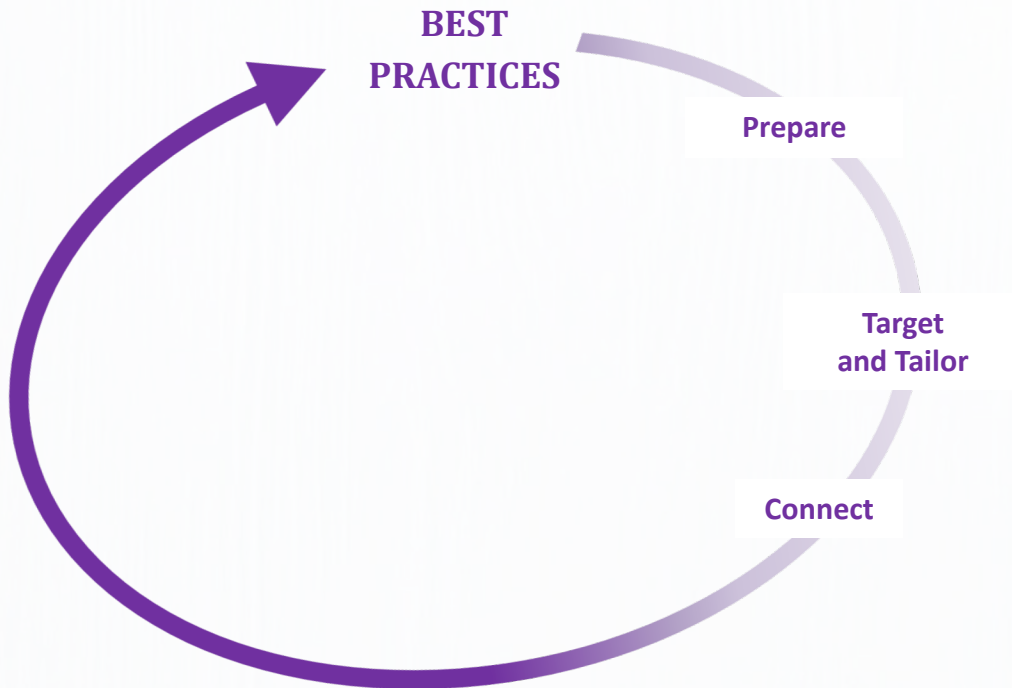
TARGETED OUTREACH:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A POLICE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

We recently led a two-year recruiting campaign for the San Diego Police Department that was very successful. They welcomed their largest ever academy class ... It was a digitally-driven campaign. Initially, the SDPD had wanted billboards, posters, and bumper stickers. To the credit of the senior leadership in that police department, though, they changed gears and went digital, realizing that their audience is young and that their initial plan did not align with the way in which their targeted audience communicates. The lesson here is to look at the affinity of the audience for certain media tactics and then utilize those tactics based on what audience you're trying to connect with.

—John DeBello (President & Chief Creative Officer, Loma Media), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Best Practice #3: CONNECT



CONNECT: Strive to connect credibly, coherently, consistently, and emotionally with the targeted audience.

- Your “brand” matters—promote **authentic** and **trustworthy** messages and messengers (i.e., credibility).
- Keep the message **simple** and clear and **tell a story** (i.e., coherence).
- **Stay on message** and **repeat, repeat, repeat** (i.e., consistency).
- Make **emotional connections**—through triggering feelings of relatability, companionship, empathy, humor, fear, etc.—with the audience when appropriate.

Promoting credibility, coherence, and consistency, of both the message and messenger, is universally cited by communication experts as a best practice for effective communication.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))

If I had one piece of advice, I would say have a clear story. It seems so obvious, but you'd be surprised how many times communications are unclear and convoluted. If you're trying to pile on too many messages into one piece of content, it gets really confusing. It's important to be very clear in what the story is and what the plot is. Whether it's an ad or whatever it is you're trying to communicate, you have to be clear and coherent to be effective.

—Anonymized Gaming Industry Executive, [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Messages and messengers that trigger emotions or build emotional connections with a targeted audience are more likely to resonate, impact, and spark attitudinal or behavioral change among those receiving the message.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))





CONNECTED Communication in Practice



THE IMPORTANCE OF CREDIBILITY: *LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MUSIC INDUSTRY*

Decision number one in the music industry is whether an artist's music is something we can bring to the public in a powerful way. Once that decision is made, then we build upon that core with various components of imaging ... For instance, just the look of an artist matters. If it's a heavy metal band, we don't want them going on stage wearing cowboy boots and cowboy hats. Their look has to be consistent with what their music is all about.

They also have to have a personal lifestyle that is credible to the audience. A key ingredient of the connection, the psychological or subliminal connection that is made between an artist and the audience, is the credibility of the messenger who is delivering the music. The audience wants to feel that the artist they're listening to is believable in terms of the music that they're presenting.

You have to have that consistent credibility between the message, namely the music, and the messenger, namely the artist. That is essential. If we ever screw up on that level, that is game, set, match. We lose.

—Al Teller (Music Industry Executive, Independent), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

CONNECTING EMOTIONALLY AND CREDIBLY: *LESSONS LEARNED FROM CINEMATICS*

When trying to connect emotionally, you have to come from an authentic place. First and foremost, whether you're the writer on a project, the producer on a project, or just the executive on it, you have to think about how the message makes you feel.

I always think about Toy Story. What makes that franchise so amazing is that it's an animated movie that, obviously, when it came out was targeted to a younger audience, but everybody could relate to Woody's plight of feeling displaced, because you feel that. As a kid, when you get a new sibling, you feel that. As a parent, as your kids get older, and you feel like you're sort of left behind, you feel that. It's just such a relatable feeling.

—Anonymized Gaming Industry Executive, [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

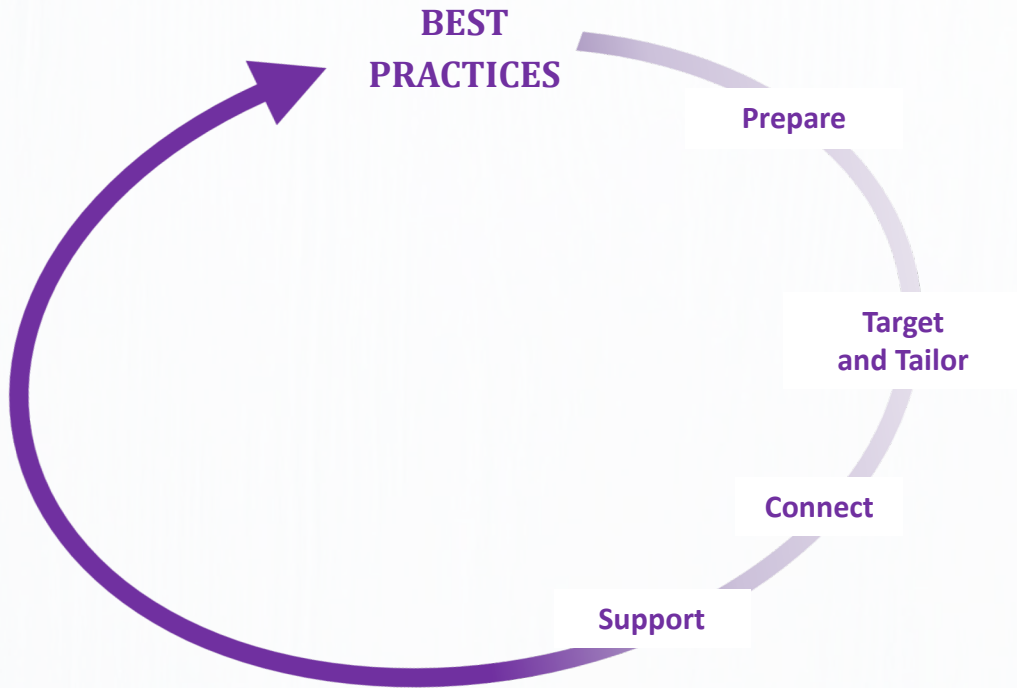
KEEPING IT SIMPLE AND COHERENT: *ADVICE FROM THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY*

In advertising, we have an expression: Write the way people talk. And that, probably more than anything, is the key. Advertising tends to be successful when people sense that you're talking to them like a friend in the language they use every day and in a way that makes them feel like a human being.

And to be a bit prescriptive, that means the sentences are shorter, there's a common language, and there's common feelings because you know each other, you're a friend.

—Bill Heater (Creative Executive, Real Life Creative), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Best Practice #4: SUPPORT



SUPPORT: Support communication efforts with other complimentary mechanisms of behavioral and social change.

- Supported communication (the three mechanisms of social change): Communication alone is not a magic bullet for changing and influencing public behavior. Scholars point out three distinct mechanisms of social change: *engineering*, *enforcement*, and *education*. The *engineering* solution typically involves the development of technology or innovation related to the desired behavior change, the *enforcement* mechanism implies the use of coercion or other forms of mandated change, and the *education* solution involves modifying attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors. The education mechanism is primarily carried through communication efforts. These three mechanisms are rarely effective on their own and often complement one another.



Communication alone is not enough to change human behavior. Other social change mechanisms are needed to complement communication efforts.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))



A WELL-SUPPORTED COMMUNICATION EFFORT: *US PUBLIC SAFETY CAMPAIGN FOR SEAT BELTS*

An example of the three mechanisms of social change working together can be found in the US public safety campaign for seat belts. The *engineering* solution includes enhanced seat belt reminder systems, the *enforcement* mechanism includes seat belt laws and mandated child safety protections, and the *education* solution is public communication campaigns promoting safety belt messages warning that unbuckled passengers will be injured in a crash.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))

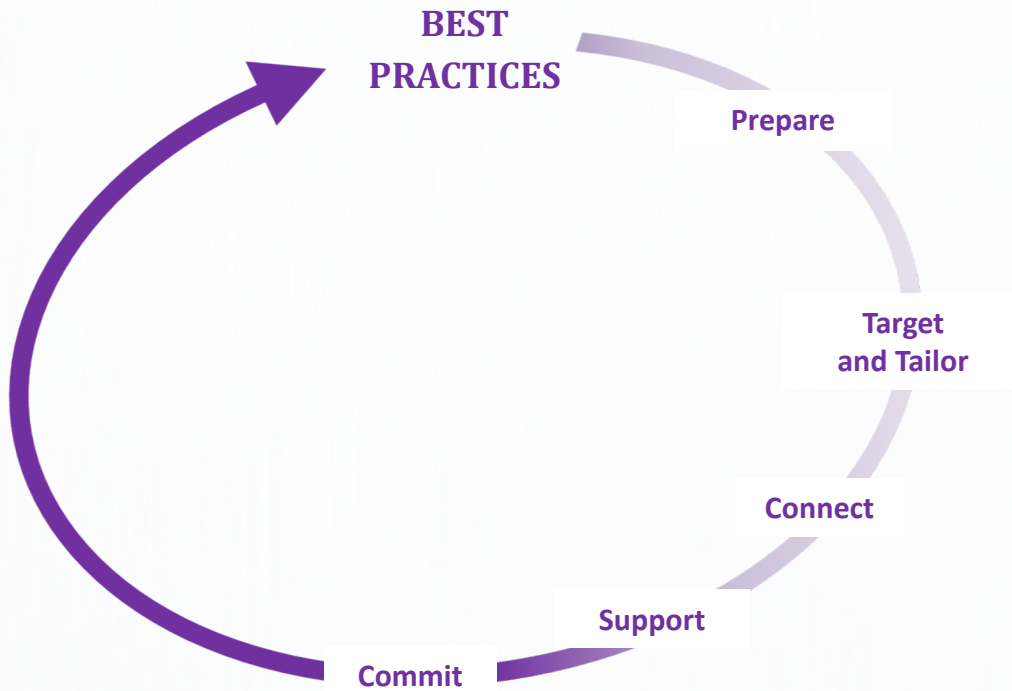
In 2019, the national seat belt use rate in the United States was about **91%**. That's a significant increase from 1994, when that number was about **58%**.

Moreover, observed seat belt use in 2019 was about **92%** in states with primary enforcement laws but about **86%** in states with secondary enforcement laws or no seat belt laws.

—National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA),
United States Department of Transportation



Best Practice #5: COMMIT



COMMIT: Communication efforts should be long-term commitments.

- Communication is a complex human process that requires conveying and creating meaning.
- Changing behavior is a long-term effort—consistency and commitment is key.
- Communication campaigns that are long lived, high exposure, consistent and focused, and multi-channel efforts tend to be more effective in influencing and changing behavior.
- Multi-step communication is sometimes the best approach (i.e., focusing on changing social norms first, and then, through social norm change, influencing individual behavior).

Long-term commitments to a communication program are linked to success in changing behavior.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))

Human communication is fundamentally about conveying and creating meaning, it involves much more than the simple transmission of information.

—Kuznar & Yager ([Development of Communication Models Quick Look](#))





COMMITTED Communication in Practice

COMMITTED COMMUNICATION: *THE US ANTI-SMOKING CAMPAIGN*

Long-term commitments to a communication program are linked to success in changing behavior. These long-lived, high-exposure, multiple-channel programs affect individual preferences as well as social support and institutional policies that encourage these preferences. The United States anti-smoking movement is one of the best examples of such efforts. While short-lived, specific communication interventions had some success. However, the change in mass behavior is largely attributed to a 50-year span of communication campaigns, including mass media campaigns and public relations efforts by anti-smoking groups.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))

In 2019, about **14%** of adults reported as being cigarette smokers. That's a significant decrease from 1965, when that number was about **42%**.

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & American Lung Association

"Just Do It":

A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO THE BRAND

Nike's brand is "Just Do It." That's what they stand for. That's the sign off and it has been since the 1970s. Consistency and commitment are key building blocks. Decide who you are and then go be that thing. And generally speaking, a consistent plan that's 80% baked is better than an inconsistent plan that's 100% baked but you change ten times.

—Paul Astorino (SVP, Global Merchandizing, Clarks), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)



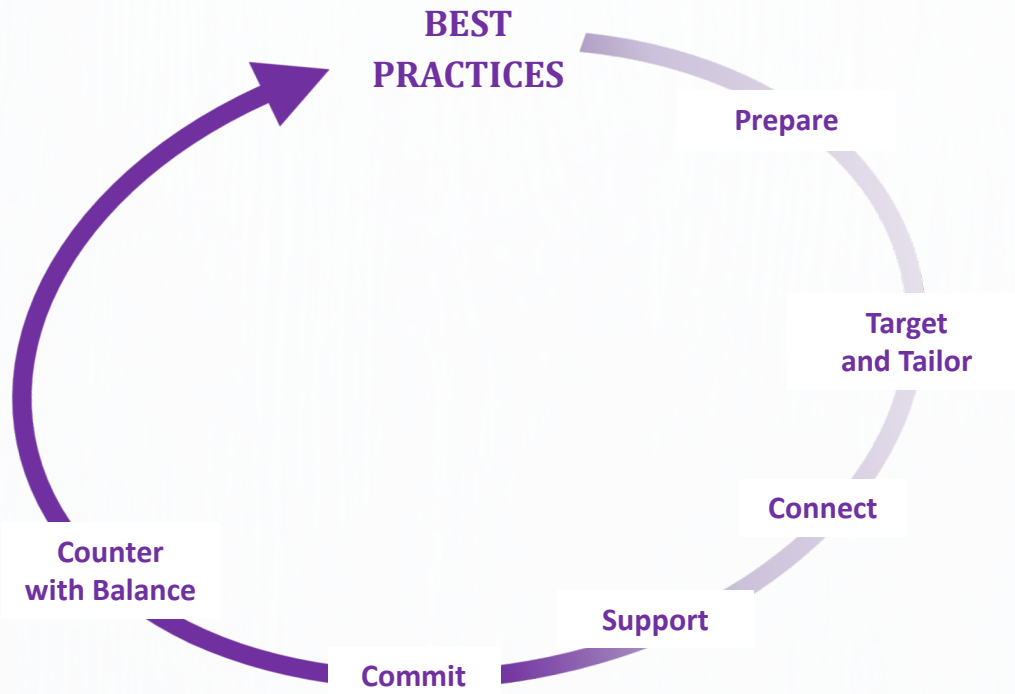
THE LONG GAME: *LESSONS LEARNED FROM MARKETING*

Unfortunately, from an internal perspective, people sometimes get bored, want to move on, and think the job is done too soon. You'll work on a project and go back to the client a dozen times, if not more, before anything actually happens. And in that time of creating the campaign, they'll eventually say, "Okay. Well, the job's done." But, in reality, you haven't even gone to the consumer yet. It takes time to create your plan and then it takes years to change a consumer group's mind. And no one wants to hear this, but it's a long-term pull. When Nike introduced football, they were 0% market share and Adidas was something like 80% market share. Well, right now they're 49% and 51% respectively. But it took 20 years for Nike to get from 0% to 49% market share, and it was a big spend. Constantly hammering, hammering, hammering away. And any overnight success in consumer product goods took at least 10 years.

There's the internal boredom that one must manage. And then there's the external exigency of continually pounding the same message for a long, long time, and then adapting it as you go to meet the consumer understanding, but it's got to be the same core idea.

—Paul Astorino (SVP, Global Merchandizing, Clarks), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)

Best Practice #6: COUNTER WITH BALANCE



COUNTER WITH BALANCE: When counter messaging, strive to strike a delicate and important balance between responding rapidly and aggressively to quickly counter false, harmful information, while also being careful to communicate in a way that does not overamplify the inaccurate and harmful information among the audience.

- Be equipped to communicate offensively and defensively—responsiveness is a key component of any communication strategy.
- Counter and/or attack damaging information and messaging quickly to prevent it from taking over, but don't overamplify or echo it to the extent that it further resonates or indoctrinates.

To effectively combat and counter false, harmful information and messaging, communicators must develop and implement an effective counter-communication strategy while also working to safeguard the communicator's "brand" against any damaging information. Essentially, to be truly effective in this space of counter-communication, communicators must be able to message both offensively and defensively as needed.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))

Messengers have to be careful when calling out disinformation directly to protect the audience from being further indoctrinated by such information.

—Dr. Jay Rosen (Professor of Journalism, NYU), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)





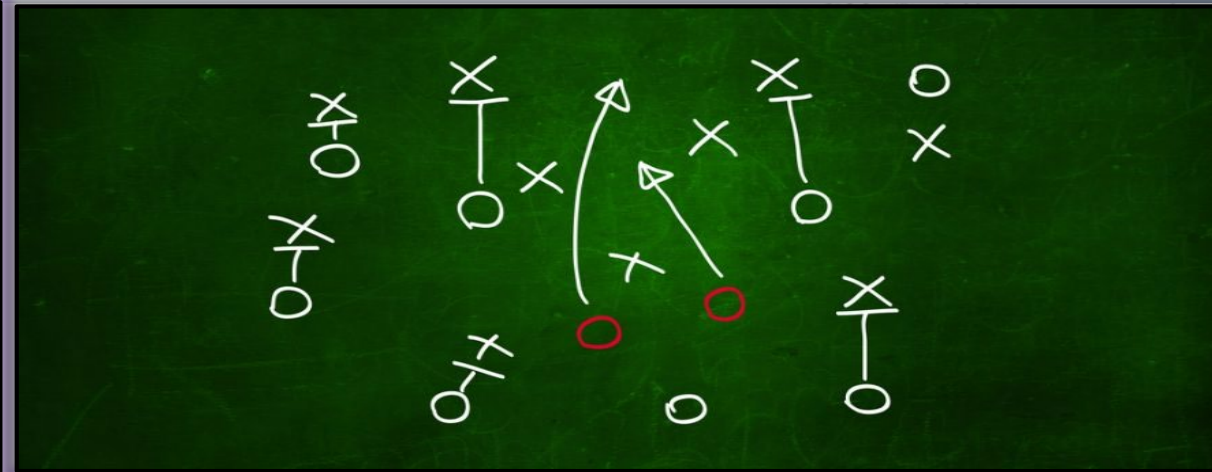
COUNTERING WITH BALANCE in Practice

PLAYING OFFENSE AND DEFENSE:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

The way I'd deal with disinformation is to attack it. I wouldn't let it fester to take root and grow. Think of it like a basketball team. You go on offense and then two seconds later you're on defense. Let's say you have a message that you want to get out to a certain population, you go on offense. You know what you want to accomplish, and you go ahead and execute it as best you possibly can. Then, at the same time, you're hearing stuff that you want to combat. It's misinformation, disinformation, it's not accurate. You don't want to let it take root and fester. You have to defend against it as rapidly as possible. And there are various techniques you could use. You could mock it. You could attack it on a logic level. I like making fun of stuff that isn't true and basically pulling the legs out from under it. But I think the worst thing you could do in the face of meaningful disinformation is let it rise above the noise ... Once you identify something important in the realm of disinformation, you have to attack it and neutralize it as quickly as possible because otherwise it starts to take root on the internet, on these various social media platforms. You're probably not going to kill it altogether, but you can at least tamp it down.

—AI Teller (Music Industry Executive, Independent), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)



PLAYING OFFENSE AND DEFENSE:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

Sometimes you have to play defense as well as playing offense. That's where the brand message has to be strong. That's where people have to know who they're listening to and have to want to hear what you have to say. The brand message needs to be strong in terms of coming out with clarity and being responsive. Communication is no longer a one-way channel. It's now two-way. Everything that is sent into the marketplace is commented on—it's sometimes discussed in heated terms, it's sometimes countered. So, your structure has to be responsive. Unlike the old days where you just put out some billboards and called it a day, communication efforts now have to be solid and backed up. In a military campaign, you don't just throw the troops into battle. You have a plan and a backup plan. Same with communication. You need to be thinking of responsiveness as a key part of any communications strategy.

—John DeBello (President & Chief Creative Officer, Loma Media), [NSI ViTTa Elicitation](#)



Best Practice #7: EVALUATE AND ASSESS



EVALUATE AND ASSESS: Evaluation and assessment of performance and effectiveness should be a central component of any communication effort. Such measurement can be challenging, however, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to doing so effectively.

- Evaluate both the **exposure** (i.e., overall reach and frequency of contact with communication) and **impact** (i.e., shift in perception and/or behavior following communication) of the communication effort.
- Consider **multiple dimensions of effectiveness** (e.g., definitional, ideological, political, contextual, cost, programmatic).

The overall number of exposures a message receives and its lasting impact on the audience are two strong indicators of messaging performance and effectiveness.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))

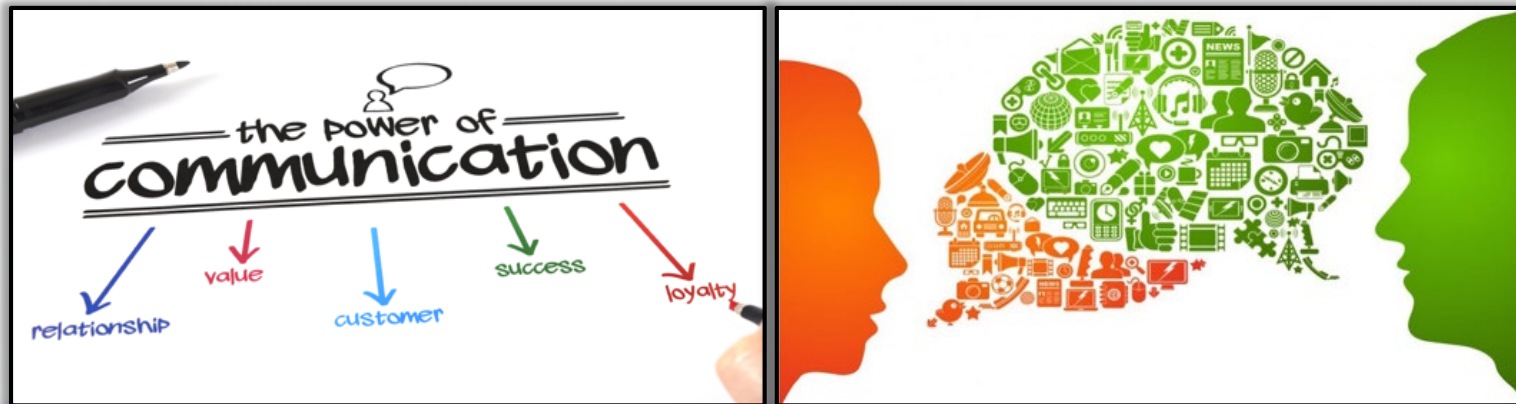
Effectiveness is often conceptualized as the ratio of achievements divided by expectations. In other words, an undertaking is deemed successful or unsuccessful relative to what is desired or expected. When the expectation is high, the outcome will have to be of proportionally greater magnitude to constitute a success.

Conversely, when the expectation is low, a much lesser outcome will constitute a success. Communication effectiveness is not dissimilar in that respect ...

Depending how one chooses to conceptualize effectiveness, the same campaign can be considered both successful and unsuccessful.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))





EVALUATING BOTH EXPOSURE AND IMPACT: *LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR*

EXPOSURE: To understand and evaluate a message's overall exposure and reach, one can look to data on metrics such as audience interactions, likes or shares on social media platforms, clicks on an online news story, television viewership ratings, or even retail purchases. Exposure is generally measured in terms of both reach and frequency of exposure. For example, target rating points (TRPs), a standard advertising industry metric, is calculated as the share of the target audience that is reached times the number of times they are exposed to the message. A generally accepted practice is to attempt to achieve a minimum of three exposures among a target audience.

IMPACT: Evaluating a message's longer-term impact and effect on an audience is more challenging. Audience polling, surveys, and focus group data can provide useful insight on impact, but it's not always conclusive ... There are many factors that influence behavior. It is naïve to think that one message will likely achieve widespread change. It is, however, one ingredient or variable in the overall influence and decision calculus that does drive behavioral shifts. Other factors (situational, environmental, cultural, monetary, opportunistic) are also important to consider. A key to understanding impact is to discern the shift in behavior that occurred after the communication took place. While this cannot be considered causal, the time series aspect of that type of analysis does lend support that it is reasonable to assume that, at a minimum, it may have influenced the result.

—Popp et al. ([Insights from Private Sector ViTTa](#))

SIX DIMENSIONS FOR CONCEPTUALIZING EFFECTIVENESS:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

Attempts have been made to conceptualize the effectiveness of public communications campaigns. Ultimately, there are six frequently used dimensions for such evaluation:

DEFINITIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the extent to which the message penetrates the communication ecosystem (i.e., media, audience) as a pressing issue and/or area of focus.

IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the extent to which the communication effort achieves a consensus on the level of behavioral change that needs to take place.

POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the extent to which the communication effort inspires confidence in what is being communicated.

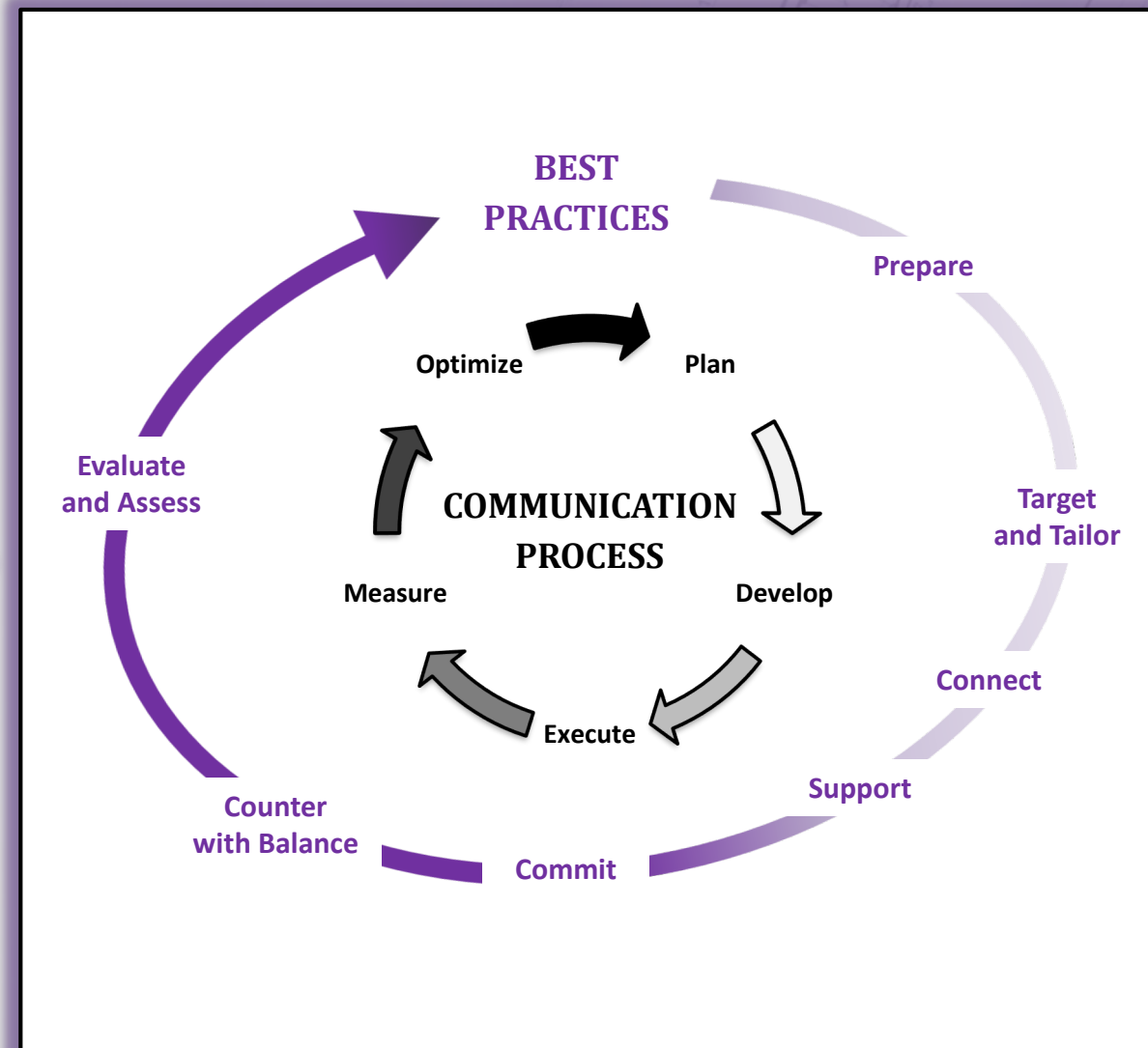
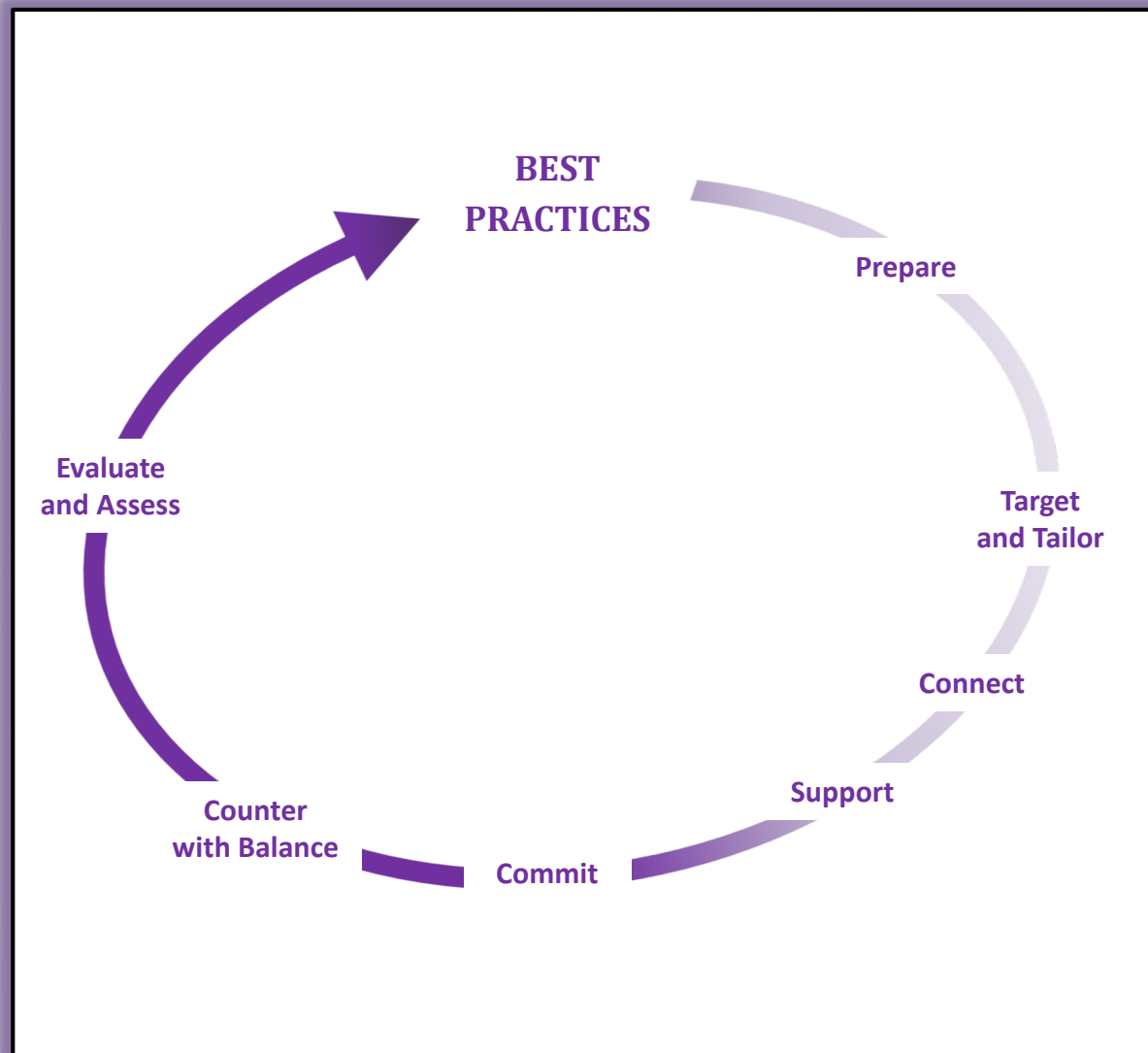
CONTEXTUAL EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the analysis of why the decision to use communication was adopted and how communication was used alongside other mechanisms of behavioral and social change.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the assessment of overall benefit in relation to the overall cost (i.e., whether the communication campaign was more or less cost-effective than other forms of intervention).

PROGRAMMATIC EFFECTIVENESS: Measured by the direct comparison of the communication effort's stated objectives and observed outcomes.

—Cooley et al. ([Influencing Public Behavior Quick Look](#))

Mapping the Best Practices to the Communication Process



PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

PREPARE
Begin all communication efforts with sufficient preparation and research to develop a communication plan from start to finish.

- Develop a communication plan and process.
- Identify and define a target audience.
- Outline clear and measurable objectives.
- Do needs assessment research, formative research, and potential impact research.

TARGET AND TAILOR
Target and tailor the communication effort to its intended audience and outlined objectives.

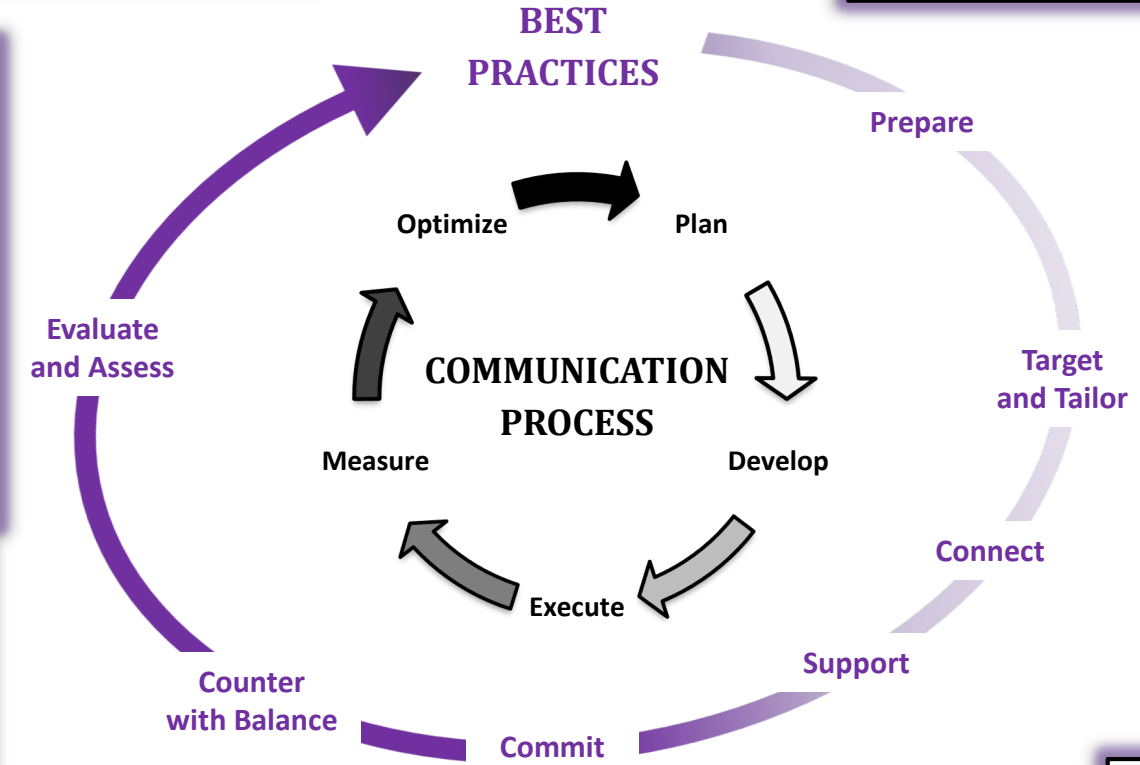
- Ensure knowledge and understanding of the targeted audience.
- Tailor and localize the communication to the targeted audience.
- Target specific behavior change rather than broad categories of behavior.

CONNECT
Strive to connect credibly, coherently, consistently, and emotionally with the targeted audience.

- Promote authentic and trustworthy messages and messengers.
- Keep the message simple and clear and tell a story.
- Stay on message and repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Make emotional connections with the audience when appropriate.

SUPPORT
Support communication efforts with other complimentary mechanisms of behavioral and social change.

- Support communication with three complementary mechanisms of social change: *engineering* (development of technology or innovation), *enforcement* (use of coercion or other forms of mandated change), and *education* (modification of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors).



EVALUATE AND ASSESS
Evaluation and assessment of performance and effectiveness should be a central component of any communication effort. Such measurement can be challenging, however, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to doing so effectively.

- Evaluate both the exposure (i.e., overall reach and frequency of contact with communication) and impact (i.e., shift in perception and/or behavior following communication) of the communication effort.
- Consider multiple dimensions of effectiveness (e.g., definitional, ideological, political, contextual, cost, programmatic).

COUNTER WITH BALANCE
When counter messaging, strive to strike a delicate and important balance between responding rapidly and aggressively to quickly counter false, harmful information, while also being careful to communicate in a way that does not overamplify the inaccurate and harmful information among the audience.

- Communicate offensively and defensively—responsiveness is a key component of any communication strategy.
- Counter and/or attack damaging information and messaging quickly to prevent it from taking over, but don't overamplify or echo it to the extent that it further resonates or indoctrinates.

COMMIT
Communication efforts should be long-term commitments.

- Communication is complex and requires conveying and creating meaning.
- Changing behavior is a long-term effort—consistency and commitment is key.
- Communication campaigns that are long lived, high exposure, consistent and focused, and multi-channel efforts tend to be more effective.
- Multi-step communication is sometimes the best approach.



SMA IIJO Effort References

- Bragg, B.; Cooley, A.; Cooley, S.; Hinck, R.; & Kitsch, S. (2021). Transactional Communication Model. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/transactional-communication-model/>
- Cooley, S.; Cooley, A.; Kitsch, S.; & Hinck, R. (2021). Understanding Mass Self-Communication. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/understanding-mass-self-communication/>
- Cooley, A.; Cooley, S.; Hinck, R.; & Kitsch, S. (2020). Influencing Public Behavior: Takeaways From Public Communication Scholarship. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Quick-Look_Influencing-Public-Behavior_FINAL.pdf
- Cooley, S.; Cooley, A.; Hinck, R.; & Kitsch, S. (2020). Communicative Power in a Globalized “Network Society.” NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/communicative-power-in-a-globalized-network-society/>
- Kluver, Z.; Cooley, S.; Hinck, R.; & Cooley, A. (2020). Propaganda: Indexing and Framing and the Tools of Disinformation. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/propaganda-indexing-and-framing-and-the-tools-of-disinformation/>
- Kuznar, L. & Yager, M. (2020). The Development of Communication Models. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/the-development-of-communication-models/>
- Polansky, S. & Rieger, T. (2020). Cognitive Biases: Causes, Effects, and Implications for Effective Messaging. NSI and MESA Quick Looks Series. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/cognitive-biases-causes-effects-and-implications-for-effective-messaging/>
- Popp, G.; Kuznar, E.; & Stokes, S. (2021). Using Messaging and Communication to Influence and Inform: Insights From the Private Sector. NSI Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) Report. Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office. <https://nsiteam.com/using-messaging-and-communication-to-influence-and-inform-insights-from-the-private-sector/>



Additional References

- American Lung Association. (2018). Overall Tobacco Trends. <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease/tobacco-trends-brief/overall-tobacco-trends>
- CDC. (2021). Burden of Cigarette Use in the US. Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/resources/data/cigarette-smoking-in-united-states.html>
- CDC. (2020). Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults in the United States. Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/adult_data/cig_smoking/index.htm#nation
- CDC. (2020). Seat Belts: Get the Facts. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/seatbelts/facts.html>
- NHTSA. (2020). Seat Belts. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/seat-belts>
- NHTSA. (2019). Seat Belt Use in 2019—Overall Results. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812875>
- NHTSA. (2011). Seat Belt Use in 2011—Overall Results. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation. <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/811544>