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- (v) Internal communication and training

COMMUNICATING A VISION TO STAFF

Submitted by Eurostat¹

ABSTRACT - In August 2009, Eurostat presented a Communication on the production method of EU statistics: A vision for the next decade, which was adopted by the European Commission. The Communication outlines how the European Statistical System (ESS) should be modernised in the longer term to meet the challenges that statistical producers are faced with at national and European levels. This paper focuses on communication techniques used to inform and engage staff in the implementation of the Vision at Eurostat.

I. THE EUROSTAT VISION

1. The preparation of the so-called “Vision” started in November 2008, a few months after Walter Radermacher was appointed Director General of Eurostat. Mainly, the Vision is based on the Director General’s ideas, but senior managers were involved in the reflections and drafting of the actual [European Commission Communication on the production method of EU statistics: A vision for the next decade](#)².
2. The Communication was adopted by the European Commission in August 2009. The objective of the Vision is to improve the efficiency of European statistics by reforming their production methods. According to the Vision paper, Eurostat and the national statistical institutes (NSIs) need to adapt their products and services in order to satisfy users and continue to play a relevant role in EU policy-making.
3. The main idea is to move away from the traditional way of producing statistics in silos, or 'stovepipes', to a more integrated production model. The current stovepipe production model is not well adapted to collect data on phenomena that cover multiple dimensions, such as climate change or globalisation. The current model is also costly and less efficient, as it does not make use of standardisation between areas and collaboration between Member States. By avoiding duplication of work Eurostat and the NSIs will increase efficiency, reduce burden on respondents and cut the cost of compiling statistics.
4. Another important element is to better understand and respond to user needs. For many users statistical information is abstract and the more complex the production and methodologies become, the more it is necessary to explain the results. New ways of communicating with users should also be explored.

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² COM (2009) 404, 8 August 2009

II. ORGANISATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VISION

5. Once the paper was adopted, a group of Eurostat directors was selected to coordinate the implementation of the Vision at Eurostat. This Coordination Group is headed by the Director General.

6. A Project Team (PT), which includes members from across the organisation, was also set up to support the implementation of the Vision. The PT is chaired by one of the Heads of Unit together with a director, reporting directly to the Coordination Group.

7. A separate subgroup deals with communication issues related to the implementation of the Vision and reports to the Project Team. Its members all belong to the PT and come from both production and horizontal directorates within Eurostat. This Communication Subgroup is headed by the Head of the Internal Communication Section.

8. The role of the Communication Subgroup is to steer the communication around the Vision at Eurostat and, if necessary, to suggest follow-up actions.

III. COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

9. Communicating the Vision is a challenging task per se, as it describes the future in broad terms, without going into detail on how the organisation should precisely change to reach this future. The Vision does not include concrete proposals or a roadmap. Furthermore, it does not spell out who is responsible for the changes.

10. An additional factor is also the fact that the success of the Vision does not solely rely on Eurostat, but also hugely depends on the Member States of the European Statistical System.

11. Eurostat has around 850 staff members and they do not form a homogenous group. People have at least 30 different cultural backgrounds. There is a mix of permanent and contractual staff, part of who will not be working at Eurostat in ten years' time. Additionally, staff members are interested in different aspects of the Vision depending on their tasks in the organisation.

12. To summarise, there are two important challenges. Firstly, to make the contents of the Vision understandable to all staff and to motivate staff to engage in the implementation of the Vision.

IV. SOME (POTENTIAL) SUCCESS FACTORS

A. Support by top managers

13. The close link to top hierarchy is crucial for successful internal communication. The close ties and easy access to concerned directors and Director General have been important for the efficient communication at Eurostat.

B. Two-way communication and engagement

14. It is also important that communication is a “two-way” process – top-down as well as bottom-up. The Communication Subgroup has been playing a crucial role in trying to ensure that both needs and wishes of senior management as well as staff are taken onboard. The mixed representation of highly motivated colleagues in the Subgroup resulted in rich, vivid discussions, unusual ideas and actions, and it paved the way for a better understanding of staff’s communication needs.

15. Internal communication is a valuable tool for staff engagement. Engagement is a continuous process centred on building trust and encouraging dialogue. Several opportunities of dialogues between top managers and staff, as well as groups of staff, were offered to encourage involvement in the implementation of the Vision and to provide feedback. A Wiki site will also open soon to encourage dialogue and feedback.

C. Be strategic and plan

16. One of the first things the Communication Group did was to prepare a Communication and Engagement Plan. The plan was discussed in the Project Team and adopted by the Coordination Group. The first plan was adopted in November 2009 and the second in April 2010.

17. The focus of the first plan was to inform staff **about the Vision**. The focus of the second plan was to inform staff about the **implementation** of the Vision. Both plans focused on reducing uncertainty and engaging staff in the change process.

18. Staff was divided into different target groups:
- Heads of Unit
 - Domain managers in Production Units, IT and Horizontal Units
 - Support staff

The idea was to ensure that all groups of staff members were informed according to their needs.

19. The Subgroup also prepared a rolling calendar to better visualise all events linked to the Vision and to spread them evenly in time and between target groups.

D. Use a variety of tools

20. A variety of tools were proposed to communicate the issues revolving around the Vision, the idea being that everyone, from managers to secretaries, would find a way to understand the Vision's objectives. The tools were:

- Traditional internal communication tools, such as intranet, articles in Eurostat's in-house magazine, regular unit meetings, meetings between directors and heads of unit etc.
- More modern tools, such as Open Spaces, Wikis, Away Days for different groups of staff.

V. COMMUNICATION ACTIONS

A. Intranet and internal newsletter

21. During the whole process there have been regular updates about the Vision and activities related to the Vision on Eurostat's intranet and also in the internal magazine. We also followed the process by interviewing the senior managers in charge of the implementation, following their meetings. The aim was to show that the implementation process had started and that the directors were working on establishing a concrete action plan on how to reach the broad objectives of the Vision.

B. Staff meetings

22. One of the first things the Communication Subgroup did was to suggest a staff meeting with the Director General dedicated to the Vision. To generate interest and ensure that people attended the meeting a humorous poster was created.

23. The humorous touch certainly worked. The meeting was attended by 200 staff members. However, a few staff members did not appreciate being called 'beginners'...

24. The first meeting took place 13 October 2009. During the meeting Eurostat's Director General presented main ideas behind the Vision and a number of colleagues from different statistical domains gave examples of how a more integrated production model is already working in the field of business statistics.



25. The next staff meeting took place on 10 March 2010, where Eurostat's Director General outlined the state of play regarding the Vision implementation and answered questions related to the subject. Two members of the Communication Group and some other colleagues, had prepared a humorous music video about Eurostat, before and after the Vision. It should be noted that the Director General, directors, some heads of unit and a group of around 30 staff also participated in the creation of the video. The evaluation of the staff meeting showed that the video was a success.

26. A third staff meeting will take place 24 June. The Communication Group has suggested that the red thread should be "Vision – state of play and what's next". The idea is that the Director General should give a general overview of where we are now, outline what comes next and talks about the relations with Member States regarding the implementation of the Vision. One of the directors will also be invited to speak about some Vision related projects which are taking place at Eurostat. As usual, time will be allocated to a question and answer session.

C. Open Spaces

27. In order to make the Vision more concrete for staff and to involve them in discussions related to the Vision, the Communication Subgroup sought subjects which could be explained and discussed in the so-called Open Spaces. From December 2009 to April 2010 three Open Space meetings were organised. They focused on:

- a. Data Warehousing
- b. How to work with cross-cutting issues, such as climate change
- c. Web data collection methods

28. Around 30 staff members participated in each Open Space. Their formula included the responsible director explaining the subject matter together with colleagues knowing the field. The group was then split into smaller ones, in which different issues linked to the main subject were discussed. At the end each group reported what had been discussed to the rest of the participants and the director in charge. There was also time for questions. At the web data collection Open Space, two speakers from Statistics Norway and Statistics Canada were invited to talk about their experiences in the field. Reports about the discussions were published both on Eurostat's intranet and in the in-house magazine.

29. The Open Spaces proved a success and were highly appreciated by staff. All three meetings got very good evaluations from the participants, probably because they made actions linked to the Vision more concrete and the staff felt that they could give input into the process and were listened to by the hierarchy. Furthermore, ideas which came up during the Open Spaces have been used by the responsible director in developing their work linked to the Vision.

30. As of April 2010, the focus of communication lies on the implementation of the Vision, rather than informing about the Vision. This is linked to the fact that the directors, by this time have formulated activities and outcomes they wish to achieve by 2011. Therefore, Open Spaces will from now on be organised around those activities. The first meeting will take place on 3 June and focus on managing human resources at Eurostat.

D. Away Days and seminars

31. Several directorates (around 100 staff each) organised Away Days where the issues related to the Vision and the work of their directorate were discussed. Some of these Away Days were organised by staff members. In general the Away Days were appreciated by staff and issues linked to the Vision were discussed in a more relaxed atmosphere.

32. At two occasions, in March 2009 and March 2010, Eurostat's heads of unit had the opportunity to discuss the Vision and its implementation at their annual seminars.

33. On 18 June 2010 the network of secretaries and assistants will have an Away Day. This Away Day has a very specific target group and part of the meeting will focus on how the Vision impacts the work of secretaries and administrative assistants.

E. Invited speakers

34. To show that other statistical institutes have gone through similar process as the ones discussed in the Vision and to learn from other organisations' experiences, the Communication Group occasionally invites representatives from National Statistical Institutes to speak to staff about their experiences.

35. The first guest speaker was Stephen Penneck, Director General of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in the United Kingdom, who visited Eurostat on 3 February. His speech entitled "The ONS Statistical Modernisation Programme. What went right? What went wrong?" was much appreciated by all participants.

36. A second speech is likely to be scheduled with Wayne Smith, Assistant Chief Statistician for the Business and Economic Sector, and one of the leaders of Statistics Canada's Corporate Business Architecture.

F. Logo

37. To make actions linked to the Vision easier recognisable a dedicated logo was created. The logo is used in all materials linked to the Vision, posters and on the intranet. A special PowerPoint design was also made, which should be used for presentations linked to the Vision. All these documents are available on Eurostat's intranet.



VI. EVALUATION

A. Staff Opinion Survey

38. Eurostat's internal communication is evaluated every second year in the annual staff opinion survey. In 2009 there was a special section related to the Vision.

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40. According to the Staff Opinion Survey held in December 2009, 45% of staff felt they were well informed about the Vision, 34% agreed to some extent, 11% disagreed and 10% had no opinion. 43% felt they understood the purpose of the Vision, 34% to some extent, 12% disagreed and 12% had no opinion.

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42. These figures show that almost half of staff felt well informed about the purpose and meaning of the Vision, after only two months of active and planned communication actions.

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44. However, according to the 2009 survey only 18% felt involved in the discussions about the implementation of the Vision, 26% agreed to some extent, 38% disagreed and 18% had no opinion. These figures demonstrate that staff were not involved in discussions leading up to the Vision paper. Therefore, the Subgroup on Communication suggested more Open Spaces to better involve staff in the implementation of the Vision.

B. Other evaluations

45. As previously mentioned, certain events, such as staff meetings, seminars, Away Days and Open Spaces, are also evaluated individually. The feedback is used to improve next events of the same kind and is very useful.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Plan

46. As mentioned before, the preparation of the Vision started in November 2008. During spring 2009, the Vision communication was more improvised than planned and thought through. Today communication is more structured, but could still be improved.

B. Be concrete

47. By nature, the Vision paper outlines long-term objectives but does not explain in detail how these goals will be reached. Therefore, it has been difficult for staff to understand how the Vision will influence their daily tasks. Staff requested more concrete information, which was difficult to provide at an early stage of the process.

C. Involve staff and middle managers

48. In 2009 communication and engagement suffered from not having involved middle management in the discussions and drafting of the actual Vision paper. The Heads of Unit seminar, which was organised in March 2009, probably raised more questions than paved the way for a smooth implementation of the Vision. Some middle managers criticised the fact that they had not been involved in the early discussions on the Vision.

49. An earlier involvement could have enabled heads of unit to act as a more effective interface with staff. They could have been a driving force behind the experience, offering knowledge and know-how that would contribute to the achievement of the targets of the project.

50. However, putting all members of staff at the same level and varying the communication tools have also created a common understanding of the Vision and its goals. Furthermore, the set-up of the Heads of Unit monthly meetings is currently being changed to involve the middle managers more in the decision making process. More middle managers are also being involved in defining how to reach the goals of the Vision, and how to measure its progress. Currently, around half of the heads of unit take part in defining actions for the next couple of years.

D. United face

51. The Vision paper was inspired by the ideas of the Director General of Eurostat. Depending on the various directors' role and responsibilities, they were involved at different levels of the discussions and the drafting of the Vision Communication.

52. However, during the last six months all of the senior managers have defined key priorities for challenging and new development projects to be carried out in the short to medium term. These priorities have been translated into actions relating directly to the implementation of the Vision.

53. Ownership and responsibilities for driving forward the different actions and outcomes have been distributed among the senior managers. Together with their teams, responsible directors should now define short, medium and long-term goals, as well as actions to reach these goals and indicators to measure progress. The first progress review by senior management will take place in mid-July 2010.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

54. By definition a Vision describes a distant future in broad terms and it does not clearly explain how the organisation should change to get there. This is undoubtedly a communication challenge and it is clear that the preparation, start of the implementation and the Vision communication have not been perfect at Eurostat.

55. However, taking into consideration the issues listed in the section 'Lessons learned', the efforts to plan and provide timely and diversified events, target communication at different groups and, whenever possible, provide concrete examples, the Vision communication has been rather successful.

56. Obviously, a lot remains to be done and more communication actions need to be planned as the Vision progresses and becomes more concrete within the next few years. Hopefully, we will be able to measure some of the results of the communication efforts in the next staff opinion survey, where we hope that more staff will understand the Vision and feel involved in the implementation at Eurostat.