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- (i) Getting the numbers across in ways that external audiences understand

PROFILE AND INFOTAINMENT

Submitted by Statistics Denmark¹

I. INTRODUCTION: WORKING PROFESSIONALLY WITH SIGNALS

1. Whether they are aware of it or not, statistical institutions are sending lots of signals in their stakeholder communication. This takes place, e.g. in job advertisements and in the physical localities of the institution. Communication professionals may target these signals, thereby utilizing them in the organisation's systematic *profile work*.
2. This paper presents a number of visual and textual elements in newly developed job advertisements and profile materials from Statistics Denmark and in the reception hall for visitors. It also presents a statistical Trivial Pursuit in digital as well as analogue format and other initiatives to catch the attention of external audiences and shape their view of Statistics Denmark.
3. The Trivial Pursuit is an example of the use of *infotainment* as a strategy to influence the image of the organisation. Infotainment is a mixture of entertainment and information, and infotainment products can be used as elements in other profile materials such as posters and large screens.
4. The paper argues that statistical organisations should work professionally with the signals we send. This goes for both the signals we cannot avoid sending – and therefore should pay lots of attention to – and in the optional profile products in which we can shape our public image and tell our core story again and again.

II. FROM CARELESS COMMUNICATION TO CAREFUL PROFILE WORK

5. Even if you shut your mouth you send a signal. Organisations – such as national statistical institutes (NSI's) – are sending lots of signals all the time, in addition to all the words and figures they disseminate: The building, the handshakes, the telephone answers, the business hours, the envelopes, the logo, the fonts used for print, web and e-mails, the colours of web-elements, the photos used in front pages of books and at the website, the representative gifts, the flowers and snacks for anniversaries and receptions, the spoken and written language, the participation in meeting and conferences, the dress code, the locked or open doors to individual offices, etc.
6. Organisations send so many signals that the communication staff should not try to influence them all, only some of them. But which signals? My answer is: The ones that has strategic relevance, the ones where the organisation are sending the wrong signals, and the ones that we have possibilities of changing from the position of the communication unit.

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7. When you look around in your own organisation, you will probably find a lot of *careless communication*. This is when things are done the same way year after year without anybody taking initiative to evaluate or change this communication, e.g. recruitment communication. Careless communication also happens when nobody pays attention to missing signals, e.g. the possibility of placing a large screen in the reception hall as a supplement to the printed information that you are free to take and read while waiting. It makes a huge difference when you go from careless communication to *careful profile work*.

8. In Statistics Denmark, the communication staff regards profile as the conscious presentation of the organisation, mostly done by the communication staff itself. This presentation may be part of all types of communication. The profile is closely linked to the *image* of the organisation (the reputation, the way others see the organisation) and the *identity* of the organisation (the self-understanding, the way we perceive ourselves). If there is a big gap between the public image and the identity, it may lead to confusing signals – contradictions. The profile work is, thus, the conscious work with changing the image, carefully taking the identity into consideration.

9. Professional profile work is both a matter of working with traditional presentation materials such as folders, looking for missing or outdated communication, and inventing new and creative solutions. Be sure to consider both signals you can choose, and:

III. SIGNALS YOU CANNOT AVOID

10. Some signals are unavoidable, but not necessarily dealt with by the communication staff. Think about the **envelopes** in which the letters of your organisation are sent out (around 500,000 letters a year from Statistics Denmark, mostly to respondents). Do you use white envelopes? Or presumably white envelopes with the logo of the organisation. Is it neutral? Yes. Is it good communication? Maybe. But consider adding a message to the receiver, as we recently did in Statistics Denmark with this piece of text:

Statistics Denmark is an independent government institution, which produces statistics of the Danish society. Correct informations from businesses and citizens have great importance.

11. With this little initiative, now Statistics Denmark sends 500,000 extra messages to stakeholders without any extra costs. We have gone from neutral signals to careful communication – though we have to admit that we do not differentiate the messages for different stakeholder-groups, as this, unfortunately, would imply too many practical problems.

12. What about **job advertisements**? You probably cannot avoid them either. But are they good? Do they send the right signals and tell the right story? In the beginning of 2009 Statistics Denmark launched a new concept for job adds (ironically it was a few months after the international financial crisis had frozen down the labour market). The purpose was to modernise the visual and textual communication. Until the modernisation most of the job adds had no illustrations, and the text was too formal and too long. The new style is visually appealing, friendly, brief (with links to more info) and with a slight touch of humour and play on words, inspired by the style of many commercial adds, making pictures, headlines and other textual elements play together. Still the aim is to indicate a strong professional dedication and be true to our values and our culture.

13. Also the job-site (www.dst.dk/job) was modernised in the same process. All texts at the subsite were rewritten in collaboration between the human resource division and Communication Centre, and the visual elements were used here as well. You cannot avoid presenting new jobs online, so you should better do it well.

14. When you visit an organisation, naturally, the first thing you notice is the building. Visitors then go to the reception counter, where one typically has to spend a few minutes waiting in a sofa or an armchair. Until last year the **reception area** of Statistics Denmark offered the visitors some information in the form of presentation folders and the booklet “Denmark in Figures”, among other things. Though these printed materials – in our own opinion – are of quite good information and layout quality, the implied overall

signal to the visitors was conservative: Statistics Denmark was still living in the Gutenberg era, the good old days of book print as the primary media.

IV. INFOTAINMENT AND OTHER SIGNALS YOU CAN CHOOSE

15. One year ago Statistics Denmark put up a **large information screen** in front of the sofas used by visitors waiting in the reception area. The content is specially designed for the purpose, using very short texts and large illustrations. Some of the elements – graphs and texts from our daily newsletter – are taken directly from the website (technically speaking via RSS), and these elements are updated automatically. This should show to the visitor that Statistics Denmark is working like an electronic news media organisation, bringing fresh news on a daily basis.

16. Furthermore the large screen presents other interesting aspects of the statistical institution: The organisation, its history, research service, customer service, international consulting, the library, popular subsites and the StatBank etc. It also shows the front pages of the folders offered in the reception area, inviting the visitor to get a free copy.

17. Likewise the screen invites the visitor to take a sample of our statistical “Trivial Pursuit”, our quiz, in the form of a box with a deck of playing cards. The quiz is also used in the right part of the screen, showing one question at a time. This is the infotainment aspect.

18. Why infotainment? As mentioned in the introductory paragraph, infotainment is a mixture of entertainment and information. Entertainment is used as a tool to make people pay interest in the information which is often seen as “dry” and boring – or even irrelevant. The questions and the correct answers should open up the readers and the participants in the quiz, making them think, e.g. “Ah, does Statistics Denmark really publish figures on this aspect – how interesting!” or “Really? I didn’t know that those figures were so high”. In other words, this kind of infotainment should be eye-opening, creating interest in statistics, and thus improving the image of the institute.

19. As a deck of cards the statistical equivalent to Trivial Pursuit mostly works as a gift for visitors, connections, relatives and friends. It is also possible, though, to order the game for free via the website (www.dst.dk/quiz). At the website you can find updated questions for the quiz and see the answers when clicking at “See the correct answer”.

20. The physical product, the quiz cards, helps the staff-members becoming good *ambassadors* for Statistics Denmark. As I have experienced myself, giving the deck of cards away, the recipients start opening the box, reading and asking each other questions; statistics make people curious, and people will soon have fun, competing in knowledge about society. The one who gave the small present will enjoy a moment of popularity – and get a good opportunity to tell more about the work in an NSI, this time not having to excuse oneself for spending eight hours a day producing endless rows of boring numbers.

21. The ambassador-thinking is also the base of another infotainment product, our **collection of quotations, anecdotes, and jokes** about statistics and statisticians. (*StatiStikpiller* was first published in Danish in 2000. An English version, *StatisTics*, appeared in 2005 – see it at www.dst.dk/stattics. An updated version in Danish was published this year with the new title *Statistisk talt*, www.dst.dk/publ/statistiskalt). Among the most remarkable statements are these three:

- Josef Stalin: “A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is statistics.”
- Aaron Levenstein: “Statistics are like a bikini – what they reveal is suggestive, but what they conceal is vital.”
- Albert Einstein: “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.”

22. If a statistician starts, e.g., a lecture or a presentation with such a quotation, he may easily capture the full attention of the audience, immediately breaking down their possible prejudices against dry statisticians. Thus the employee will become a better representative for the NSI. The booklet with the quotations may of

course also be given as a small present. The front page of the booklet looks like a comic strip – a very different signal from a typical NSI-publication. This change of signals will make many people curious.

23. All profile and presentation materials are, to some extent, optional, e.g. a **presentation folder**. (See Statistics Denmark's presentation folder at www.dst.dk/presenting). But then again, it is a very normal thing for an organisation of a certain size to have such a thing, and people might even ask for it, if you do not have it – giving a bad, unwelcoming impression of the organisation when you say "I'm sorry". Thus, we find it essential for Statistics Denmark to have a brochure which tells about the statistical products, the dissemination, the organisation, and the international dimensions of our work, among other things.

24. When you have chosen to have a presentation brochure or folder – and to publish it at your website – it may also be used as a basis for other presentation materials. In Statistics Denmark we have used the presentation brochure as the basis for a small **PowerPoint-presentation**, consisting of twelve slides. Most of the slides reuse some of the illustrations and quotations from the brochure, and the last slide offers more information in the presentation brochure.

25. The slide show is a tool which can be used by all employees at Statistics Denmark as a point of departure for subject matter presentations at meetings, conferences and seminars, and they are free to adapt it to their specific purpose, adding or deleting slides or text elements. It is a time saving piece of help, and the result will, in most cases, be visually much more appealing than an average slide show (often lacking illustrations and having too much text).

26. Another useful profile material is a **poster**. It looks good and attracts people at e.g. conferences, seminars, expositions, carrier days and other recruitment events. The poster of Statistics Denmark consists of our pay-off (*Tal til tiden – Numbers on Time*), some quadratic squares with photos and small texts and a text-field which may tell about us in a general way or shortly describe the event to which the specific poster is adapted. The photos and small texts is a mosaic, presenting interesting and surprising aspects of the statistics. The texts are written in the question-answer style, inspired by our own quiz; questions will often make the reader curious, and a dialogue may begin, if staff-members are present near the poster.

27. The visual and textual concept from the poster is reused in a series of postcards that can be used accompanying, e.g., wine or book gifts at anniversaries or similar festive events. The postcards thereby tell a little about Statistics Denmark in a way that plays well together with the rest of our profile materials.

V. SIGNALS MUST PLAY TOGETHER

28. Going from careless communication to careful profile work is a process that may take years – in fact, it may never stop. You should not send exactly the same signals year after year, because then you will be making careless communication again. The profile materials can be updated for some years, but after five to ten years they are probably outdated. Meanwhile the profile materials have helped paving the way for a better understanding of the role of the NSI, made the staff members better ambassadors and opened the eyes of external audiences towards the interesting, surprising and fascinating aspects of the official figures.

29. When you have several profile materials – the optional material and the unavoidable communication – they should always play well together. Reuse as many visual and textual elements as possible, not because it makes the communication task easier (even though that is a nice thing, too), but because the organisation should not send too many signals at the same time, pointing in different directions. Profile materials are like the logo of the organisation; it may work in another colour and size, but it should always be easy to recognise. The image of the organisation should be clear, and it starts with your communication.