

COMMUNICATING YOUR COLLABORATIVE JOURNEY...



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Few people would argue how important effective communications are to successfully establishing a new collaborative service. This is reflected in the large number of communications ideas and techniques appearing throughout the SSA toolkits.

For a significant shared services programme, there is a strong case for following a communications journey which runs alongside the overall SSA Collaboration Journey Map (see the final page of this article).

Over the last 12 months, I have led the communications support for the development of the oneSource shared service between London's Havering Council (Conservative minority led) and Newham Council (Labour Mayor). In this article are the steps I would recommend you consider as you develop your communications on a collaborative working journey.

Putting Communications On The Map

At oneSource, we were bringing together 22 services with budgets of £58million and 1,300 people – a major project by any organisation's standards – so there was an early recognition that communications needed to be well planned and executed.

Good communications begin with preparing yourself for the journey ahead. For example:

- Do you have the resources to plan and manage communications for your project?
- Does your Shared Service Architect have the capacity and skills to do this?
- Are there resources available from your existing comms services or will you need some external (possibly part-time) support?

There needs to be proper time allocated for communications on your meeting agendas.

You also need to take advice on whether there are any big comms issues around that you need to be aware of. For instance, is the local media likely to be hostile and are there any vociferous pressure groups or individuals who oppose your plans?

Whilst the potential partners are busy understanding and developing the opportunities to collaborate, you need to take the time to put all the building blocks for successful communications in place. This includes producing your communications strategy, writing your key messages and deciding which channels to use.

I wrote a detailed communications strategy for oneSource, with clear objectives, success criteria and action plans well before we got to the point of writing the business case.

This meant that there were no surprises over the coming months and it was easy to monitor progress and risks.

I also produced a strong narrative which was used as the basis of our communications messages and ensured that these were consistent across the two councils – focusing on the questions of “Why are we doing this?” and “What does it mean for me?”

At this point, I ensured that we sent out strong leadership messages to staff and other stakeholders.

The news that the two councils were looking at sharing services was already ‘out there’ so it was important to reinforce that with positive messages, to quash rumours and disinformation.

There was a programme of communications activities including our first staff roadshows, stakeholder briefings and meetings and a media release and photocall, with clear 'lines to take' ready for any media questions.

Communication is a team effort...

This is also the time to start building great working relationships with the communications people in the organisations that are planning to collaborate. They will already manage a range of existing communications channels and can be a real help in getting the collaborative transformation or shared service message across.

There's also a clear role for your communications resource in the shared vision stage. They can help write the vision in language that will excite and engage people, bring the stories that you developed at your workshops to life and ensure that the vision document itself has high impact and is professionally presented.

Havering and Newham used the vision document to launch the potential shared service partnership on the waiting world.

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How to use communication to gain consensus and buy-in...

We followed a similar approach at the next stage of the route map, establishing consensus and buy-in for the business case.

I made sure that we had a comprehensive package of communications in place, including further staff events at both councils, detailed 'Q and As' on the intranet, and stakeholder briefings.

When your journey reaches the 'Innovation and Design' stage, this is also the time to start looking at your future communications.

I worked on developing the name and brand for the new shared service, which was important to us as we wanted to establish it as something new and different for the two councils.

I also developed the implementation communications plan that would take us right through to 'Go Live' and set up the specific communication channels that the new service would use, including a brand new intranet and regular e-bulletins.

When the new joint service was ready to go and had reached the 'Transformation' and 'Operate and Improve' stages, my role (once we had launched the new service) was to establish the business as usual communications channels and ways of working. This was to make sure we celebrated our successes and used our communications tools to keep people focused on the overall vision.

Consistency equals success...

Throughout the collaboration journey, it's important to have consistent messages running through all your communications. Repeat them regularly and ensure your audience can receive communications and messages through a range of channels (informal as well as formal).

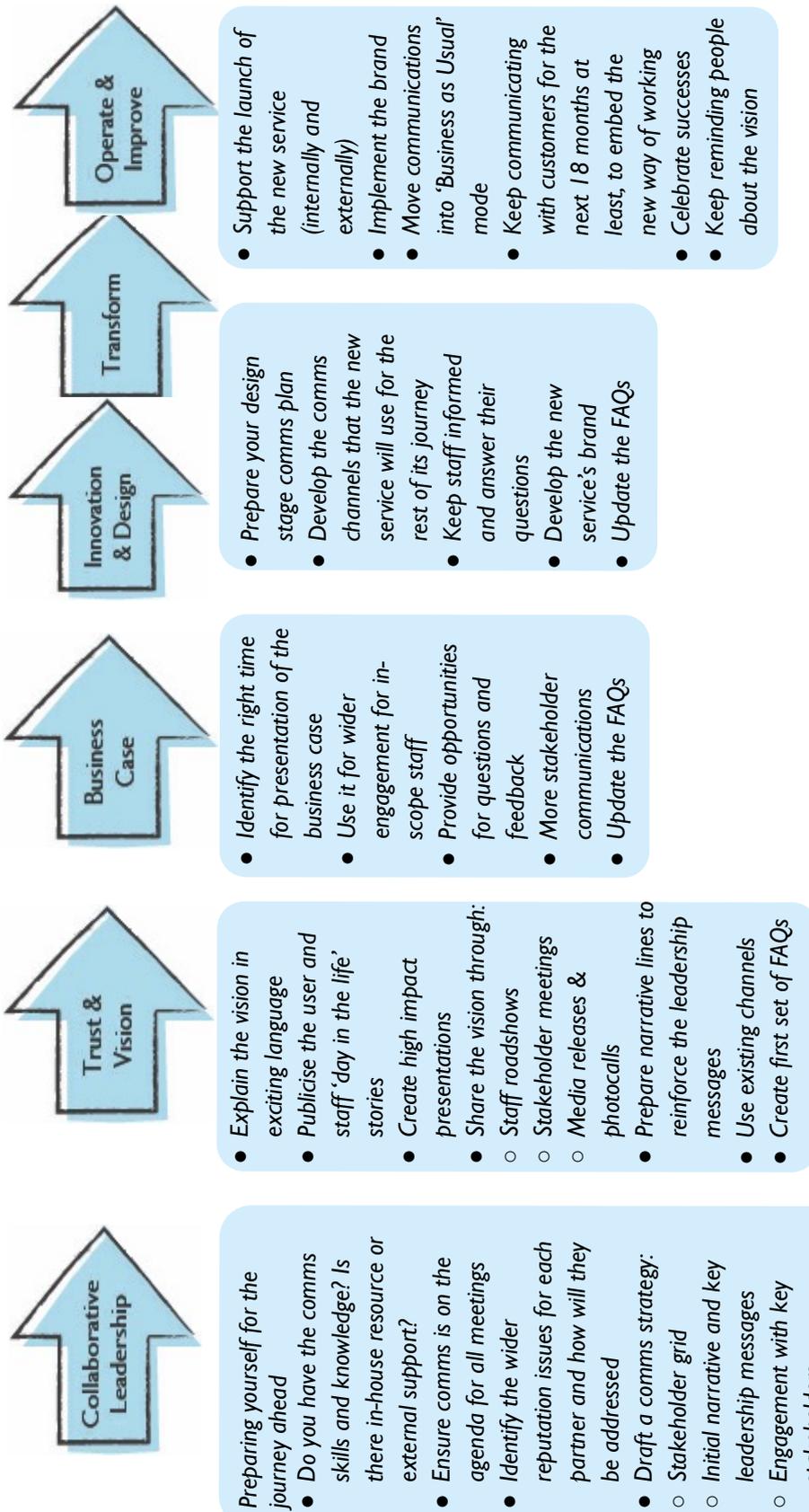
I also found that testing staff awareness and understanding and holding regular update meetings with the communications people in the two councils helped us keep communications activities on track as we developed oneSource after the launch.

Developing a communications' checklist

On the the following page, I have matched a number of key communication steps and actions to the SSA collaborative journey map. I hope that it will help you in your journey. Also feel free to contact me if you have questions about the stages in the journey.

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The Shared Service Architect's Collaborative Working Journey Map



A check list for your communications during the collaborative working journey