



Early Childhood Development Function transfer from Eastern Cape Department of Social Development to Eastern Cape Department of Education

Communication Strategy

June 2021

(Draft discussion document)

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1. Background and introduction

The country is gearing itself toward the introduction of two years compulsory preschool for all children before they enter Grade 1, as pronounced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA).

The Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, in her 2019 budget speech stated that there is a need to urgently proceed with the systematic transfer of the responsibility for Early Childhood Development from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education.

Chapter 9 of the NDP 2030 sets out a clear objective to “Make early childhood development a top priority to improve the quality of education and long-term prospects of future generations. Dedicated resources should therefore be channelled towards ensuring that all children are well cared for from an early age and receive appropriate emotional, cognitive and physical development stimulation”. Its motivation for this is that an investment in ECD will result in better academic performance, lower levels of antisocial behaviour, improved living standards, and better adult health and longevity¹.

This strategy has national implications, and all Provincial Departments of Education and Social Development are required to implement this strategy successfully over a transitional period of three years as from 01 April 2020.

The Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) and the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development (ECDSD) have embraced the requirement to transfer the ECD function and have embarked on a joint implementation initiative.

DBE developed a comprehensive plan for the different work streams involved in the ECD function shift (Grade R, Grade RR, and Birth to 4), in collaboration with the relevant partners in government. One of those is Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Workstream.

This draft communication strategy serves as a discussion document to inform the communication activities to be rolled out in support of the overall process and specifically support the stakeholder engagement process.

2. Situation Analysis

¹ GTAC, Diagnostic Report (Project No. 1157) Early Childhood Development Function Shift, Final Report, 23 November 2020

The function transfer will have a definite impact on a broad range of stakeholders as outlined in the stakeholder engagement strategy². The two areas that will be impacted most severely through this initiative are processes and people. It is therefore critical that any communication considers change management principles to pre-empt the areas of change and to minimise the potential negative impact of poor communication.

A change event of this magnitude can be incredibly stressful both on the part of the Department relinquishing the function (ECDSD) and the receiving Department (ECDoE). As such both organisations have a responsibility to assist stakeholders, including staff members to manage and deal with this change. Careful planning, consultation and ongoing communication with all stakeholders affected by this initiative is critical to the successful transition.

The role of communication is to guide and support the process and provide the necessary platforms for dissemination of key messages. It is therefore critical that there is collaboration, support, and cooperation between all communication units within the affected Departments to ensure that the communication needs of all stakeholders are considered and met.

It should be noted that, although there has been high level communication around the shift (i.e. the what?) and to a large extent the strategic intention (the why?), the mechanics around how it will happen i.e. when it will happen; who is directly affected; how the move will impact working conditions; whether the receiving environment is ready for the transfer in terms of infrastructure, curriculum; teaching staff etc. may still unclear in the absence of a concerted stakeholder engagement and communication drive.

This communication plan has been developed on the premise that, besides the announcement that the shift is to take place, by political principals, no other communication has taken place to date with affected stakeholders in terms of the mechanics of the function shift.

The function shift will influence people and processes, and as such requires that all communication be directed by the principles of change management.

² Transfer of the Early Childhood Development Function from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Education, Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, April 2021 (Final Draft)

3. Change management

Understanding the change management process is essential to ensure that the correct communication approach is adopted for a project of this magnitude. The strength of our relationships with all stakeholders will determine the success or failure of this initiative, and this essentially relies on effective communication.

The stakeholder engagement strategy identifies five stakeholder groups who will affect or be affected by this initiative, they are:

- a) The DSD community – these stakeholders are directly affected and/or involved in the work of the ECD function irrespective of whether they are located at national, provincial or district level.
- b) The DoE community - these stakeholders are directly affected and/or involved in the work of ECD irrespective of whether they are located at national, provincial or district level.
- c) National stakeholders – these stakeholders have a national presence and may / may not be directly involved in the ECD sector.
- d) Provincial stakeholders – these stakeholders have a provincial presence, within the Eastern Cape, and may or may not be directly involved in the ECD sector.
- e) District stakeholders - these stakeholders are in the twelve (12) education districts within the Eastern Cape and may or may not be involved in the ECD sector.

All these stakeholders have different needs and understanding these needs will improve the chances of success of the function transfer tremendously. This requires a sustained commitment by all key role players to accompany these stakeholders on the change journey. In doing so, it is important to understand the human and emotional stages that our stakeholders will go through during the ensuing 10 to 12 months towards successful conclusion function transfer.

Change commitment models are a useful tool to guide change interventions in an incremental manner. The *Patterson-Conner Commitment Curve* provides a series of milestones along the process of change, which encompass three phases i.e., Preparation: Acceptance and Commitment.

This serves as a useful tool for guiding our stakeholders through the human and emotional stages of contact, awareness, understanding, positive perception, adoption, and institutionalisation – stages typically associated with the change process. These stages are briefly described below:

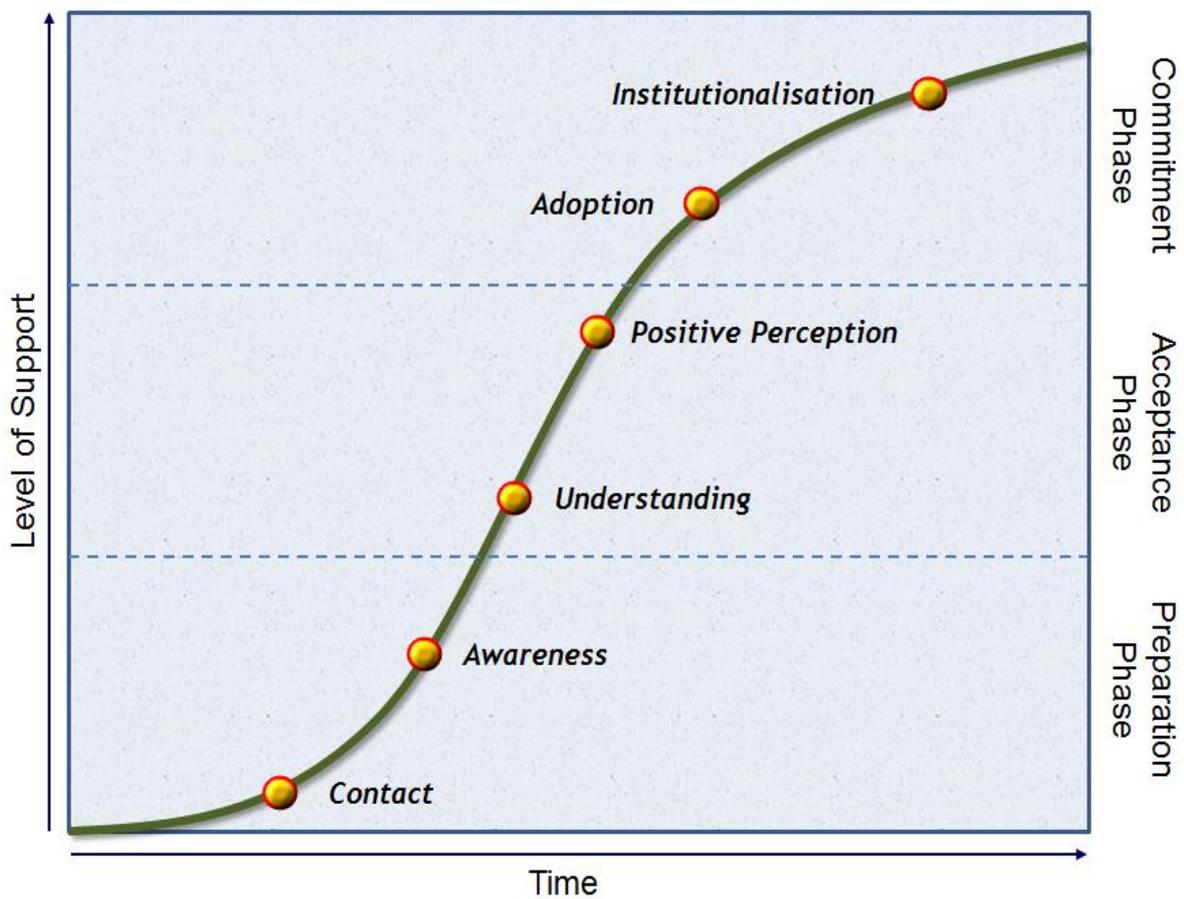


Figure 1: Patterson-Conner Commitment Curve

The table below provides a further explanation of each of the Stages of Change; and the communication approach required for each change.

Table 1: Required communication approach for each Stage of Change Model

	Stage	Explanation of Stage	Change communication approach
*PREPARATION PHASE	*Contact Stage	First encounter those stakeholders have that change is happening i.e., function transfer has been announced and this will require a different mindset and/or behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate as much information as possible in order manage expectations, dispel rumours, and allay fears. • Explain the rationale for and benefits of the change. • Reinforcement of the same message on multiple platforms. • Use a good balance of face to face and other channels. • Appointment and use of Change Ambassadors / Agents to spread the word.
	*Awareness Stage	Stakeholders, at this stage, have good knowledge of the scope of the function transfer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent communication, share more in-depth information and reinforce previous messages. • Communicate the right message at the right time. • Solicit and encourage open and honest feedback. Build a climate where feedback is welcomed by addressing concerns. • Do not ignore negative feedback / venting - it is an opportunity to allay fears through positive reinforcement of messages. • Continuously showcase successes / milestones.
*ACCEPTANCE PHASE	*Understanding Stage	Stakeholders show a degree of understanding of the change i.e., the extent/scope of and rationale for the change and what the change will mean for them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more detailed information on the specifics (as it becomes available). • Promote the change through Ambassadors and Change agents. • Provide Ambassadors and Change Agents with support to communicate effectively. • Call for collaboration from stakeholders who show a strong commitment to the change.
	*Positive Perception Stage	During this stage stakeholders make a commitment to support the change and show excitement, energy, and enthusiasm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities to share success stories and celebrate milestones frequently. • Encourage involvement and participation. • Capitalise on the positive “mood” of stakeholders.
*COMMITMENT PHASE	*Adoption Stage	Stakeholders have successfully gone through the initial period and are now comfortable with the change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of “new” and “emerging” issues that may arise. • Track and monitor issues and develop solutions. • Communicate solutions, not problems.
	*Institutionalisation Stage	At this stage stakeholders view the change as standard operating procedure i.e., “this is how we do things now” .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor regress into the “old way of doing things”. • Communicate progress and celebrate successes. • Continuous promotion of positive behaviour.

Sources:
 Stakeholder Commitment and Change Management
http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=134403
 Accessed on 20/06/2021

*Note - The timing of all communication and initiatives will be aligned to these change management phases.

4. Analysis of the communication environment

Effective two-way communication is vital in a democracy. Confidence and trust are inspired when there is open and honest communication between government and its citizens. Effective communication, or lack thereof, can make or break any government programme. Public servants are entrusted to execute the developmental programme and to provide meaningful contributions to ensure the success of said programmes. Other stakeholders are reliant on communication for information, education, to assess government performance, and to hold public officials accountable for non-delivery of services.

An analysis of the environment defines the conditions in which we will communicate and provides critical inputs to the development of this strategy. Several factors such as the track record of ECDoE and ECDSD to deliver on their mandate, the mood of the public, the agenda of the media, the political climate etc. will impact communication efforts around the ECD unctio n shift.

Although some efforts have and continue to be made to change negative perceptions around service delivery, this is a mammoth task. Some of the environmental factors which may impact our communication efforts relate to:

- Public perception and the overall reputation of ECDSD.
- Public perception and the overall reputation of ECDoE.
- Prevailing perceptions of stakeholders in the ECD sector around government support, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic.
- External factors which may / may not have anything to do with the function shift for e.g., corruption; politics; socio-economic climate etc.
- The ability of government departments to communicate proactively, transparently, and effectively.

5. Communication goal and objectives

The overall outcome that we hope to achieve through this strategy is –

Consistent, coherent, and sustained communication with all stakeholders towards a smooth ECD function shift from ECDS D to ECDoE in a manner which enhances the brand and reputation of the respective organisations and the Eastern Cape Province as a whole.

Taking into account the current situation (as outlined in the situation analysis above) and a better understanding of the phases and stages of the stages of change those stakeholders may go through (as outlined above in the change model), the goals and objectives of this strategy are to:

Goal #1 : Create awareness, educate, and inform all stakeholders of the ECD function shift.

- Keep all stakeholders informed of developments of the function shift transfer (the project) through regular and timely communication interventions.
- Provide opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback / comment during key stages of the project by making appropriate channels available to facilitate effective two-way communication.
- Consistently promote and market the project using suitable internal and external channels.

Goal #2: Drive the ECD function shift change management process.

- Identify and mobilise key stakeholders at the right levels, with the necessary authority and credibility to serve as project ambassadors and change agents.
- Engage stakeholders to ensure that their interests and concerns are addressed – through ongoing assessment.
- Create credibility and trust amongst stakeholders the by providing support mechanisms for dealing with the change.

Goal #3: Enhance the brand and reputation of both the ECDoE and ECDS D.

- Position the ECDoE and ECDS D as caring organisations.
- Build a sense of pride and belonging.
- Create a positive reputation of the project through consistent positive positioning and application of the ECD function transfer project identity (logo/tagline/creative application).

The communication objectives to achieve this goal are therefore to:

- a) Create public awareness and understanding of the ECD function shift.
- b) Reassure citizens that the function shift is well-informed and is beneficial to all role-players.
- c) Positively profile the key role players involved in the process to instil confidence and trust.
- d) Change public perceptions by continuously sharing good news stories about the function shift – benefits; processes; efficiency; enhanced service delivery.
- e) Instil a culture of ownership, pride, and confidence in the process through profiling stakeholders directly affected by the function transfer.
- f) Position the ECDoE and ECDS D leadership positively as visionary and inspiring leaders who have the best interests of citizens at heart and who have what it takes to drive this strategy successfully.
- g) Position both Departments positively to restore public confidence and trust in the public that each can deliver on their respective mandates.
- h) Use a variety of communication tools in a consistent and balanced manner to serve as a catalyst to start conversations and create a positive public profile around the ECD function shift.

6. Targeted communication

To ensure 'on-target' communication, several stakeholders have been identified (in the existing stakeholder engagement strategy), who may have an influence on, or who are/will be affected by the infrastructure development programme. The stakeholder engagement strategy should be read in conjunction with the communication strategy.

6.1. Stakeholder segmentation and prioritisation

To develop meaningful and value-added stakeholder communication it is important to understand:

- Stakeholders' level of influence and power and the desired level of support that the ECDS D and ECDoE would like them to play (desired actions required).
- The communication approach required (based on their level of influence and power) and the type of activities required for successful engagement with these stakeholders.

It should be noted that, the more refined our stakeholder classification, the more precise and effective our communication efforts will be.

The approach to prioritising stakeholders in terms of their communication needs on the infrastructure programme has been to map them on a grid according to their **level of power** (high/low) (to influence the infrastructure programme) and their **level of interest** (high/low) in the infrastructure programme. The position of a stakeholder on the power/interest grid indicates the action to be taken in interacting with the specific stakeholder.

The following Stakeholder Prioritisation Grid depicts identified stakeholders and their classification:

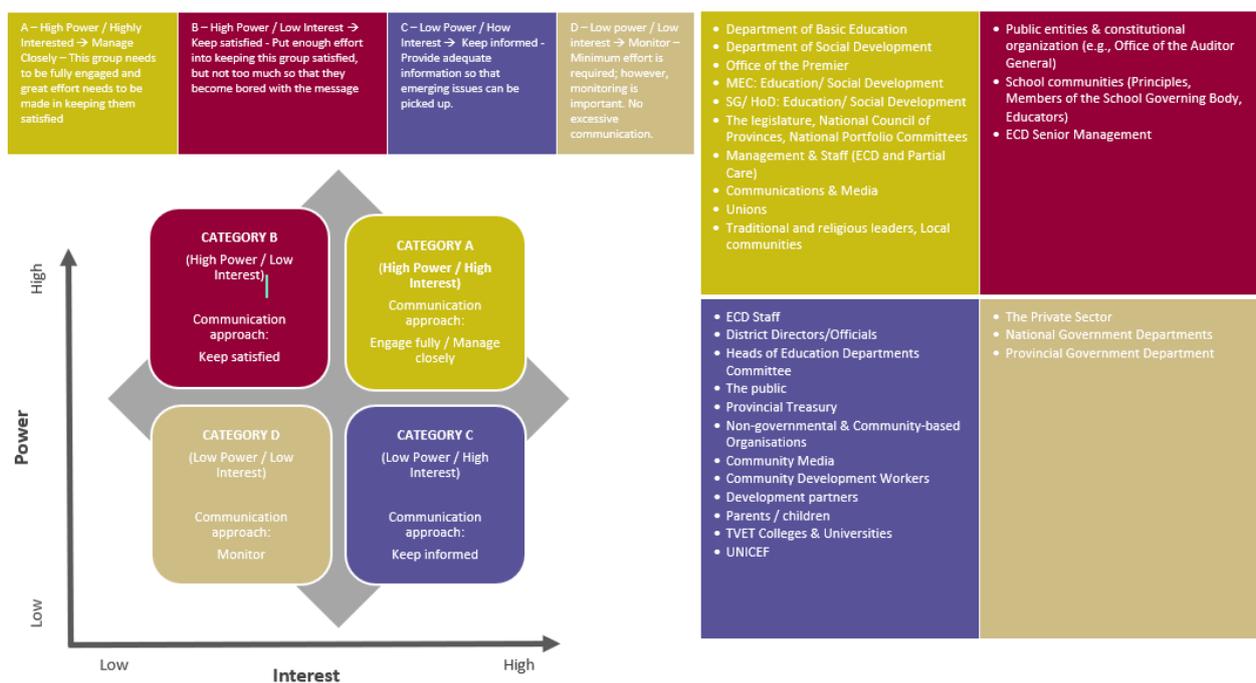


Figure 2: Stakeholder Prioritisation Matrix

6.2. Managing stakeholder communication

Having identified and prioritised our stakeholders, we also need to determine what is required in terms of our interactions with these stakeholders. It should be noted that stakeholder relationships are built on an incremental basis, moving a stakeholder from their status to the required status. Therefore, a stakeholder's status, as either, advocate; supporter; neutral; critic; and blocker may/will change as the project progresses depending on the level of interaction and communication with the stakeholder. This change will inform further change and communication activities to be undertaken with the specific stakeholder.

7. Communication approach

Communication initiatives / activities will be rolled out in a systematic manner to coincide with various phases and stages of change those stakeholders will go through (as outlined above). Communication activities will be rolled out in four major phases over a period of approximately 10 to 12 months.

Communicating the vision, values, and the culture to which we aspire will serve as the golden thread, through all communication.

The stakeholder environment will be scanned on an ongoing basis and communication with specific stakeholders would either be reinforced, enhanced or new messages will be communicated, depending on the success of the communication and change intervention with the stakeholder.

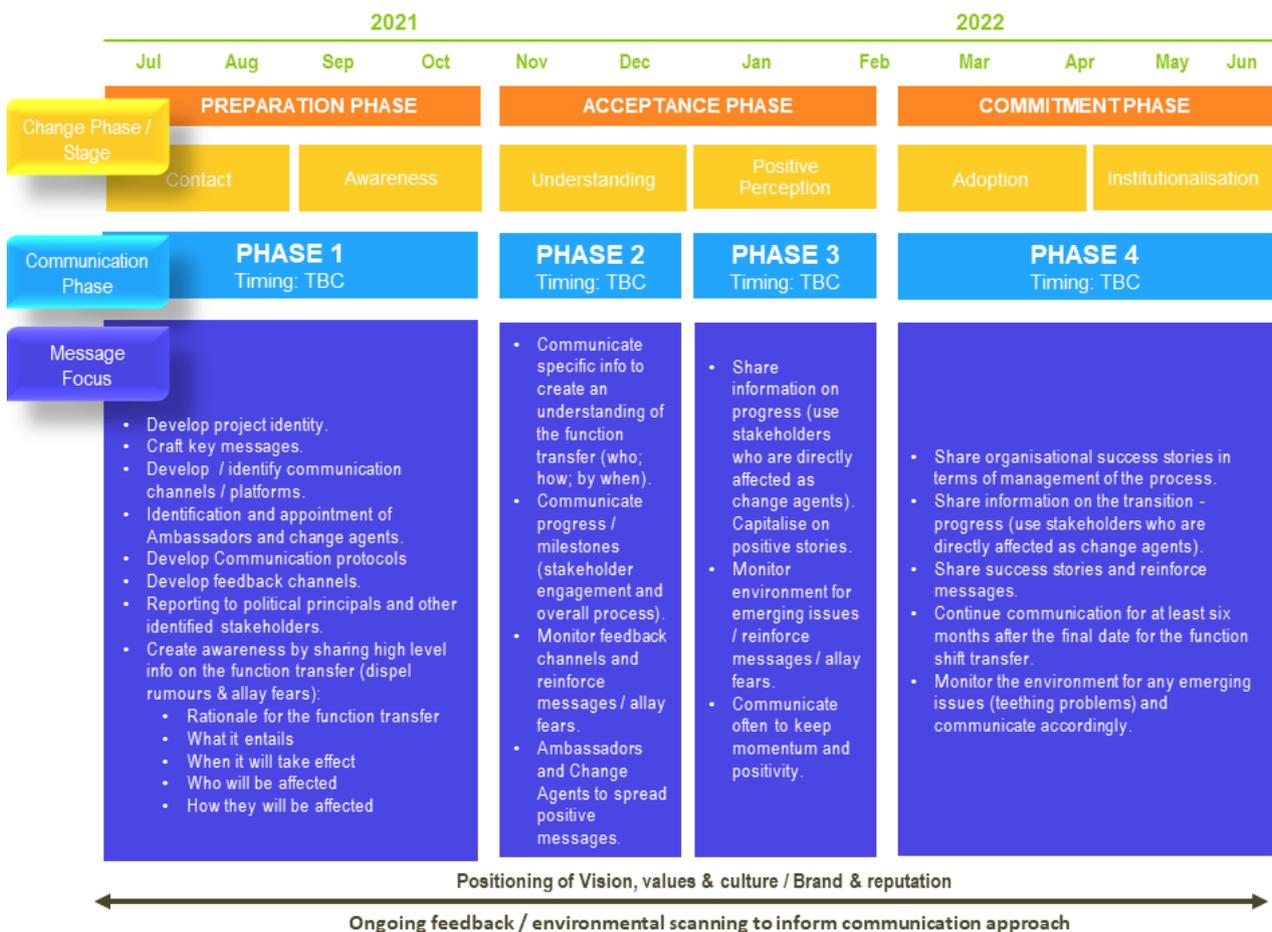


Figure 3: ECD Function Transfer Communication Phases

7.1. Communication methods and channels

Communication collaboration between ECDoE and ECDS D is a critical success factor for the achievement of the outcomes of this project i.e., a smooth transfer of the ECD function. A 'one shoe fits all' approach cannot be adopted when deciding on the most effective communication channels to utilise in meeting the diverse communication needs of identified stakeholders. In most cases, the choice of communication channels is complex as different target audiences are best reached in different ways and often several channels need to be used to reinforce messages. It would be critical to identify existing communication channels and methods used by both Departments to communicate with stakeholders, identify gaps and where necessary, develop new channels to augment the communication.

A combination of the following communication methods is proposed to ensure an integrated approach to all communication – refer to the diagram below for further information on specific channels:

- a) **Formal line briefing process:** Given the huge change management aspect of this project, line managers (at all levels) will be required to play a leading role in the communication exercise. A formal line briefing process will be instituted which will ensure that the management teams of both the ECDS D and ECDoE speak with one voice, and that they guide their teams through the change process, by being both accessible and willing to answer any questions around the function shift. A toolkit will be developed for managers to assist them in delivery of the message.
- b) **Change team:** The change team, consisting of identified change ambassadors and change agents will be used to reinforce messages and serve as the “face” of the function shift. Their primary role would be to engage staff on an informal basis, through “walkabouts” etc. to share key messages and to pick up on any emerging issues (i.e., get a sense of “grapevine” communication).
- c) **Internal communication channels:** Existing communication channels utilised by the ECDoE and ECDS D will be used to reinforce communication messages and create greater project awareness. In addition, new channels (e.g., Project Newsletter, Project-specific email address, web page etc.) may be developed. A detailed discussion is required between the two organisations to identify existing channels, conduct a gap analysis, and devise new channels where required.
- d) **External communication channels:** These channels will be used to communicate the message to external stakeholders. A detailed discussion is required between the two organisations to identify existing channels, conduct a gap analysis, and devise new channels where required.

e) **Feedback channels:** Feedback from stakeholders is critical in scanning the environment for emerging issues, dealing efficiently with queries / questions and; ensuring 'on-target' messaging to all our stakeholders. Several feedback mechanisms are proposed to facilitate two-way communication with all stakeholders. A discussion on feedback channels is required to identify areas of collaboration or identify gaps to devise new channels. The feasibility of introducing new channels is also to be investigated.

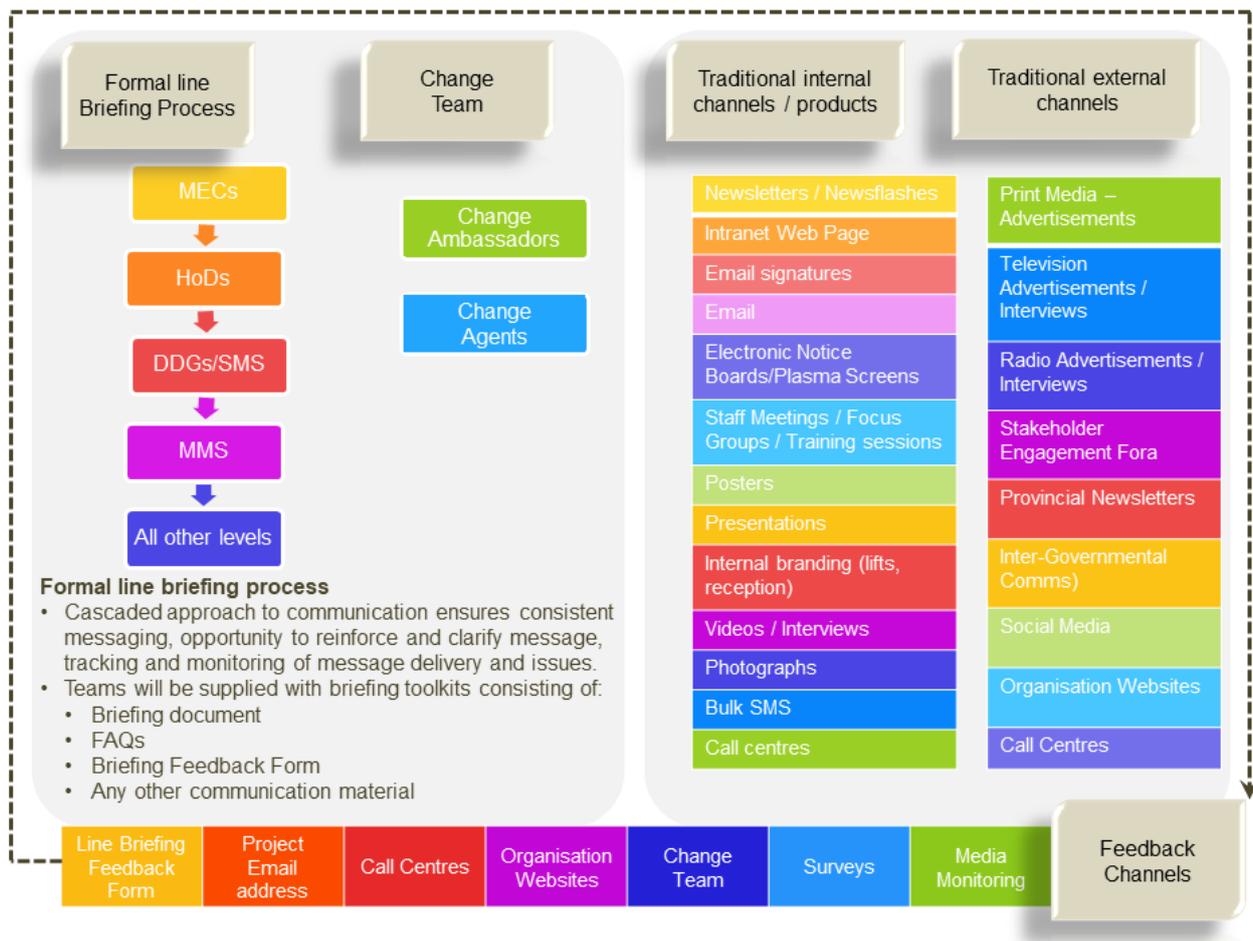


Figure 4: ECD Function Transfer - Communication Channels / Platforms

7.2. Communication themes

Communication themes and messages will be aligned to the overall intent of the ECD function shift transfer.

Further brainstorming is required between the two organisations.

7.3. Communication Messengers

Government communication is built on the premise that messages have more impact if they are delivered by our political principals rather than by lower-level public servants. As such, there is a need to increase the visibility of principals both from an internal as well as external communications perspective. However, given the vast scope of the ECD sector, it is also important to demonstrate the depth and breadth of expertise and competencies within both Departments and beyond to instil trust and confidence in the minds of the public, that we can effect a smooth transition.

Furthermore, there is a need for influencers to spread the message at the grassroots level to positively influence perceptions of communities.

The following have been identified as communication messengers in this project:

Primary messengers:

- The President of the Republic of South Africa
- Minister of Basic Education / Minister of Social Development
- Premier of the Eastern Cape
- MEC: Education / MEC: Social Development
- Superintendent-General / Head of Department: Education, Eastern Cape
- Head of Department: Department of Social Development, Eastern Cape
- Chief Director: Communications (ECDoE & ECDSD)

Secondary Messengers:

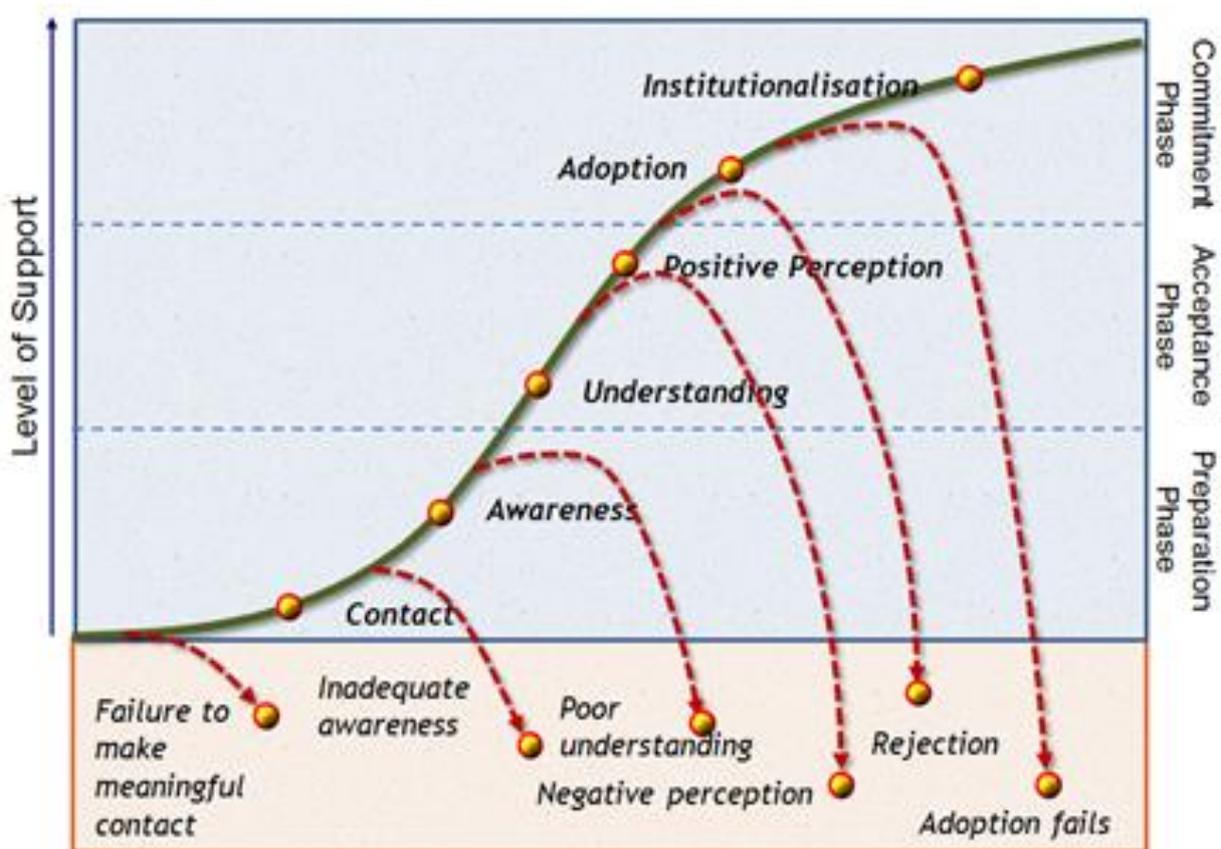
- District Management

Influencers:

- Identified Ambassadors and Change Agents

8. Reasons for the failure of change projects

Whilst everything in our power will be done, to ensure successful communication, it is important to take cognisance of the reasons why such a project may fail. This is particularly important to reinforce the point that communication is not the role of the communications team alone. Rather, a concerted effort is required on the part of all role players that have been identified to fulfil some or other communication role in this initiative. To understand the modes of failure six areas are highlighted, each arising from failure to achieve one of Patterson’s and Connor’s milestones



Change projects fail when³:

- i. The promoting team fails to make meaningful contact with all their stakeholders. They do not engage them and properly consult i.e., failing to understand their needs, desires, and expectations – setting themselves and their projects up for failure.
- ii. Having contacted stakeholders, change agents fail to create adequate awareness of the driving need for change or the real benefits of the solution .
- iii. Stakeholders may be aware of the change that is to take place, but fail to understand it fully – or worse, they misunderstand it. This leads to scepticism, cynicism, and rejection.

³ Why Change Projects Fail - <http://mikeclayton.wordpress.com/tag/patterson-connor-commitment-curve/>

- iv. Stakeholders may understand the change, but they may not like it. Negative perception may be illusory or real. They may not like the change for spurious reasons linked to misunderstanding, emotional reasons linked to fear of change, or real reasons arising from genuine negative outcomes for them or for people they care about.
- v. Despite positive perceptions, the change may be rejected prior to commitment. This could be due to new constraints or priorities, or a failure of organisational will.
- vi. Adoption does not always lead to effective organisational change, where the new ways of working are institutionalised.

9. Implementation strategy

A detailed implementation plan indicating outputs: timelines and responsibilities will be developed upon approval of the strategy. This will be costed so that the necessary budget implications are clear for funding of all communication activities.

10. Critical success factors

This strategy is aimed at addressing communication related to the ECD function transfer over a 10- to 12-month period. Communication only works if it is worked on. The success of this strategy therefore requires the support and involvement of several role-players and is reliant on the following dependencies:

- a) Buy-in, collaboration and support of key functional areas of both Departments - Corporate Communication; Customer Care; Stakeholder Management; and Heads of Departments; MEC's – who will be responsible for joint implementation.
- b) Approval of the strategy and implementation plan.
- c) Availability of budget.
- d) Engagement and efficient response to information requests.
- e) Recognition by all role players that communication is key to changing perceptions and not merely an after-thought.
- f) Collaboration between the Departments in strategy refinement and implementation.

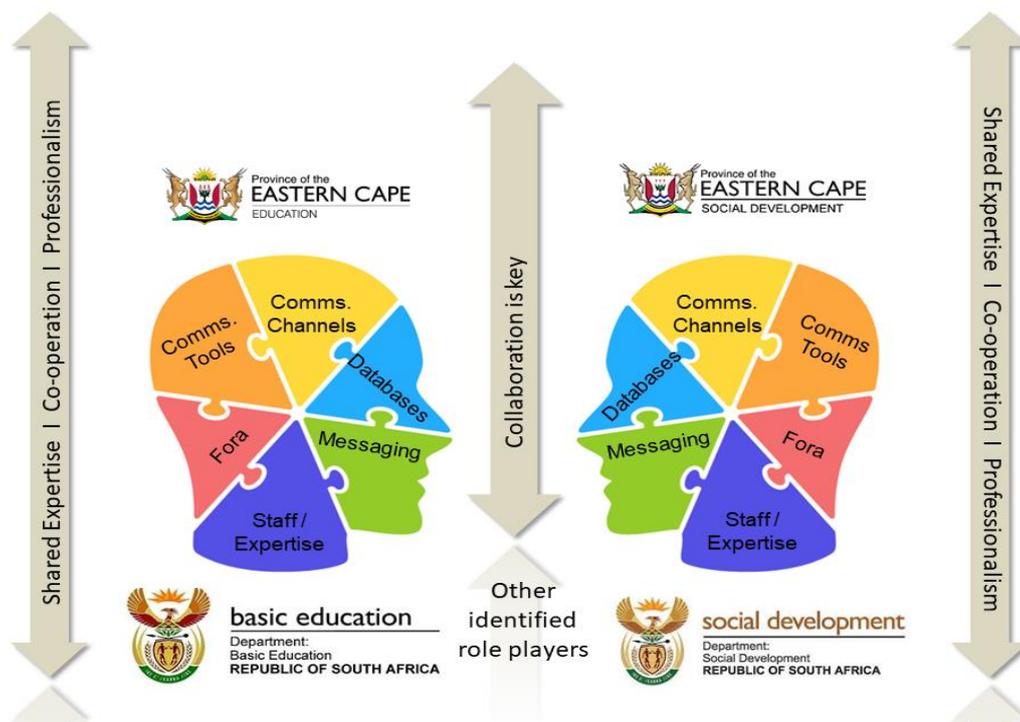


Figure 5: Areas of Collaboration required for successful communication

Measuring the efficacy and impact of communication is important to assess whether the messages; tools and tactics employed are having the desired effect. Mechanisms will be included in the implementation strategy to obtain feedback from stakeholders. This feedback will inform subsequent communication efforts.

11. Conclusion

Communication does not happen by itself – it takes effort and a strong desire to get the right message to the right audience at the right time using the right / most appropriate channels and platforms.

It must be noted at the outset, that this communication strategy is a first draft, crafted solely on the information at hand and an understanding of the communication requirements inherent in a project of this nature. This is merely an attempt to get the discussion around an ideal strategy going and to plant the seeds of creativity.

Further collaboration and brainstorming are required by communication professionals / specialists in the relevant departments to further expand on this strategy and ensure that the communication needs of all stakeholders have been considered.