

CONSIDERED PERSISTENCE

Communications Policies Of The Foreign Service of Finland



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

FOREWORD



The most important objective of the Communications Strategy for the Foreign Service is to increase the communications preparedness of the Foreign Service. The three central projects in this regard are to change the way of thinking about communications, to organise extensive training on modernising communications and means of exerting influence, and to adopt easy ways of presenting and disseminating information.

It is necessary to raise communications preparedness widely so that the Foreign Service can adapt to the change brought about by the use of digital information and the ways it is disseminated. Important here is the shift in the logic of the communications world from a hierarchical media structure to process-like discussion based on network logic.

It is also essential to develop a way for the Foreign Service to convey Finland's objectives and to tell about its own work on behalf of Finland and the Finns. Training in compiling key messages and public appearance, an integral aspect of the strategy, will also help the Foreign Service staff to work in their own special fields more effectively.

The goal is that over the long term these communications skills will be included in each Foreign Service employee's basic know-how, and the staff will have the modern tools needed in their communications work. In this way, the wide-ranging know-how existing within the Foreign Service will be more readily available in discussions on themes important to the Foreign Service. From now on, the Communications Department (VIE) will focus its work on implementing the operational changes and policies defined in the strategy, in cooperation with the departments, services, diplomatic missions and the management of the Ministry.

1. STARTING POINTS FOR COMMUNICATIONS



The reputation of the Foreign Service arises through what it does. Reputation is the sum of actions. The base for the reputation of the Foreign Service is doing things correctly. Actions and telling about them determine what sort of relations the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has with citizens and other target groups.

Successful organisations are characterised by an identity born of strong internal stories. The core of Foreign Service communications is based on the idea of 'Work on behalf of Finland and the Finns'.

The relevance of the work creates a pull that carries the organisation forward. An expert organisation such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs succeeds if the work has a clear direction and purpose. Lack of a common direction leads to ineffective or contradictory communications because the work disintegrates into separate communication actions.

So that we would be able to do the right things, we must also see what is happening outside the organisation. This requires that we also want to question our own approaches. Instead of major reform projects taking place in jolts, as communicators we must constantly ask whether we are doing the right things and

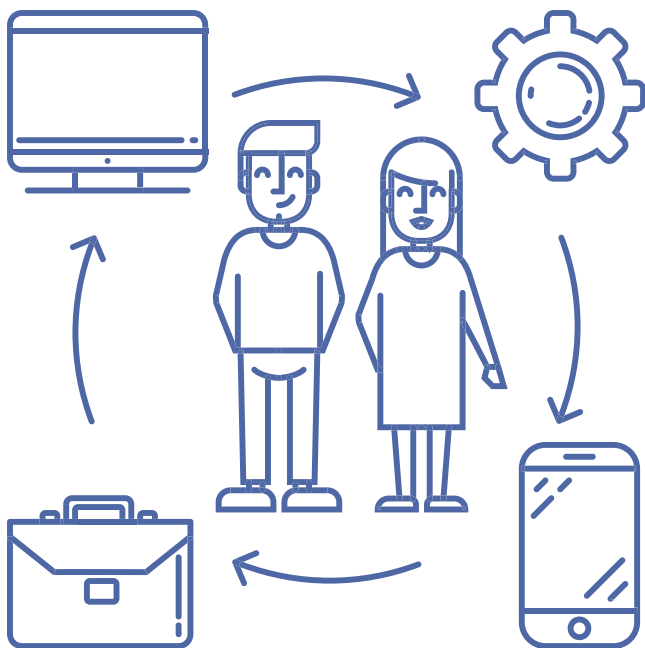
how we might be able to do the right things a bit better. This does not mean the same thing as endless planning.

Communications must know the management's central objectives and the Ministry's main projects as early as possible – foresight increases the effectiveness of communications. Cooperation with the Ministry's political and civil service leaders and the department directors must be smooth. There is no 'communications of the Department for Communications'; we all carry out Foreign Service communications.

The basic style of Foreign Service communications is considered and active persistence. The main policies for content work must be found easily on the channels of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and these main policies are repeated tirelessly. These policies must be supported in discussions taking place on social media.

In a democratic society, a person needing information should get the information required from a source as close to the actual decision-making as is practical. For this reason, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has decentralised its communications responsibilities, nor does it have a designated spokesperson.

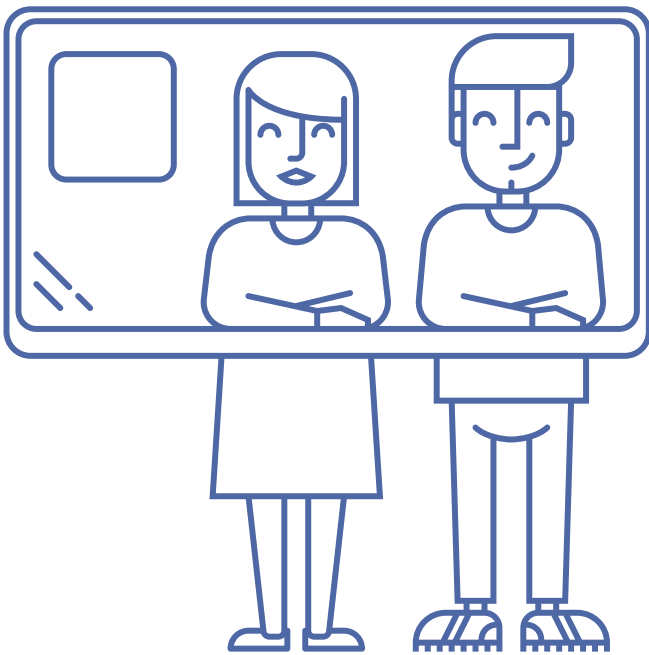
2. CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS



Reliable, timely and empathetic crisis communications tells citizens that their matter is being handled. Internal and external communications is a key aspect of the managing crisis situations. The base for good practices is created in normal circumstances. In situations requiring intensified communications, we must be able to use different communications methods quickly and flexibly.

The task of internal communications is to clarify the objectives of activities broadly for the staff and to make the relevant information for achieving the objectives easily available, as well as to attend to the fluency of the practical work. Effective internal communications makes it possible to break organisational silos and create an information exchange culture supportive of work. For internal communications to be successful, it is pivotal that the available information is grasped. The importance of internal communications is emphasised when the organisation is in the midst of a dramatic phase of change.

3. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND INFLUENCE THROUGH INFORMATION



Measured on many indicators, Finland overall has a good country image. The objective of country image work is to strengthen international awareness of Finland as a democratic, Nordic society based on European values. Important decisions by individuals, companies and State actors related to Finland can be influenced by successful country image work. External economic relations are promoted widely by highlighting Foreign Ministry's services to companies, and through work on behalf of Team Finland.

A country brand and a risk to a country's reputation, arising in acute situations, should not be confused with each other. The country brand develops over a long period of time. The country brand is Finland's whole story and history in crystallised form. Reputation risks are dealt with through systematic communications in current affairs.

Finland's position is strengthened when Finland conducts its foreign and security policy consistently and communicates about this work consistently. There may be efforts to challenge Finland's position by means of so-called hybrid and informational influence. This increases the need to present Finland's foreign policy stands and the story of Finland both within and outside Finland's borders. The best ways of responding to informational influence are cooperation between the authorities, citizens' good all-round education and media literacy, and media committed to good journalistic practices. We must react quickly when misleading messages are spread intentionally.

4. MAIN APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATIONS

The government's communications principles are based on freedom of expression, the rights of participation and advocacy, legal protection, the right to one's own language and culture, and basic rights concerning education. A key basic right is the right to obtain information on the decisions of public authorities and their preparation.

The digitalisation of societies is only beginning. The accelerating pace of communications and the confidentiality that forms an integral part of the Foreign Service's work are a difficult mix. The balance between control and freedom of communications requires constant evaluation. The most important consideration here is to understand where the Foreign Service is heading. If actions are steered by values and the identity supporting them, multiplicity of voices as such is not a problem. Despite such multiplicity, in its communications the Ministry for Foreign Affairs seeks to be an official body that communicates clearly and reliably. Communications must also give room to views diverging from the Foreign Service's own policies.

It's not enough that information is made available. It must be incorporated into discussions fundamental to the Foreign Service. With the development of social media, discussions in the Foreign Ministry's sphere of operations are often global. The Foreign Service should have the ability to participate in discussions from virtually anywhere in the world if the interests of Finland are concerned. The importance of rapid communications is also increasing in communications to citizens.

The way in which actions are told gives the Foreign Service its tone. The fact that Foreign Service staff themselves tell about real actions and real work is more effective than paid advertising. Experts must be

able to disseminate information effectively, to exert influence in networks and to appear in public. Contents are created in close cooperation with the departments, services, diplomatic missions and cabinets.

The Foreign Service ensures communications know-how both by training its staff and through close cooperation with other actors. External communications services are used when less frequently needed special know-how is required or when the organisation's own communications resources are inadequate.

Political communications and official communications constitute a whole where each has its own justified role. Political communications strengthens the civil dialogue essential to democratic opinion formation. Official communications in turn ensures the right of citizens and other stakeholders to obtain information both about issues under preparation and about decisions taken.

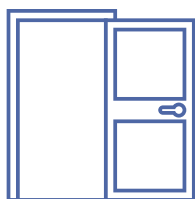
Ministerial assistants and the Ministry's Communications together are responsible for a minister's media relations and other communications. An important part of the meaning of the Ministry's messages is disseminated through ministers' meetings, visits, speeches and articles, which are utilised in communications. The Ministry's Communications tasks also include assisting a minister and the minister's cabinet in planning and implementing communications. Ministers' party policy stands, statements and speeches do not fall within the responsibility of the Ministry's Communications. Communications relating to elections is also clearly party politics.

5. COMMUNICATIONS IS STEERED BY VALUES

Well-functioning communications is an integral part of good governance. The values steering communications mentioned in the Central Government Communications Guidelines are openness, reliability, impartiality, intelligibility, interactivity and service-mindedness.

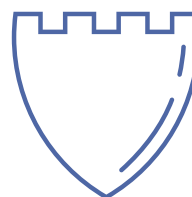
The values steering the work of the Foreign Service on the whole are cooperation, creativity and effectiveness.

OPENNESS



Openness means, among other things, that citizens have the right to obtain information on the decisions of public authorities and their preparation. The Foreign Service tells about its activities on its own initiative.

RELIABILITY



A precondition for reliability is the accuracy, clarity and sufficiency of the information provided, and that the information is provided by a competent authority.

IMPARTIALITY



Impartiality is essential so that citizens, communities and companies obtain an adequate picture to serve as a base for their own decision-making. We must be able to withstand critical discussion and we must respond to it.

INTERACTIVITY



Interactivity is based on two-way communications and service-mindedness. The objective is to create discussion and action, not merely to state.

COOPERATION



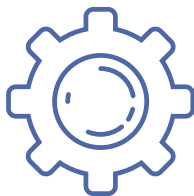
Cooperation in communications work is demonstrated for instance as close cooperation between departments and services. The Department for Communications supports the rest of the Foreign Service by creating practical ways of communicating and by helping to sharpen communications. Cooperation with partners and stakeholders strengthens our messages, increases its accessibility and attracts new audiences to foreign and security policy discussions.

CREATIVITY



Creativity as a value provides the possibility to try something new. Creativity as a value allows that a project may fail. The task of the Department for Communications is to create new tools and approaches that enhance the effectiveness of the Foreign Service's communications.

EFFECTIVENESS



The effectiveness of communications work can be measured, among other things, by how the Foreign Ministry's public image develops and by the increase in visibility. Effectiveness is also reviewed on the basis of how well the objectives recorded in the Operating and financial plan for the Foreign Service (and the communications plan) are achieved. Finland's country image is followed particularly in the longer term by means of international surveys and comparisons, and by the report Finland in World Media produced by the diplomatic missions themselves.

APPENDICES

The strategic priorities of the Foreign Service

Operating and financial plan for the Foreign Service for 2016–2019

Futures for Diplomacy: Integrative Diplomacy for the 21st Century

Diplomacy in the Digital Age

Rules of procedure of the Department for Communications

The service promise of the Department for Communications to the departments of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The service promise of the Department for Communications to the diplomatic missions of the Foreign Service

Country Image Work Handbook

Finland Promotion Board Theme Calendar

Central Government Communications Guidelines

Central Government Communications in Incidents and Emergencies

Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999)

Language Act (423/2003)

Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003)

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