



**LEVERAGING COMMUNICATION
SCIENCE TO IMPROVE THE USE OF
RESEARCH EVIDENCE**

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COMMUNICATION 101

- **Communication** as an *academic discipline* encompasses the study of all forms (verbal and non-verbal), modes (interpersonal and mediated), media, and consequences of human communication
- **Communication science** deals broadly with processes and mechanisms of human communication and behavior:
 - Cognitive (information processing and sense-making)
 - Relational (social interactions and exchange)
 - System (linkages and mobilization)
- **Science communication** has a more limited focus on the communication of science-related topics to non-experts



PERSPECTIVES ON USE OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE (URE)

URE FIELD PERSPECTIVE



- **The problem:** policymakers and practitioners should have access to and use the most relevant research evidence
- **The goal:** improve use of research evidence (outcome orientation)
- **The solution:** translation; dissemination; transfer; technical assistance
- **Measure of success:** instrumental or conceptual use of research evidence

- **The problem:** policymakers and practitioners are free to choose whether, what, and how they use research evidence
- **The goal:** influence their choice (audience orientation)
- **The solution:** persuasion; marketing; bargaining; mobilization
- **Measure of success:** conscious and consisted choice to use research evidence



COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

WHAT IS INFLUENCING USERS' CHOICE OF EVIDENCE?

- Supply (relevant/accessible/timely)
- Demand (knowledge needs)
- Motivation (goals, beliefs, external mandates)
- Capacity (e.g., research literacy)
- Context (policy, practice)
- Situational factors (degree of ambiguity about evidence)
- Time constraints



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM



THINK BEHAVIOR CHANGE

In reality, use of research evidence occupies a continuum of specific behaviors. Thus, it is crucial to determine which specific behavior is targeted for change.

It is also important to consider that you are asking people to change their behavior, and that most are averse to change.



FIGURE THE REAL PROBLEM

Problems are typically presented as the gap between what is happening and what should be happening (normative). However, the real (or actual) problem you need to solve has to do with what is impeding behavior change:

capacity, motivation, or opportunity?



KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Ultimately, the power to make the desired change lies with your target audience. This means that you should meet your audience where they are (audience segmentation) based on their needs, experience, predispositions, goals, and values. Your communication strategy must be audience-oriented to succeed.



USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

Once you figured out what exactly you want your target audience to know, believe, or feel about using research evidence, you need:

Credible source to deliver the message; a properly “packaged” message; and channel that will reach the majority of your audience.

USING COMMUNICATION TO PROMOTE RESEARCH EVIDENCE USE

- **Downstream applications** target users and the choices they make
- At the most basic level, communication can be used to inform or educate users about choices (decrease ambiguity)
- More commonly, communication is used strategically to influence (motivate) a particular choice (persuasion)
- However, strategic communication is increasingly used to reinforce existing choices (activation)



USING COMMUNICATION TO PROMOTE RESEARCH EVIDENCE USE

- **Midstream applications** target influentials – those who can influence or enable the choices users make; the idea is to leverage existing relationships between influentials and users
- At the most basic level, you can have influentials inform or educate users about research evidence (e.g., recommendation).
- You can also persuade or activate influentials to take certain actions that enable or motivate URE (e.g., offer incentives, remove objective barriers)



USING COMMUNICATION TO PROMOTE RESEARCH EVIDENCE USE

- **Upstream applications** target response from institutions (policymakers) or system-wide change (e.g., values and norms) needed to remove structural barriers and/or introduce structural facilitators regarding URE
- Lobbying and advocacy are familiar examples of direct upstream communication
- It is also possible to indirectly influence upstream processes by engaging influential institutions such as the news media and boundary-spanning organizations



EXAMPLES OF MESSAGE STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING URE

- Educate users about the value of URE (default approach, least effective)
- Connect URE to something users already personally value and/or are familiar with
- Use heuristics or cues to suggest that use of research evidence is desirable (valued) and normative (prevalent, expected)
- Engage users in producing their own messages (most effective)

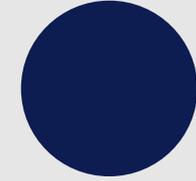


POINTS OF SYNERGY



COMMUNICATION → URE

- **Theoretical:** conceptualizing research evidence use as a continuum of behaviors that are best understood from the perspective of users themselves
- **Empirical:** measuring URE relative to context by tracking and analyzing how, when, and why research evidence is integrated into communication or discourse about problems and solutions
- **Practical:** improving the way we communicate with and about research evidence



URE → COMMUNICATION

- **Theoretical:** sharpen distinctions regarding the potential roles of communication regarding translation, dissemination, and implementation of evidence-based policy and practice
- **Empirical:** driving a shift from using mostly static measures of communication and communication effects to more dynamic, multi-level measures
- **Practical:** providing an opportunity for communication scientists to have real-world impact



THANK YOU



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