

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

LEARNING FORUM 3: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

15th JULY 2020

Summary

The Capacity Development Programme aims to transform the impact of the global Lasallian network through enhanced collaboration. The Learning Forums are a key part of the Programme. They provide distinctive opportunities for participants to develop, connect with others, and help strengthen collaborative potential. They have three overarching objectives...

- To develop a specific area of relevant learning
- To nurture relationships.
- To prepare the foundation for enhanced collaboration

The third of the planned nine Learning Forums took place online on 15th July 2020. It was attended by 37 participants besides the facilitators and interpreters.

The specific area of relevant learning was about developing effective communication; in particular, how to develop an understanding of, and actions towards, effective communication across the network. The Forum complemented everything that had happened previously, notably supporting the strategy development and change process.

Br Amilcare welcomed everyone and emphasised why communication is such a priority and how it is timely to exploit the learning gained from the covid-19 outbreak, which has prompted everyone to communicate in different ways, to help transform collaboration across the network. Participants were then provided a clear context of how the 'Learning Forums', 'Programme Development Activities' and the individual 'Conversations' all fit together to support the development of a collaborative strategy to achieve greater impact.

A recent, successful example, of improved Lasallian network collaboration efforts was high-lighted; this had involved 33 Lasallian network member organisations coming together to endorse an advocacy letter to the Beijing +25 initiative; this was focused on the education of girls.

In support of the Forum, a background document has been circulated to inform the learning process, focusing on the important matter of effective cross-cultural communication – to read it click [here](#).

The practical results of the Forum included participants gaining a better understanding about: how important communication is in relation to developing and delivering a strategy; the significance of how people feel as a result of the communications they receive; how essential communication is for collaborative initiatives of the Lasallian network. The session also provided a quiz, seven tips for effective communication along with an opportunity to experience disconnected communication first-hand; this was done through an experiential learning 'paper-folding' exercise.

Overall participants recognised that effective communication involves having positive relationships with people; further-more that it is a conscious endeavour and that everyone must 'walk together' in partnership to achieve successful outcomes related to the Lasallian mission.

The feedback to the session afterwards was generally very positive. One person commented: *"thank you for today's meeting, it has been one of the most interesting until now in my opinion."*

Introduction

The commentary below provides insights from the discussions within the nine break-out groups. The groups considered the following 3 items:

- ‘Reflect on the learning about effective communication.’
- ‘How is this relevant for you as an individual and as the international Lasallian network, now and in the future?’
- ‘What specific actions can I take to inform my networks and other Lasallians about this Capacity Development Programme?’

‘Reflection on the learning about effective communication.’

Various points were made in an appreciative way about the importance of reflecting and learning about effective communication, as had been focused on during the session. The following are some comments from the break-out groups...

- “Communication is at the core of the network; it is the essence of the network.”
- Everyone agreed (in one break-out group) about the importance of expressing in communications “the reason why: this will help motivate and mobilise people - a shared purpose helps focus and align communications.”
- “Communication is extremely important among NGOs. Each NGO has its own goals and objectives. Clear, consistent, fluid communication will allow us to understand each organization better; will enable us to know how we can work together for a larger impact.”
- The break-out group reflected about the ‘power of three’: “we found similarities with the way in which our founder structured communication into three points - La Salle's heritage of presenting ideas is in just three points.”
- With respect to the current state of communication in the network, one break out group captured that: “the grass-roots is not sufficiently involved; communication in the network is compartmentalised; key information is not always retained; information is given-out in a frugal way.”
- Starting dialogue in this way “gets all of us to see and appreciate the value of people coming together”; this will help keep the overall group to “keep connected.”
- It is now an “early stage to communicate with others beyond this group. When the strategy is developed there will be something more substantial to share.”

‘How is this relevant for the individual and the international Lasallian network, now and in the future?’

A range of points were made, this time about relevance for individuals and the network about effective communication. These can all very usefully inform strategy development and implementation. The following are some of the comments that were expressed in the break-out groups...

- As illustrated by the presentation made about learning before the break-out groups, the question of body language, tone and words is significant: “how we communicate is as important as what we communicate as we try to create the feeling of being one big Lasallian family.”
- People in the break-out group agreed about: “importance of having a dream; a shared view of the future expressed in a strategy - shared dreams and possibilities, shared objectives and solutions are needed; this

(capacity development programme) is helping us develop these; we need to communicate a common perspective; we are all Lasallians; only when we have this shared strategy, can communications be coherent and aligned to what needs to be achieved.”

- A major issue - which people all agreed about in the break-out group - is that all too often: “silos exist; and that in these silos in the network there are some examples of good practice, both in terms of having strategies and in terms of communicating well about these strategies; however, there are too many examples of poor practice where strategies are not clear and communications are therefore unfocused and unhelpful; the opportunity with this process (the capacity development programme) is that bringing people (from different parts of the network and from different silos) can lead to an overarching strategy that will create the possibility for more effective communication.”
- “People felt very positive in the break-out group about the richness of the diversity within the network: the challenges arising from this diversity, relate to developing shared understandings and shared commitment; this is because words can be understood in different ways in different places; also sometimes too much communication is circulated about points which are not relevant or helpful to the specific recipient; as such people can become overwhelmed and confused; it is important to understand the nuances of communicating across different cultures; hence the importance of ‘cross cultural communication’ and the paper circulated”
- The view was expressed in our break-out group that: “collaboration depends on each person as well as the leaders of organizations; Institutions are made up of people, as well as networks; each one of us can assist in this way.”
- We need to “shift to a different concept of communication among NGOs in the Lasallian network: we are not in competition for donors; rather we should work collaboratively to attract funding; donors are looking for collaboration and synergy; we need a common language that signals partnership and collaboration.”
- “If the quality of communication is low, the message is not relevant and deep; what we are doing is then merely an exercise of having presence in social-networks; a survey carried out with Lasallian NGOs, universities, schools and so on demonstrated that the Lasallian network is today in this trap; we should inform less and communicate more; we need to think more about the message; we need to look for more relevance and quality in our communications if we want to make sure that people are moved by them.”
- “We need our communication to be two-way or both-ways; we need to ensure that not only are people listening to us; rather that we have ways to ensure that we can listen to those who read and see us too; only that way will we not fall into the ‘dictatorship of the like’ and so on; only that way will be promote actual engagement; social network participation is fictitious if it does not move people to engage in real change; only real commitment - in the streets, in the neighborhood, in the real world - beyond social-networking, brings people to become agents of change.”
- “Communication strategy is quick; change in our organizations is slow.”
- “Different parts of the network – NGOs, for instance - are specialized in the way they communicate and report; whereas people typically want to read and see stories. There is a gap here.”

‘What specific actions can I take to inform my networks and other Lasallians about this Capacity Development Programme?’

Some examples of comments from the break-out groups are as follows...

- “Communication about, and from the network, could be an opportunity to offer something distinctive: imagine being able to offer parents access to the wisdom of 90,000 teachers!”
- “We are sharing this collaborative process and materials with all of our team: it has been helpful to better understand the international network; to see things differently; to see how to have a common outlook.”
- “New challenges require us to think differently: with younger people the focus of our messages needs to be in forms that they are used to receiving; for instance, in bite size pieces and using contemporary channels such as TikTok.”
- “TikTok will be useful to share our message with young people. However, we must be careful not to communicate for the sake of communicating. Rather, we need to communicate in alternative ways that reach out to different people in the network.”
- “For efficient communication, we believe that adapting communication to different contexts is vital: it is important to see the balances that exist between communication spaces, group dialogues, interpersonal exchanges from and to the institute; when the communication becomes very monotonous, the distance begins to be perceived; having closer, more personal dialogue merges us to know the reality for other; think of teamwork beyond being physically far away; communication does not have to be sporadic; instead, through teams, people can listen to each other better; we are going to get more involved, and contribute more.”
- We need to “go beyond official communication; go beyond mere information; create interpersonal relationships to facilitate communication within the Lasallian network; we need to discuss important topics with the grass-roots; specify the actors and levels of responsibility in each communication.”
- “A multi-faceted approach to communications is required; communicating in different mediums for different audiences; different cultures focus on different things; how can we embrace this – for instance, in a workshop report it is not important to some to know what was for lunch, for some this might be the most important thing.”
- “Success looks like a lot of small successes together making a bigger success; we need a common voice to promote small successes.”
- “A skilful chair-person or facilitator is key to bringing the different cultural aspects of communication together focused on our new and emerging strategy of collaboration; facilitators can help bring a discipline to the process with a clear timeline and agreed deliverable outputs.”
- “Developing a common dashboard and platform for communication that we can all use together as one organisation would be really helpful to enhance effective collaboration.”
- “We should share resources and investment – especially investing in people – so that each local area has a knowledgeable person to coordinate communication.”

Feedback

Based on the analysis of feedback received after the event, the Forum was positively received: average scores for content, format and facilitation were very high, respectively 8.2, 8.1 and 8.9 out of 10.