Strategic Communication:

Navigating Policy and Politics in a Competing Information Environment

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Key Elements of Strategic Communication

Establishing the
Common Academic Language of
Strategic Communications:
What do we know about effective SEA processes?

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What is Strategic Communication?

▸ <u>Department of Defense</u> (DOD): "Synchronization of actions, images, and words to achieve a desired effect" (Department of Defense, 2008).

▸ <u>Business Management</u>: "Communicating the best message, through the right channels, measured against well-considered organizational and communications-specific goals." (Nordal, M., 2013).

Why Do SEAs Need It?

- New demands on SEAs
  - Higher profile
  - Responsible for education reform
  - Complex and political tasks

- Critical for creating system-wide clarity, coherence, and gaining stakeholder support

What are the Major Components?

▸ **Leadership**—Leading creation of major messages to be used for integrated communications efforts.

▸ **Message/Campaign**—Developing carefully worded messages to gain clarity & support.
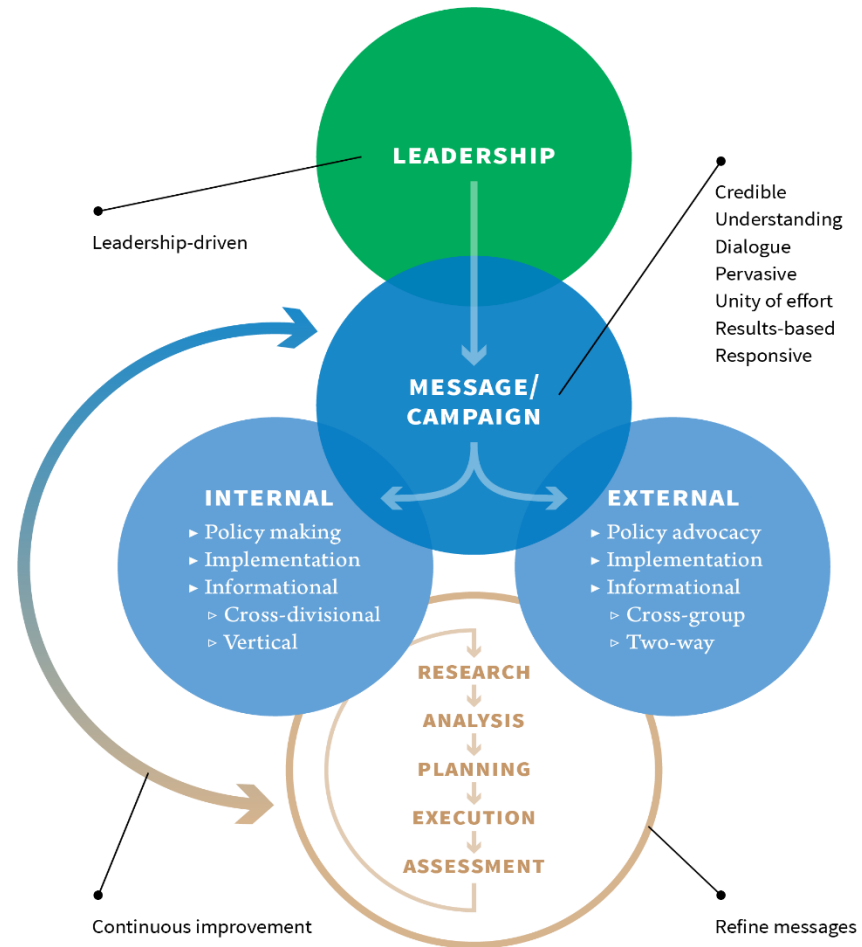
Major Components (cont.)

- **Internal & External Dissemination**— Identifying appropriate dissemination methods for internal and external stakeholders.

- **Internal stakeholders**— SEA employees, partners, and policymakers.

- **External stakeholders**— Educators (implementers), parents, community, and policy advocates.
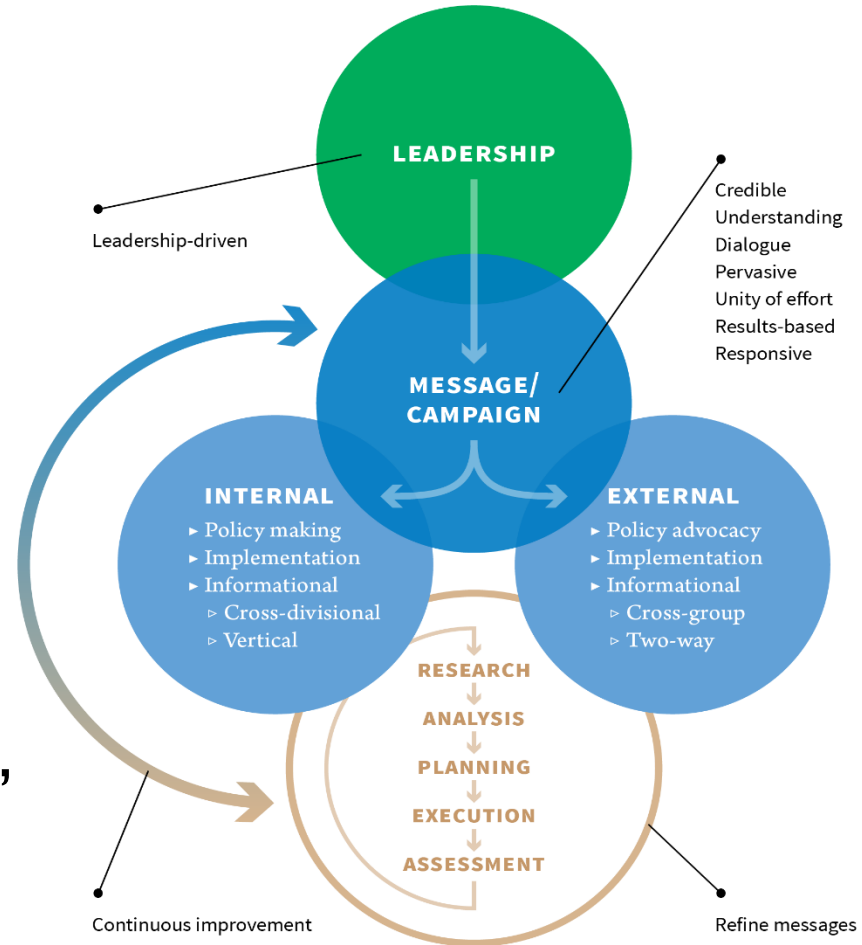
Major Components (cont.)

- **Message Refinement**—Adjusting and refining messages to meet needs of various stakeholders.

- **Continuous Improvement**—Refining and monitoring the success of communications processes through a continuous feedback loop.
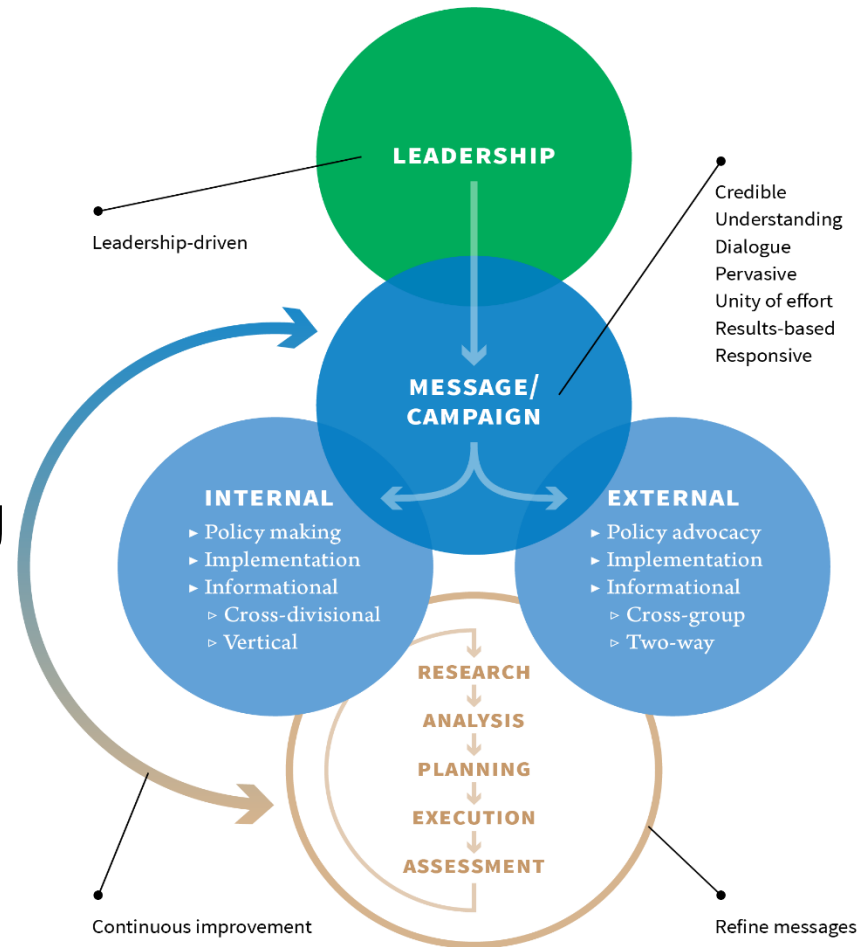
What Makes it a Strategic Process?

▸ Holistic agency-wide process
▸ Tied to agency goals
▸ Considers needs of internal & external stakeholders
▸ Focuses on clarity, alignment, & coordination
▸ Keeps control of message
▸ Employs a continuous feedback process

What Should SEAs Do?

- Create multiple opportunities to share & gain information from internal and external stakeholders.
  - Pervasive, continuous, using multiple mechanisms
  - Created by a centralized source
  - Maximize opportunities for reciprocal information sharing
- Adjust messages to meet communication goals and stakeholder needs
  - Acknowledge differences between policymakers, enforcers, and implementers
  - Test messages on different stakeholder groups

What Should SEAs Do?

- Create an organizational structure and culture that fosters open communication.
  ◦ Arrange close physical proximity when possible
  ◦ Encourage collaborative cross-division approaches

- Align communication between policymaking and policy implementation departments and actors.
  ◦ Encourage close relationships with governmental relations
  ◦ Leverage information from the field to shape policy

What Should SEAs Do?

▸ Use multiple tools and strategies to address controversial or important key issues.
  ◦ Address concerns early and often
  ◦ Use voices from the field

▸ Use feedback tools and information to evaluate communication process.
  ◦ Collect feedback data to evaluate effectiveness of communication strategies
  ◦ Connect communication plan to SEA goals and strategies
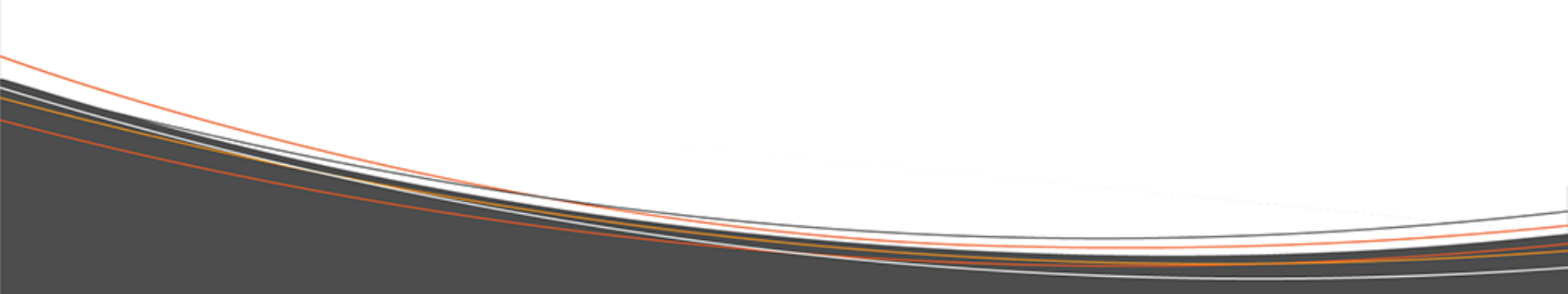
Survey Results

Strengths

- Creating coherent message
- Aligning messaging within agency
- Aligning messaging between internal/external
- Adjusting messages
- Managing controversial topics
- Aligning communication to 5-year plan

Challenges

- Lack of leadership around communication
- Aligning messaging between internal/external
- Aligning messaging across external stakeholders
- Gaining support for major initiatives
- Managing controversial topics

Comments

Thank you for your participation!

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