



**Critiquing a design of government communication
policy and structures for the Fourth Industrial
Revolution: A Network perspective**

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Presentation outline

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Introduction

- This article outlines the notion of the design of government communication policy and structures and the Fourth Industrial Revolution using a Network approach perspective.
- To understand how a suitable communication policy and institutional arrangements could be developed, a contextual discourse outlining democratisation and integration process for a post-apartheid South Africa is presented.

Introduction...

- This discussion provides for the need to embed constitutional principles of transparency, accountability and consultation within government communication policy and its structures.
- Furthermore, understanding development communication brings into perspective the conceptualisation aspect of demonstrating intersections of communication, public policy and development scholarship.

Contextual discourse: Democratisation and integration process of South Africa

- The democratisation and integration process of South Africa since 1994 has brought about the need to consider constitutional values that sought to ensure that citizens are central in policy making process and several other related functions of government.
- The years of apartheid and segregation policies were institutionalised and maintained to achieve a separate development agenda.
- This kind of approach was embedded in the way that promoted government communication policy and structures that were highly layered and duplicate.
- This meant a new constitutional and democratic dispensation was needed to dismantle government systems that have become obsolete.
- This realisation requires some understanding of the policy approach and structures pertaining to the complex nature of government functions and processes.

Contextual discourse: Democratisation and integration process of South Africa...

- This focus is made with an understanding that government policy and structures as well as good governance are interwoven within the ideation of democracy and developmental agenda and discourse of the South African government.
- A discourse of this nature indicates that policy choices or a lack thereof would have a direct bearing on the communication outcome that is positioned to inform citizens accordingly.
- Similarly, designing government communication policy and structures draw from the institutional theory approach which outlines the applicable communication systems and processes undergirding the transdisciplinary and cross disciplinary nature of complex considerations of public institutions (Frederickson, Smith, Larimer and Licari, 2012:67-68).

Developmental communication and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

- The governmental role encapsulates the provision of services and the wellbeing of its citizens. Developmental communication is strategic in nature in ensuring the utilisation of communication means to facilitate development initiatives.
- This means that in specific cases or projects of development, there is a need to provide communication infrastructure relevant and tailored according to the citizens' needs and evolution of education levels, geographic locations, transport access, as well as data speed and access, among others.
- A report by the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (2020:17) highlights the need for integration considering significant levels of inequality that exist in the country such as South Africa with many people staying far from cities and with difficulty in accessing services.

Developmental communication and the Fourth Industrial Revolution...

- This is the level of complexity to consider in order to provide the necessary policy interventions for such matters of developmental communication.
- Embedded in these also is the manner in which politics, public policy processes, governance and professional crafts interact to realise the objectives set out for a developmental communication project at hand.
- Effective coordination of these critical elements could be ideal in ensuring a successful developmental communication initiative that could respond to such issues in a pragmatic manner.
- These draws from the individual expertise, educational background and their patriotic resolve to contribute positively to the actual development of the country.

Model design of government communication policy and structures for 4IR

- Understanding the meaning and intent of public policy for government communication requires conceptual aptitude and sophistication among public officials.
- The complex nature of government communication structures and functions needs to be matched by the skills set from these public officials who are at the centre of discharging such responsibilities.
- This understanding needs to be premised on the constitutional provisions of the right to access freedom of expression and information.
- While the 19th and 20th century societies considered the right of access to information vital to citizens, this has clearly exploded during the 21st century period as the use of social media platforms and internet has become a norm.

Model design of government communication policy and structures for 4IR...

- The post COVID-19 pandemic has even facilitated online services and functions that citizens could only dream of before.
- This means various considerations need to be made in realising constitutional principles within the context of government communication policy and structures for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, namely:
 - 1) What are the required communication adaptations and adjustments necessary for government?
 - 2) What limitations exist for government in the age of information explosion and overload?
 - 3) What intergovernmental relations models and platforms exist to optimise public policy and communication structures?
 - 4) What dominant communication tools could be effective within the South African polity where inequality levels are at crisis proportions

Network approach perspective and developmental communication

- A Network approach could serve a critical discourse as a way of ensuring that societal stakeholders form part of the messaging within the broader government superstructure.
- The challenge of government structures that inherently emphasise top-down approach means that the question of statecraft requires 21st century communication means that are agile and able to coordinate the various functions within a complex government communication policy and structure.
- Focusing on a Network approach perspective in designing government communication policy and structures is also ideal to ensure that government communication is modelled based on societal structural configurations and public sector arrangements that are continuously evolving.
- The fact that a Network approach places emphasis on relationships means that the purpose or goal is shared among the various stakeholders based on the interrelatedness, interdependency and critical democratic principles .
- Thus, the success or realisation of such a goal would require each constituent to demonstrate clear understanding and capabilities regarding pertinent and cognate public policy choices.

Network approach perspective and developmental communication...

- Bueren, Klijn and Koppenjan (2003) in Kapucu (2014:32) further highlight three types of uncertainties that play out in governance and policy problems which often relate to designs of government communication policy and structures. These uncertainties manifest as: cognitive, strategic, and institutional.
- Firstly, Cognitive uncertainty means that there is a lack of clear understanding of the causal relationships that underlie the problem. This is often made as a result of a lack of expertise or specialist knowledge on the matter. The practice of deployments of cadres in government has significantly contributed to this challenge as the balance over political deployees against skilled individuals has become difficult to maintain.

Network approach perspective and developmental communication...

- Secondly, strategic uncertainty is considered to be resulting from the multiple interventions coming from multiple actors trying to address the wicked problem.
- This means that without a clear central direction conflicting strategies and perceptions may hamper progress in addressing the problem.
- Thirdly, institutional uncertainty is based on the complex policy networks that are polycentric in nature, fragmented and belong to multiple arenas and spheres of government.
- At the centre of any of these uncertainties is also the question of poor communication strategy, a lack of infrastructure and access to communication devices among the various stakeholders.
- Designing a government communication strategy that is interdisciplinary and multisectoral is a clear demonstration of an embodiment of a Network approach.

Maintaining effective government communication and Fourth Industrial Revolution structures

- The complex nature of government communication structures means that any communication policy position would inevitably require sophisticated individuals who are not only communication specialists but possess critical policy and governance expertise and skills.
- The question of how ICT is evolving means we need to position the country and our communication machinery for widespread access by our citizens. This remains an Achilles hill
- The understanding of the role of government in the society needs to remain a *sine qua non* for a proper communication structure to be constituted.

Maintaining effective government communication and Fourth Industrial Revolution structures...

- This means that government communication needs to be modelled on the basis of its configurations and functional structures for streamlining public service delivery.
- In this case, the existing Government Communication Policy document makes provision for the various national, provincial, district and local government forums as well as public participation structures (GCIS, 2018:19-24).
- This is a noble attempt to ensure uniformity and compliance with critical Network approach and communication rules for the entire public sector despite the possible nuances that often exist in certain sectors such as municipalities and government agencies.

Maintaining effective government communication and Fourth Industrial Revolution structures...

- Despite this attempt, there is clear gap in the National Development Plan Vision 2030 in this policy and therefore runs parallel to existing functional structures instead of embedding such.
- A situation of this nature presents a critical reflection that could be addressed through a Network approach perspective within the superstructure of government.
- This clearly embraces developmental communication that is carried out through accessible Fourth Industrial Revolution tools.

Conclusion

- The need for a developmental communication in the South African public service needs to be considered beyond a lip service from many of these public institutions.
- This is because the problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality have reached a tipping scale and have already caused the undesired social unrest.
- Ensuring that public policy and government communication structures are used as tools to realise the developmental agenda has become even more urgent.

Conclusion

- This paper outlined the democratisation and integration goal post 1994 to realise the constitutional principles.
- The realities however, are that public policy and structures of communication relevant for the 4IR demonstrate critical gaps especially within the National Development Plan Vision 2030 context.
- This is a masterplan that needs to exemplify and facilitate functional institutional processes.
- It is on this basis that this paper draws the attention to the need for government communication that is embedded in its line departments through a functional Network approach perspective.
- It is therefore imperative that the design of government communication policy and structures be undertaken to maintain alignment to the critical societal needs.

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- Thank you

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