

school of government
Department:
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

CIGFARO Effective Public Speaking for Leaders

Reimagining Public Finance Leadership for a Changing South Africa

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Learn Serve Grow

Presentation outline



- Communication policy framework.
- Defining public speaking for professionals.
- Mainstreaming communication.

Some practical tools and strategies for:

- Direct communication
- Mediated communication.

RSA Communication Framework



The Constitution of the Republic (1996) enshrines freedom of expression, media, association, academic and other freedoms (Clause 16).

Government has also passed laws which enable access to information: Public Access to Information Act, Public Administrative Justice Act, Batho Pele White Paper.

The democratic state has also entrenched public participation in governance. Izimbizo and public meetings promote structured two-way communication with the public.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) and local government legislation entrench public participation in local government. The Integrated Development Plan process cannot be concluded without public participation.

Theoretical Approach



Development communication is the theoretical approach for government communications (Quebral, 2011)

Definition: The use of communication to facilitate social and economic change, with the emphasis on active citizen participation in activities that affect their lives.	Government (leaders) must listen to citizens and keep them informed on the delivery of services.	Government communicators must educate and create opportunities that will uplift the quality of life socially, economically and culturally, using a range of communication tools" (GCIS, 2018).

What is public speaking?



“

“

“Public speaking is not reserved for keynote stages or packed conference rooms. Every time a leader leads a meeting, communicates a new direction, addresses conflict, or shares an idea with one person, they are speaking publicly”.

*(*Watts, 2026*)*.

Public speaking and accountability



- Communication, including public speaking, is a core function of a leader.
- Accountability in governance: Work done must be communicated to various publics. The people have a right to know.
- Important that the 97th conference of CIGFARO, under the theme: *Reimagining Public Finance Leadership for a Changing South Africa,* prioritises communication, especially public speaking.
- Public speaking/communication is important to enforce accountability and build public trust.
- However, it is never easy, even for Heads of State and other leaders who have delivered dozens of speeches.
- The cure for the anxiety: thorough preparation and practice!

Where and when do leaders communicate



When do leaders communicate publicly and how?

Announcing new developments, new policies, findings, explaining budget vote/speeches and new products.

How and where:

Can be done via speech, presentation, statement, or video.

Directly with the public/unmediated communication:

- Addressing seminars, workshops and conferences.
- Addressing gala dinners, luncheons, stakeholder engagements
- Addressing public gatherings – Izimbizo, IDP meetings in municipalities, visits to community sites.
- Via social media platforms – YouTube, TikTok videos, Facebook videos

Mediated: media briefings.

Communicating public sector finance



Public sector finance professionals perform extremely important functions, but the work is perceived as complex and technical.

Effective communication bridges gaps and builds trust through transparency and open dialogue.

Leaders in this sector have to regularly explain the following:

- Organisational performance, in particular the financial statements/reports, in a clear and simple manner – to the public, Council, parliament or legislature.
- Explain to the public: What is a "clean" audit, irregular, fruitless or wasteful expenditure? What is a disclaimer? – the country's "best kept secret".
- Should managers whose departments get these outcomes not be jailed? The people want to know each time the AGSA releases her report.

Communicating finance, audit, risk



- Explaining complex budgets and plans to residents/citizens: Citizens/residents want to hear whether water infrastructure in their community has been budgeted for – at the Integrated Development Plan sessions, ward committee meetings, and izimbizo or radio and TV.
- Risk management

How an organisation manages risk impacts people's lives. An example is water boards, as water outages caused by ageing infrastructure require a Minister, MEC, or Mayor to explain to an angry public who may be protesting.

Organisational:

Communicating CIGFARO: role, activities, benefit to the sector and society?

How do leaders communicate?



First step: planning and planning!

- Researching the topic thoroughly: read, read and read on the subject. If the address follows the Minister of Finance's Budget Speech ensure to pick up points from there for messaging.
- Researching the audience to understand interests, requirements, and information gaps - what would they want to know?
- Understanding the terrain and environment – for example, planning to address an IDP meeting in a community that is angry and has faced several disappointments, or a TV interview post a qualified audit for a department or institution requires appropriate planning to tailor the message and demeanour.

Protocol and etiquette



Observe the Protocol in the room

- Acknowledgements are done through the Order of Precedence, acknowledging the most senior person in the room and then all others in a descending order.
- Please don't say: "All Protocol Observed" or " I stand by the protocol already established"; it is rude. It says, "I couldn't be bothered, or I really have no time, there are way too many of you requiring acknowledgement"
- Solution, mention the most senior persons and then group the rest – "Hon Minister and all Ministers present, Premier, MECs, Mayors, Board chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen".
- Do not leave anyone out! Get the list from the hosts.

How leaders communicate: the message



Simple and clear messaging

- Effective public speaking involves understanding how to get a message across clearly and simply without being misconstrued – No ambiguity.
- If you need to issue a statement the following day, clarifying what you said, it means the message was ambiguous or confusing. The objective was not met.
- Importantly: The technical message must be simplified to be understood by non-technical/non-financial audiences. Acronyms and financial jargon must be explained *(examples…AG Ms Maluleke, StatsSA Mr Maluleke)*
- The storytelling technique works, using relatable examples!

Language use and impact



Direct and authoritative language of leadership

- The language must be authoritative and direct: A leader must say, “We have decided to do ABC and D”, and not “We *have decided that it would be good to do ABC and D”*.
- Language that says *“we will, we shall” and not “we must”* gives people hope, as a leader in a particular field must have the answers.

Mean what you say!

Avoid thinking aloud in public and sharing thoughts about what the institution will do on our feet. Everything said in public must have been well thought-out.

This includes rash announcements – “I see you don’t have an access road here; we will budget for it next year”.

A leader of commentator/analyst?



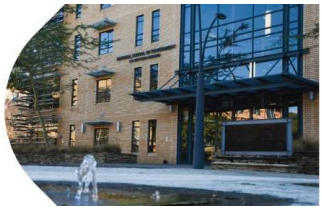
Avoid too much analysis and commentary on issues

- The speech or statement must not dwell too much on the analysis of what is wrong or lamentations and complaints. The leader should announce a solution! It gives hope.

Watch certain problematic phrases

- Safety net phrases which tend to diminish the impact of the message, such as “I think,” “I believe”, and “I hope.”
- Dead-weight words: tend to minimise the message, for example, the word “just”. An example is “I am just here to see how you live and what the situation is”. It signals that the visit is unimportant; therefore, there is no need for the listener to pay close attention to the visitor.

Communication for specific situations/events



Public communication during a crisis

Messaging must be pointed, provide solutions and give hope.

- Gather the facts quickly, determine what went wrong where, and determine a solution, then communicate what is to be done without much delay.
- Avoid messaging that is designed to shift the blame to others in public - blaming National Treasury, COGTA and taking no responsibility for the problem and providing no solution.
- Deflection leaves the audience demoralised, defeated and very concerned, if not very concerned.
- Face the problem head-on and speak convincingly about solutions.

Addressing the public/izimbizo



Empathy

- Empathy is key during meetings directly with the communities we serve. The speech must indicate that the leader understands the situation and conditions they live in or face.
- Prior research must be done about the area being visited to understand the situation of households, families and even the general living conditions.
- If you do not know the answers during Q and A, undertake to find out and provide feedback and do so via the councillor or any other means.
- Do *not debate with residents who ask questions; remain polite!*

Presence in community meetings



Be present and listen carefully

"Your body is here with me, but your mind is on the other side of town, you are messing me around," (The O' Jays, 1982).

"Presence is what allows a leader to move beyond simply delivering information. It is the ability to be fully engaged, grounded, and responsive in the moment. When leaders are present, people do more than hear their words; they feel their clarity, confidence, and conviction" (Watts, 2026).

- Be present, listen to what people are saying, and take notes so that when responding, they can see you were listening.
- Avoid using the iPad, laptop, or cellphone while people are raising issues that matter unless you are taking notes to respond, and they are alerted to that fact.

Be human and humane



Leaders must be normal, human, and humane

Leaders must behave as normal humans do in the public domain- no acting for social media content creators or the media!

Avoid the following in public:

- Smiling for the cameras and content creators when handing over flowers or greeting the family when undertaking condolence visits.
- Cold and clinical delivery of messages of condolence or congratulations, which lacks the human touch.
- The “Getting out of the car” and “umbrella holding” photo shoots.
- Chatting during the speeches and giggling and texting endlessly.

Mediated communication



Forms of mediated communication

- Media conferences/media briefings for announcements, briefings on new developments, the release of annual reports and the release of Audit outcomes, CIGFARO conference outcomes?

Media briefing strategy:

- Proper planning and development of key messages arising from the purpose of the briefing.
- Keep statements short and to the point, with simple language and clear points. There must be at least four or five take-home messages.
- Media briefings can now be held on any day and time, but avoiding competing events, i.e. Madlanga Commission times.

Mediated communication



Media briefings:

- Dress appropriately (presentable or formal) for the briefing.
- If an iPad, laptop or autocue is to be used, have a hard copy handy just in case…
- Avoid too much clutter on the desk or lectern, and no flowers and no food.
- Lectern delivery is best for voice projection and focus. No person/s should stand beside or behind the presenter.
- The SA culture is one person at the podium, while in other countries, for example, a Presidential briefing, there is a team standing with the President during such a delivery, especially during a crisis.

Media briefings



Question time

Question time is the most tricky period if not handled well and professionally.

- There should not be more than two rounds of at least four questions – four in the house, four online. A briefing that runs beyond 45 minutes is a huge risk, and the session can degenerate into a big mess.
- Journalists often veer off the message to other matters in the department or sectors that were not covered in the statement, which are considered to be more newsworthy, if briefings drag on and on.
- Be ready for surprise off-script off-beat questions – proper prior scanning of the communication environment is key.
- Stick to the message.

Thought leadership by finance experts



Thought leadership to raise awareness

- **T**elevision and radio are powerful media for commentary on various topics, as an expert, or to share information - post-Budget Speech, AGSA reports.

Television

- Now more convenient with technological developments, most interviews are done virtually via Zoom, Teams and other platforms.

Radio

SABC Radio (18) in various languages, commercial radio stations, and community stations.

Podcasts:

The era of the podcast is upon us!– unfiltered, accessible but risky.

Preparing for the interviews



Television or radio interviews, YouTube, TikTok, or podcasts:

- Prepare and even rehearse for the interview.
- Key take-home messages ready for the session.
- Keep content simple and accessible to non-experts.
- For media interviews: Avoid rage baits: questions designed to irritate you, which may make you lose control.

For TV interviews:

- Dress code: Decent/presentable to project a serious, knowledgeable demeanour.
- Avoid “busy” clothes.
- Good background: Avoid pot plants and busy wall hangings behind you.
- Avoid interviews in cars or at least have a screen.
- Position the camera correctly – no rooftops and nostrils.

Recap: Effective comms is key!



- Financial statements/audit reports are the lifeblood of strategic decisions, especially partnership and investment decisions.
- They are also a barometer of good governance (or the lack thereof).
- The reports are also a measure of accountability and compliance with good practices.
- If the communication delivery is confusing, too complex or ambiguous, the information loses value despite the data being technically accurate.
- Therefore, the ability to communicate financial information in an accessible manner is an invaluable skill for public sector officials.
- Proactive, confident, authoritative communication is of paramount importance.

End result: Impact of good communication



Uniting people behind a clear message

- Every public speaking session should be a relationship-building exercise.
- It is an opportunity to create new friends and ambassadors for the institution one represents.
- Every session should contribute to building trust through accountability.
- Every session should leave people feeling informed and energised.
- For an imbizo or similar gathering, the session must end with people feeling they were listened to and heard.
- Importantly, the communication session should give people hope!

Conclusion



Effective public speaking is doable!

How to get rid of the nerves and fear?

- Thorough research of the topic, the audience, and the environment.
- Read and write – internalise the message, own it.
- Rehearse, even in the bathroom, talk to the mirror!

Practice makes perfect!



Thank you