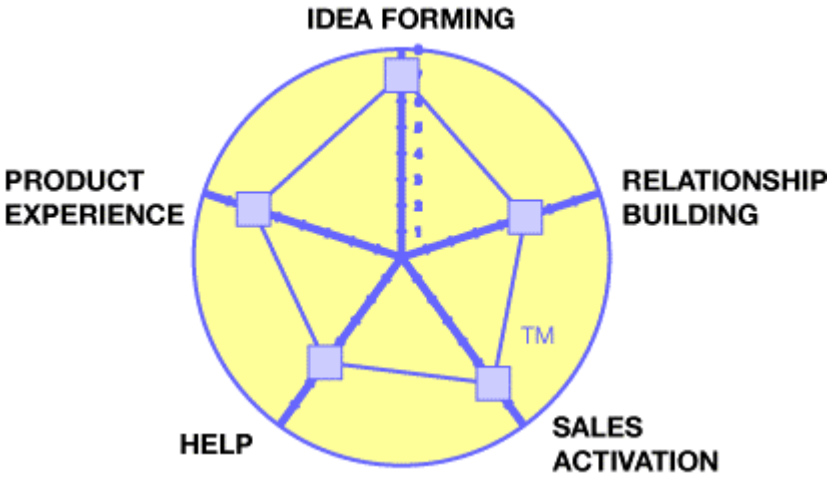
CODAR for leaders

CODAR makes an excellent tool for leaders who are planning communication to their team or teams. Take for example a situation in which the leadership have decided on a plan for change, or where there is a need to communicate a vision or operational plans. The leadership team might be away on a retreat and wanting to plan communication of the results of the retreat to the rest of the organisation. Alternatively a single leader might be planning communication around quite an informal event, such as a team get together. In these and a variety of other situations, the thoughtful leader or leadership team will spend at least a short time in advance thinking about the communication objectives. What do you want to communicate and, more importantly, what do you want to achieve?

CODAR can be used quite informally to help in planning this. You can in principle begin with any of the dimensions that CODAR uses, but let me illustrate using the classic cycle.



First, what is *the idea* you are trying to form in the minds of the team members? What do you want them to think and believe? For example if there is bad news, such as the need for redundancies, you might want staff to understand that these are really necessary. The idea might be something about the leadership team itself, such as: We understand the problems. Alternatively, it might be an idea about the situation, for example that the business is doing well. It might be an idea about themselves. You might for example want the team members to be proud of themselves, or alternatively that they need to improve their performance. So there can be myriads of ideas in different contexts that need to be communicated and sometimes there will be more than one really important idea. The key is nevertheless to know exactly what the really important idea or ideas are so that you can both focus on this and also focus creative thinking on how to get the idea across.

Secondly, as a leader you will want to develop some *relationship feeling* with yourself, with the leadership team or with the company or group that the individual team members belong to. Any communication aims to build some form of relationship, so what is the relationship

you are trying to develop and what feeling or feelings are associated with it? Is the communication about bonding, trust, enthusiasm, happiness, fun, hope or perhaps something with a darker shade, such as concern about the future or being united in adversity. The decision will shape the language used, as well as the form of the communication and communication event.

Thirdly, the leader will almost inevitably want to gain some *commitment for action*. The leader's role is centrally concerned with developing common endeavour and so being clear about exactly what this is will be vitally important.

Fourthly, the wise leader or leadership team will put themselves in the shoes of the team members and ask what *help or support* they might need, from the practical to the emotional. Help me to understand: Help me to believe: Help me to feel at home or to see my place: Help me to understand the implications. These and other needs might be relevant and will lead to different forms for the communication. Will there need to be evidence? Will there need to be time for people to talk amongst themselves or to ask questions? Who else might need to speak? Do we need a handout with detailed information? What will be the difficult ideas?

Fifthly, what *experience* is required? Many of the problems with change arise from the uncertainty that is inevitable. Change almost always involves going from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. The reason why vision is given such importance as a leadership task is because it helps to provide familiarity with the anticipated. It is difficult to walk in the dark: much easier with at least a glimmer of light. So leaders must routinely ask themselves what experiences the members of their team need in order to anticipate the future positively. For example if the company and jobs are being reorganised, what will it be like in the future? If the company is moving to a new building, what is the new building like? If you are a new leader, what will it be like working for you? So leaders should ask themselves about the project experience that team members will be having in the future and about the possible or probable need for an authentic experience to anticipate it, to make it real, imaginable, acceptable. (The experience must of course be authentic in order to avoid either confusion or disappointment).

These five elements are clearly strongly interconnected. The experience of the future may help to solve many of the questions and "help needs" of the team members as well as building an emotional relationship and a clear idea about what would be involved, thus contributing to a positive intention and commitment. A clear idea about the future might help people to have a picture and thus an experience of what is coming. This is fundamental to the design of CODAR. The five dimensions are mutually supportive and round each other out.

The way to use CODAR is as follows:

1. First think about *the people* to whom you are going to be communicating. Who are they? What is characteristic of them? How do they relate to the present situation? How are they likely to relate to the ideas or news that you are bringing? What relationship do they already have with you and the leadership team? What relationship do they have with each other? and so on.
2. Consider carefully exactly what the *communication objectives* are for each of the five dimensions. There may be more than one objective or communication need against any or all of the dimensions, but try to be clear about the essential priorities. It is desirable to write down exactly what you are trying to achieve.
3. Think about the relative *priorities* of these five dimensions. On a scale of 1-7, how much priority would you give to each of them? For example if the event is more of a social occasion, you would probably be focusing on relationship building. If it is a task allocation meeting, you will probably be focusing on help and activation. There will be some importance for each of the dimensions, so none should score less than 1 and double check your assumptions about any scores that are particularly low or high, asking yourself whether the solution might actually lie elsewhere. For example,

supposing you have a need as a business to get people committed to action, and therefore to the activation dimension. Communication might at first seem to be focused on this, but the real need might actually be to address concerns and worries, and therefore be focused more on help and experience, from which activation will follow. These two steps, objectives and priorities can be reversed or carried out simultaneously.

4. Then think about how you will actually achieve the communication. Knowing the objectives and needs creates a brief for thinking creatively about how to actually do the communication. What form and format should it take? Speech, video, question and answer, discussion, slides. What visuals will be needed? How much depends on facts and how much depends on communicating the emotional commitment of the leader?
5. Afterwards, evaluate either as an individual or as a leadership team or with the team members how effective you were. You can use this in two ways. You can understand where the gaps are that might need to be addressed by a future communication event and you can also improve both your communication skills and your use of the CODAR tool.

CODAR can also be used to develop more sophisticated or complex communication programmes through the levels of an organisation. For example, there can be communication objectives from the senior leaders to middle managers and others from middle managers to the remaining employees. There could also be communication objectives to different parts of the organisation: to the sales force, production, HR and so on. There maybe communication to other stakeholders such as shareholders, the family of employees and of course journalists and customers all of which begins to take CODAR into its wider and classic use.