



Chapter 6

The Public Sector Communication of Development Programmes for Small Businesses: An Implementation Challenge in South Africa

Maphelo Malgas  and *Andiswa Mrasi* 

According to Canel and Luoma-aho (2018), communication is the exchange of information through symbols; when that information is arranged into a body of thinking, it becomes knowledge that enables a clear understanding of a specific circumstance. Furthermore, public sector functions within their cultural and/or political environments are made possible by goal-oriented communication within, between, and with their stakeholders. Essentially, public sector communication is aimed at establishing and maintaining public good, as well as ensuring trust between communities with various channels that promote public participation. The authors do, however, caution that effective communication necessitates engagement with stakeholders, and the value of the engagement is derived from its capacity to facilitate participation and comprehend dialogic dynamics. As a concept, engagement should be viewed as a tool of achieving greater equality in the relationship between the public and government agencies (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2018). Additionally, public sector entities exist to ensure the effective functioning of society in accordance organisations with government-established principles, according to Vuori, Aher, and Kylänen, (2020). The authors further suggest that public sector entities that organisations public sector entities must strike a balance between democratic communication goals and, in the case of public institutions tasked with small

business development, involve these enterprises as their primary stakeholders in their communications (Vuori et al, 2020).

Canel and Luoma-aho (2018) further noted that public sector communication should be viewed as a tool that offers a long-term view of the organisation and its functions, giving stakeholders a comprehension of the context and environment and ultimately leading to the creation of cooperative and realistic attitudes. Also, the authors stated that public sector communication has been largely regarded as inefficient, resulting citizens frequently disregarding government and public sector behaviour guidelines on various issues such as waste management, safety, and health. Consequently, public sector entities must comprehend the evolving needs of stakeholders for public sector communication to succeed (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2018).

Vuori, *et al* (2020) stated that public sector entities responsibility for the promotion of small enterprises is to create an enabling environment that will empower them to realize their goals. The author also emphasizes the fact that there is no one definition of “good public sector communication”, as the messaging sent by public sector entities reflects the cultural and historical legacy of the society in which they operate. Since models typically work well in one social context but not another, we offer a public sector communication model in this chapter that can be utilized by public sector entities responsible for the development of small businesses in South Africa. According to Kaidi Aher (2020), successful public sector communication is a challenge on a worldwide scale, as such, developing a model that is specific to a given environment requires a deeper understanding of that setting.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive, setting-specific view of current public sector communication focusing on entities charged with the development of small business in South Africa, such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and Small Enterprise Finance Agency (SEFA).

We focus on public sector entities tasked with the development of small businesses in South Africa after considering the country's extensive public sector communication system. Next, we provide an overview of the small business environment in South Africa, emphasizing the challenges that these businesses face, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, we examine how the central government supports the growth of small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in South Africa, referring to a case study that reveals how public sector entities failed to communicate with small businesses about support programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter concludes with a proposed public sector communication framework that can assist in communicating support programmes for small businesses in South Africa.

Methodology

Using a case study design and a qualitative research methodology, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive knowledge of the settings of township SMMEs in South Africa and the ways in which public sector communication failed to support these businesses both during and after COVID-19. Additionally, the study sought to identify key stakeholders and their roles when the post-COVID-19 relief programmes for SMMEs. Lastly, the study, through a qualitative desktop data collection method, the study explored public sector communication during COVID-19 and how SMMEs regarded the programmes meant to support them.

Public Sector Communication Framework

According to Luoma-aho and Canel (2020), public sector entities are supported by the lawful authority of the central government and are dependent on the consent of the public, in a democratic environment to function. Operating at several levels—national, provincial, and local in South Africa, for example—these public sector entities offer services that are paid for by taxes and other public funds.

Public Sector Communication in the Digital Age

Since public sector entities and the media work together to promote their programmes and occasionally get unfavorable media coverage, there is a constant demand for transparency from these bodies (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). In addition to being subject to public scrutiny and being more restricted by legal and regulatory frameworks, public sector entities are expected to be highly accountable.

In South Africa, public sector entities charged with the advancement of small businesses account to a parliamentary portfolio committee that has oversight on all entities falling under the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD). The portfolio committee monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of public sector entities' communication about programmes through public engagement with individual and small business representative bodies, community engagement programmes in various local municipalities, and parliamentary committee meetings in parliament.

A communication framework (Table 3) was devised by the parliamentary committee of the DSBD with the intention of visually delineating the intended initiatives pertaining to the small business development programmes. Furthermore, the framework analysing both the current status quo and the desired outcomes.

Though the framework is relevant, it is too generic to work in communicating development programmes targeted at small businesses. For instance, a framework ideally represents an approach diagrammatically. Thus, the DSBD parliamentary committee framework lacks detail on the most critical aspect, which is “the main channel for communicating SMME development programmes”. We must reflect often on the role of the DSBD, which is to support the development, growth, and sustainability of SMMEs, as they are known to be key economic drivers.

Government and development partners should work together to better coordinate the development of inclusive SMMEs, relevant policies, and the methods of delivery, utilizing an impactful model. A methodology that enables

Table 3: Communication framework (DSBD parliamentary committee)

Outcome: Programmeme areas	Outputs: Programmeme areas	Project activities to achieve outputs	Target groups	Institution Responsible (implementing Agency - Lead and Support)	Current situation and risks
Partnerships outreach for SMME growth	Strengthen partnerships to identify new projects and investments for SMME growth and competitiveness	Establish a business and government working group at national and provincial levels	Small enterprises; Entrepreneurs	DSBD; Relevant agencies; Organised business	The trust deficit between business and government
Intergovernmental and business dialogue to assist the delivery of the NISED master plan and the National Summits objectives		Improve coordination to support the implementation of Presidential Summit resolutions	SMMEs and cooperatives	DSBD; Government; Private sector; Organised business	Failure of parties to engage
		SMMEs and cooperatives, and private sector	DSBD; New Agency; Government; Private sector; Organised business	The trust deficit between business and government	

(Source: Adapted from DSBD, 2022: 73)

DBSD to collaborate with small company forums for enhanced service synergy and more efficient resource use for expanded outreach is necessary for the organisation to have a significant impact. Improved coordination of SMME support should also result from significant involvement in the biannual national presidential summits and provincial conferences. To this end, we recommend a model that public sector entities under DBSD can use to effectively communicate their developmental programmes aimed at supporting SMME growth and sustainability.

The Small Business Landscape in South Africa

In South Africa, small businesses are defined as companies with fewer than 200 employees under the National Small Business Act (NSBA) 102 of 1996. The Act aims to establish favourable conditions for small enterprises to function better. In addition to Act 102, the South African government has established several small business-supporting entities and agencies including SEDA, SEFA, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), and the Centre for Small Business Promotion (CSBP).

Bvuma and Marnewick (2020) noted that SMMEs in South Africa face particular contextual issues because they operate in a variety of contexts, including cities and townships. The authors also point out that SMMEs' significance and the part they play in spurring economic progress are recognized by economies all over the world. Additionally, SMMEs can be extremely helpful in reducing some of the economic challenges facing South Africa, such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality, as stated in the country's National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Committee, 2011).

However, Makwara (2022) notes that globally, and in South Africa, there is yet to be a commonly agreed definition of a small business because of the ambiguities of how and what dimensions are appropriate for measuring business size. Furthermore, Makwara (2022) states that "in South Africa, a small business is officially defined as a separate and

distinct business entity, including cooperative enterprises and non-governmental organisations, managed by one owner or more, including its branches or subsidiaries, if any, and is predominantly carried on in any sector or subsector of the economy”. Adding complexity to the South African situation is that an SMME is regarded as either a formal or an informal business. The difference is that while formal businesses are monitored, protected, and taxed by the government, informal SMMEs are not government-regulated (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020).

Formal SMMEs are complex, well-established, licensed firms that are primarily found in urban areas. In comparison to informal SMMEs, they are typically more technologically advanced, especially when it comes to those who operate in township and rural areas (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020). The many ICT adoption frameworks that are currently in place will not be effective for township SMMEs due to their unique characteristics, as there are limited insights on ICT adoption frameworks for these businesses (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020).

Agboblí, Oni, and Fatoki (2017), however, believe that a drastic strategy is necessary given the study’s findings on the significant incidence of unofficial small enterprises in South Africa. They add that a great deal of work needs to be put into the SMME sector to transform the largely unofficial and necessity-driven small businesses into sustainable and profitable businesses. Serviço Brasileiro de Apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas (SEBRAE), the Brazilian counterpart of SEDA, has demonstrated remarkable success in assisting small businesses in formalizing their operations and transforming them into thriving, economically sustainable enterprises. To move most of the nation’s small enterprises into the commercial sphere, the South African government should tenaciously pursue a formalization policy in collaboration with NGOs that support small businesses.

Other SMME issues such as not having access to bank credit financing will be resolved by entering the commercial sector (Agboblí, Oni & Fatoki, 2017). Furthermore, as formalization

has many advantages, registered SMMES may also be eligible for state guarantees for lending facilities and formalized training in a range of business-related subjects. It is a definite way to boost the small business sector's efficiency and, in the end, address the persistent challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Agbobli et al., 2017). The goal of provincial governments, municipal and provincial SMME departments, as well as other entities is to assist small business operations; however, small businesses continue to perform appallingly and have not significantly improved South Africa's economic challenges despite the government's elaborate interventionist efforts (Agbobli et al., 2017).

According to SEFA, SMMEs and cooperatives are facing compounding challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on them, the full extent of which is still becoming apparent (SEFA, 2022). SEFA has further noted that the number of SMMEs in South Africa declined by 11% (or 289 000) year-on-year, from 2.61 million to 2.33 million in the first quarter of 2021, while "jobs declined by 6.2% over the same period" (SEFA, 2022). SEFA has stated that "The South African economy recovered somewhat in 2021, growing at 4.9% after the previous year's contraction of 6.4%" (SEFA, 2022). However, SEFA has also observed that the pace of recovery has slowed with the war in Ukraine and related global volatility and supply chain disruptions, and oil and food price inflation (SEFA, 2022).

Wegerif (2022) claims that the agriculture sector's robust macroeconomic performance in 2020 and the first part of 2021—along with robust export growth—covered the difficulties that many farmers were experiencing because of COVID-19. The special circumstances of black farmers and the production and distribution networks they are a part of were not sufficiently considered by the government's COVID-19 actions or the support programmes implemented to lessen the disease's detrimental consequences. Notably, the official sector frequently ignores the informal sector of small businesses, even though they play a critical role in food systems (Wegerif, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the advent of COVID-19 took the entire global economy by surprise. The lockdowns that followed caused significant disruptions to the networks of SMMEs, which persisted in showing up as a lack of effective support to address the impacts faced by black farmers (Wegerif, 2022) and informal SMMEs in general. After the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to devise strategies aimed at supporting SMMEs. To guarantee the revival and long-term viability of the SMME sector in the nation, strong plans based on efficient public sector communication must be created.

Informal SMME Post-COVID-19 Study in Delft and Mfuleni Townships

The importance of government development entities communicating about development programmes to small businesses cannot be overanalysing. However, there seems to be poor communication about government programmes designed to improve small business in South Africa. To stimulate economic recovery, the South African government made a commitment to help SMMEs that have been severely impacted by the pandemic to foster economic expansion and generate employment opportunities.

Amidst the COVID-19 lockdown period, the DSBD announced a collaboration with Nedbank to help SMMEs under SEFA's Credit Guarantee Scheme. The initiative exclusively focused on helping SMMEs owned by South African citizens, enabling them to endure the challenging lockdown period where all businesses were required to close as mandated by government.

In one project, we partnered with SEDA in the Western Cape to implement the post-COVID-19 relief grant project in the areas of Delft and Mfuleni, working with 52 small business owners. None of these business owners benefited from the COVID-19 relief funds because either they did not meet the criteria set by the government or they were not aware of the relief funds because of limited communication.

As for those who were aware, they were not able to submit the required documents because of the cumbersome nature of the documentation – including language barriers. Battersby (2020) argued that the South African government's lockdown regulations demonstrated a considerable bias which favoured the well-established formal businesses, while pushing towards formalisation of the informal sector through the conditions set as to who was allowed to benefit as well as conditions placed on the relief measures communicated.

As such, even though the communicated objective of the SEDA project was to assist informal SMMEs in completing the required documentation, the project itself was clearly not designed for informal businesses as some of the requirements included company certification documents, business bank accounts, and South African Revenue Service (SARS) income tax. To date, none of the 52 informal businesses received support or communication, even after all documentation was submitted. Instead, these informal businesses are now dealing with credit collections from various banks because of business accounts that are overdrawn or not in use.

The conclusion drawn from this case study is that there was a failure on the part of the public entities to communicate the relief grant to small businesses, and the government failed informal businesses by excluding them from the grant criteria.

SMME Representative Bodies in South Africa

Facilitating the establishment of a conducive atmosphere for the informal economy stakeholders to exercise the freedom of the right to association is regarded as vital in the quest for shaping the regulatory landscape that ultimately transforms informal economy workers and businesses at large (Berrett, 2003). According to the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), the South African environment has seen a rise in representative bodies, from worker's unions to various industry, sector, and market bodies (PMG, 2022). PMG has provided an overview of some of these bodies, with a particular focus on the informal market.

The South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) is by far the largest informal representative body for informal businesses operating in the public transport sector. SANTACO's primary purpose is to be the voice of the sector, more especially as far as regulations are concerned, and to bridge the communication gap between government and taxi operators (Berrett, 2003). PMG (2022) has further observed that the South African National Apex Cooperative (SANACO) continues to foster solidarity among cooperatives in South Africa, acting as a representative of cooperatives at the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Similarly, the National Cooperative Association of South Africa (NCASA) represents the character, nature, and purpose of cooperatives locally (PMG, 2022). More recently, the South African Informal Traders Alliance (SAITA) was formed to represent informal traders and was created within the legislation that covers the informal sector industry (PMG, 2022).

The Informal Economy Development Forum (IEDF) connects the informal and formal sectors of South Africa's economy to integrate the former into the mainstream economic system (PMG, 2022). All these bodies should work with public sector entities tasked with implementing programmes for small business development in South Africa.

The existence of representative bodies has been one of the avenues used to create a universal voice to make known needs and concerns across the various sectors or markets. If the relationship with the representative bodies is well established, the government can partner with them to ensure the successful implementation of regulations governing the sectors and offer relevant support. Several countries have invested in the establishment of representative and statutory bodies to support the SMME sector. These bodies are regarded as key elements in organising SMMEs and the informal sector.

In China, for example, one organisation that was established with the sole mandate of connecting international buyers and SMMEs is Alibaba (Alibaba, n.d.). The organisation, although operated as a private company, was established with

the primary objective of assisting SMMEs in China that lacked resources and knowledge in trading with international buyers. On the other hand, Alibaba created a trustworthy platform for international buyers seeking to procure products from China-based suppliers. Thus, the company's success and rapid growth can be attributed to the role it played in simplifying international trade regulations, being the voice for SMMEs, and ultimately benefiting its members.

Similarly, the India SME Forum was established with the aim of “building a neutral platform and voice to small and medium entrepreneurs of India”. It “has been at the forefront of demanding a radical change in the way the country is led and committed to a paradigm shift in the mindset of the people of the country, towards its entrepreneurs” (India SME Forum, n.d.).

Parameters for Crisis Communication

According to Coombs (2010), crisis communication is the process of gathering, analysing, and disseminating information needed to handle a crisis. The author also points out that gathering data on crisis risks, deciding how to handle possible crises, and preparing those who will participate in the crisis management process are the main activities of pre-crisis, crisis communication. Post-crisis communication also includes analysing the crisis management endeavour, informing people of any adjustments that are required, and sending out follow-up crisis messages as required.

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), created by Coombs (2010), is shown in Figure 5. The theory's premise is that crises—like the global epidemic caused by COVID-19—are always perceived as unfavourable occurrences. Affected parties' interactions with the organisation during a crisis are influenced by the attributions they make about crisis culpability. Nonetheless, according to Coombs (2010), SCCT is audience-oriented since it aims to shed light on how people view crises, how they respond to crisis management

plans, and how the public responds to the organisation that is experiencing a crisis.

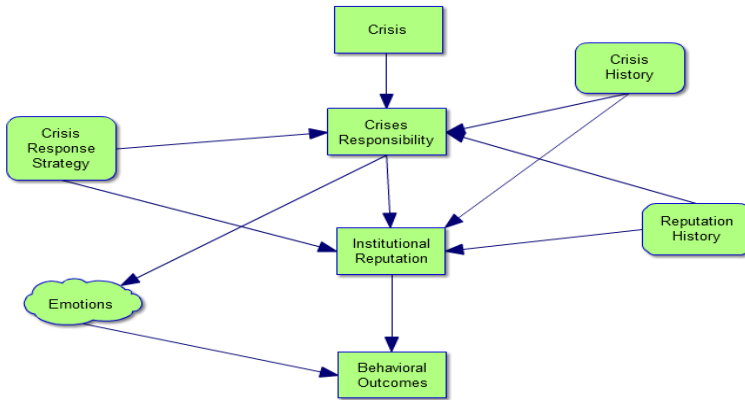


Figure 5: Model for the situational crisis communication theory variables (Source: Coombs, 2010)

According to Coombs' (2010) SCCT, there are three main crisis response strategies: (i) deny; (ii) diminish; (iii) reconstruct; and one supplemental strategy: reinforce. While diminish strategies aim to lessen the perceived importance of the issue and minimize the organisation's role for it, deny strategies try to show that the organisation was not at fault for the crisis. Conversely, rebuild methods are thought to be highly accommodating and aim to enhance the organisation's reputation by offering compensation and/or an apology (Coombs, 2010). Furthermore, by complimenting others—a tactic known as ingratiation—and/or bolstering—a technique known as reminding people of the organisation's previous good deeds—reinforcing tactics are employed to add positive information about the organisation.

According to Lovari, D'Ambrosi, and Bowen (2020), communication in public sector entities was formerly thought of as a simple transmitting function that was primarily focused on a vertical, bipolar, hierarchical, and unidirectional relationship between administrations and citizens, who were frequently seen as passive recipients of the messages

generated by institutions. But in recent years, organisations in the public sector have encouraged citizens to participate in public communication policy by giving them access to pertinent information as well as by implementing targeted communication tactics to make experiences and initiatives—like integrated policies, area plans, programme agreements, and service conferences—easier to access.

Additionally, Coombs and Holladay (2022) view a crisis as a disruptive phenomenon that involves the violation of salient stakeholder expectations, which can create harm for stakeholders and organisations. Furthermore, they claim that to varied degrees, crisis communication, like all forms of communication, acknowledges the social construction component of communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2022).

Adept strategic communicators, which include crisis managers, work to establish common understandings between organisations and their stakeholders to spot significant patterns in meaning in communication. Crisis communication theories vary in how strongly they explicitly analysing social construction (Coombs & Holladay, 2022). Sometimes a disaster such as COVID-19 triggers a crisis and public sector institutions must communicate through such a crisis in a way that is understandable to all the stakeholders.

COVID-19 crisis communication

Lovari et al. (2020) argued that COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on socio-political variables at the international, national, and local levels put pressure on the key elements of public sector communication. Following the World Health Organisation's (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic following its discovery in Wuhan, China, public sector entities faced pressure to engage with all stakeholders using digital and social media platforms. Following this, there was an informational pandemic known as an “infodemic” (Lovari et al., 2020) that had a significant impact on media systems, public sector communication initiatives, and individuals' information-seeking behaviours. The infodemic

was characterised by a combination of facts, fears, rumours, and guesses.

Thus, governments and organisations in the public sector have encountered unforeseen difficulties that have brought to light certain crucial elements of institutional communication that were already in place (Lovari et al., 2020). Chunxia, Fei, and Wei (2022) contend, however, that governments worldwide have been confronted with enormous obstacles as a direct result of COVID-19, ranging from need for robust health care and income to support severely affected businesses. A state's capacity to manage such a crisis is based on the total amount of money it has invested in its capacity for governance and management (Chunxia et al., 2022).

The necessity to create a challenge-based policy framework became more pressing with the advent of the new coronavirus outbreak (Chunxia et al., 2022). The pandemic also highlighted the importance of the public sector's capacities, as it is believed that this sector will be able to handle emergencies and have the necessary skills to address social problems and challenges. Many voices emerged from various nations because of the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, which was made worse by social and economic ramifications. Government and institutional communication were frequently out of step with the mass media, which tended to sensationalise the virus while also incorporating contradictory medical and scientific viewpoints into their reporting (Lovari et al., 2020). The public's mistrust increased because of these voices becoming shareable content on digital platforms, where they were frequently politicised or linked to false information and conspiracy theories (Lovari et al., 2020).

In South Africa, the advent of COVID-19 revealed the level at which sectors, industries, and markets are organised – or not. Ntimane, Mugobo and Mrasi (2022) observe that, globally, countries implemented various economic restrictions as a means of curbing the spread of COVID-19, such as permitting only the operation of essential services and imposing curfews, total liquor bans and restricted liquor sales.

While some industries and markets were more organised, making it possible to mobilise government and business support, this was not the case for the South African liquor trader market (Ntimane et al., 2022). Consequently, liquor traders suffered great financial loss, and full recovery for some remains unclear as they were not included in the priority list of businesses benefiting from the various government initiatives to support business (Ntimane et al., 2022).

The establishment of National Liquor Traders Council in 2020, a representative structure for informal liquor traders, once again proved to be the most effective way to represent the voice of the said businesses (BIZ community, 2020). Though these informal businesses did not receive any financial support from the government, the establishment of the representative structure resulted in their voice being represented in calls for some relaxation of liquor license regulations during covid-19 lockdown (Magubane, 2021; BIZ community, 2020).

Chunxia et al. (2022) also argued that enterprises made a concerted effort to supply their stakeholders with resources to mitigate the effects of the pandemic following the introduction of COVID-19. To build confidence among stakeholders, however, companies required good communication from public entities tasked with helping them weather the COVID-19 pandemic. This was achieved through the practice of empathy and transparency.

Organisations and companies may play a crucial role in fostering trust and hope among their stakeholders and helping them adjust to difficult situations like the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing efficient crisis response methods (Chunxia et al., 2022). In addition, the communicators worked to create crisis communication plans that would link stakeholders, workers, and communities to lessen the COVID-19 pandemic's destructive consequences on industry.

Chunxia et al. (2022) propose the following crisis communication response strategy:

- Offer information that could assist stakeholders in mitigating the crisis's negative effects.

- Make use of the material at your disposal regarding crisis management as well as the forms and causes of crises.
- Consider the causes and reasons for the crisis, which need to be promptly communicated to the relevant parties.

Lovari et al. (2020) stated that research on the diversity of opinions and the improvement of communication tactics and procedures both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic is necessary. The writers also emphasise the importance of considering the public sector voice, concentrating on the offline and digital communication strategies used by public sector entities, and looking into the ethical, social, and political ramifications. According to Lovari et al. (2020), the inquiry should also pay attention to the perspectives of the public, looking into grassroots communication strategies and the dynamics of participation through traditional and nontraditional means. The COVID-19 epidemic undoubtedly marked a sea change in public sector communication regarding connections with various publics, including the small business sector (Lovari et al., 2020).

According to Lovari et al. (2020), public sector entities should prioritise the enhancement of their digital presence while simultaneously allocating resources towards a multichannel approach that considers the diverse needs and abilities of their various audiences, as well as the moral implications of the uneven effects of COVID-19.

Removing certain segments of the populace from public sector communication channels might exacerbate social and digital divides. Additionally, according to Lovari et al. (2020), public sector entities should enlighten and listen to the public equitably as well as provide voice to all voices, especially those of minorities. On the other hand, communication that is rigid, closed, and solely focused on the organisation without any active or responsive listening to the demands of the public runs the risk of propagandising and repeating post-communication rhetoric (Macnamara, 2018). The breakdown of trust undermines credibility, undermines social cohesiveness, upsets the delicate balance that underpins relationships within

society, and may even cause public institutions to become closed off to their constituents.

According to Lovari et al. (2020), ethics is the new, main force behind communication in the public sector. Additionally, the authors assert that public sector entities have an even higher obligation to be trustworthy because of their duty to the public. To emphasise this duty and the necessity of sincere, open, and authentic engagement and communication to foster trust, we center ethics around public sector communication. Furthermore, because choices in the public sector are based on reason, these organisations can uphold their ethical obligations in a world where pandemics, crises, and upheavals provide constant challenges. Thus, by employing strategic communication initiatives to sustain accountable connections with citizens, stakeholders, the public, and the international community would benefit public sector entities in strengthening relations with these key stakeholders.

Lovari et al. (2020) note that public sector communication should have a strategic role in this time of uncertainty, which is characterised by the spread of misinformation and by economic and social crises. There is a need to add new words to the public sector's communication language, such as 'openness', 'flexibility', 'resilience', 'reliability', 'authenticity', 'honesty', 'interdependencies' and 'dialogue'. Communication professionals in public entities should be given more authority in their jobs, both inside and outside institutions, and should work to enhance their image of being trusted by top management, journalists, and the public. Meeting these new challenges calls for a major investment in communication professionals' new technical, technological, managerial, and strategic skills and knowledge (Lovari et al., 2020).

Proposed communication framework

Governments should inform its stakeholders in a way that makes communication easier and more efficient, according to Mishaal and Abu-Shanab (2015). Additionally, often

governments struggle with communication since they have limited funding and don't prioritise communicating with stakeholders (Mishaal & Abu-Shanab, 2015). However, governments should take input from small business owners in the form of feedback, participation, and discussion (Mishaal & Abu-Shanab, 2015). Government and public sector entities should be open to collaboration by asking small business owners to co-create and co-design for a specific output.

However, we caution that this task is complex and requires collective intelligence. For this reason, the government could use a shared document to engage the public's participation in designing government applications. Howlett (2009) argues that although there are many types of government communication, there are very few contextually based frameworks to guide government and public sector communication with small businesses. Therefore, we propose the following communication framework for government to engage with small businesses about its development programmes.

We propose using the framework depicted in Figure 6 for communicating government development programmes to small businesses. The framework is founded on a set of proposed factors that may lead to communication success:

Small business owners should participate when government develops support programmes. At this stage, the government – through public business development agencies – should conduct a needs analysis survey to make sure that the programmes they develop are in line with the needs of small business owners.

The government should then consider the feedback from small business owners' participation and incorporate that feedback into the development of the proposed development programmes.

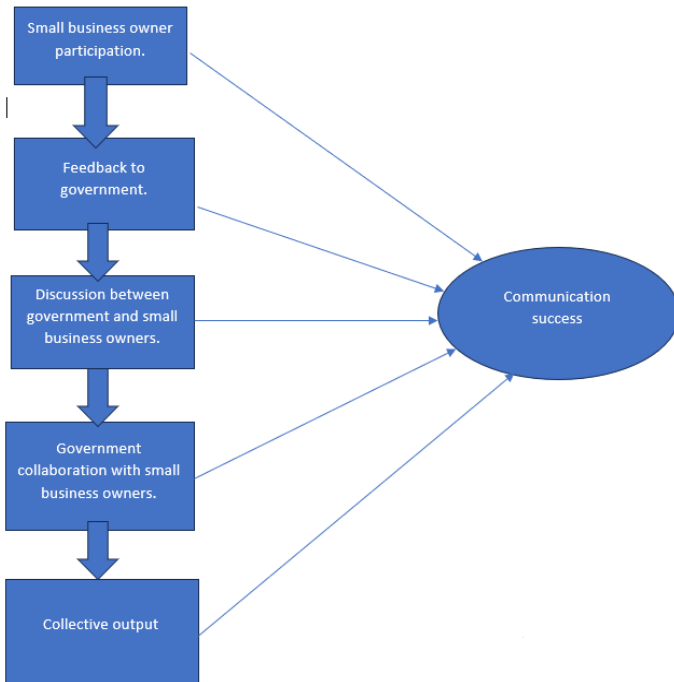


Figure 6: Framework for government communication with small businesses

Once the draft programme for small business development has been completed based on inputs from owners, public agencies and the government, there should be a discussion between small business owners and government development agencies on the feasibility of the programme and its implementation plan.

Furthermore, the implementation plan should be a collaboration between the public development agencies of government and forums for small business owners.

In this way, the communication will be a product of collective efforts and some of the stumbling blocks will be dealt with during the collaboration phase.

The next step is to measure the impact of the development programmes using various survey methods,

based on agreed-upon success measures by small business owners and the public sector. Also, the communication success should be measured based on the reach of the programmes and an evaluation of whether the intended outcomes have been achieved.

Conclusion

SMMEs are undoubtedly important drivers of economic growth globally, and South Africa is no exception (The World Bank, 2019). While the South African government has developed various programmes aimed at supporting SMMEs and informal businesses (Rogerson, 2004; Ligthelm, 2005), more must still be done, as these initiatives have not yielded the desired results of supporting small businesses financially to successfully weather the COVID-19 crisis effects. The South African government and its development agencies need to provide all the necessary assistance to start-up entrepreneurs as a way of promoting and encouraging an entrepreneurial culture (Affendy, Asmat-Nizam & Farid, 2015).

Singh and Belwal (2008: 121) also add that “the development of SMEs is seen as accelerating the achievement of wider economic and socio-economic objectives, including poverty alleviation in developing countries”.

This study explored the literature to better understand the small business environment in South Africa and the role of government in developing and communicating support programmes for small businesses. The framework proposed in this chapter includes five major predictors of government communication success: participation, feedback, discussion, collaboration, and collective output. Furthermore, government development agencies should use social media communication strategies to reach small businesses, especially those businesses operating in the townships and rural areas of South Africa.

As such, we recommend that the South African government, through the DSBD, should involve small business forums when considering initiating development

programmes for small businesses. Then, once a programme has been drafted in consultation with small business owners, a proper communication plan should be formulated so that it may reach the intended beneficiary. Lastly, according to Adisa, Abdulraheem, and Mordi (2014), the South African government ought to support its development finance organisations' capacity for effective communication and urge them to provide conferences, workshops, and training sessions for small business owners on how to take advantage of developmental programmes.

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