

Session 5: Communication Tools in the Strategy Process (09:15–10:45)

Objective

Highlight the critical role of communication in successfully formulating and executing strategy, and equip participants with practical communication tools and techniques to use with clients and stakeholders. By the end, advisors will understand how to engage stakeholders through clear messaging, storytelling, and participatory communication methods, ensuring everyone involved in the business strategy is informed and motivated. They will practice crafting strategic messages and managing group communication (e.g., strategy meetings, announcements).



Activity- Brainstorm & Input (10 min)

Pose a question: *“Who are the stakeholders that need to understand or be involved in a farm’s strategic plan?”* Write answers on a flipchart. Expected: the farm owner(s), family members, employees or farm workers, cooperative members (if co-op), investors or sponsors, customers (maybe indirectly), local community (if relevant), and partners (like extension services, etc.). This shows that strategy is not just in the head of the owner – communicating it to others is key for alignment. Highlight that even a single-family farm should ensure all family members involved know the plan; in larger groups, communication becomes even more crucial.

Reflection- The Importance of Communication (5 min)

Reinforce with a quick fact or quote: *“Successful implementation of a strategic plan depends on communication that aligns everyone’s actions”*. Explain that poor communication can cause a strategy to fail even if it is a great plan – because people will not execute what they do not understand or buy into. Another quote: *“Effective communication is key to breaking down silos and engaging stakeholders around a common vision”*. Advisors often act as communication facilitators or translators, ensuring the message of the strategy is clear and compelling.



Presentation: Communication Tools (15 min)

Introduce specific tools and approaches for strategic communication:

- **Vision/Mission Statements:** These can be displayed prominently (in farm office, on website) – a concise reminder of the strategic direction. Advisors can help craft these statements in plain language that everyone understands.
- **Strategy Map or Visual:** A one-page diagram that shows how the pieces of the strategy fit together (for example: a flowchart linking vision -> goals -> key initiatives). Show a simple example on a slide – perhaps a mock-up for an agroforestry business (vision at top, pillars or strategic objectives beneath, arrows to outcomes).
- **Stakeholder Meetings & Workshops:** Advisors might facilitate a meeting where the business owner presents the new strategy to staff or coop members. Techniques to use: start with a *story* (why this strategy matters *“Remember the drought last year? That inspired us to plant trees – our strategy is about resilience.”*), use charts or before/after visuals, and allow Q&A for buy-in.
- **Regular Communication Channels:** Encourage clients to have ongoing updates, for example: monthly meetings, newsletters, WhatsApp group updates – to report progress on strategic initiatives. Advisors can help set up these rhythms.

- **Elevator Pitch:** Teach clients (and practice ourselves) to explain their strategy in a few sentences for different audiences (such as what to tell a potential investor versus a neighbour about their plans).
- **Storytelling:** Emphasize translating dry goals into human stories. Instead of “*We aim to increase tree cover 20%*,” tell it as “*We’re planting orchards so that in 5 years our cows will graze under blossoms and we’ll have a new cider product – that’s our path to sustain this farm for our children.*” Advisors can draw out these narratives which resonate emotionally.

Mention the importance of **feedback loops**: communication is two-way. Stakeholders should be invited to give input or express concerns – strategy should be a living conversation, not a top-down decree. As a tool, advisors might use *surveys* or informal interviews to gather input from farmers, employees or coop members during strategy development.



Activity – Crafting a Message (20 min)

Participants practice simplifying and communicating a strategy. Have each participant (or pairs) pick one of the strategic targets or initiatives from the earlier case (“Sunrise Farm” or their own example). Now, imagine they have to explain this part of the plan to a stakeholder in a compelling way. For instance, target: “*Plant 5 ha of agroforestry alley crops.*” How to communicate it? Perhaps as: “*We’re going to plant rows of walnut trees in our wheat field – this will protect the soil and in a few years provide extra income from nuts, making our farm more profitable and sustainable.*” Encourage them to use non-technical language and mention the *why*. Give 5 minutes to write a few sentences (this is the elevator pitch for that initiative). Then have a few volunteers present theirs as if addressing a stakeholder group. After each, discuss: was it clear and motivating? Refine together. This trains advisors to help clients articulate their strategy clearly.



Presentation – Handling Difficult Conversations (15 min)

Discuss scenarios where strategic decisions might face resistance and how communication tools can help. For example: A cooperative decides to shift to organic practices as part of strategy, but some members resist due to short-term costs. How should the advisor guide the communication? Solicit quick ideas. Then outline a few tips:

- Use data and success stories: for example, share results from another farm that went organic and benefited, to persuade logically.
- Empathize and address concerns: “*I understand you worry about costs; here’s how we plan to manage them...*”
- Find champions: maybe a respected member who supports the strategy can co-present the plan (peer influence).
- Small group dialogues: break a big contentious meeting into small facilitated groups to let everyone voice thoughts (reducing open conflict).

Possibly role-play a micro-scenario: one trainer plays a sceptical stakeholder, and the other (or a volunteer participant) tries to communicate the strategy to them using some of these techniques. Keep it light but instructive.

Tip For Success: Remind participants that **listening** is the most powerful communication tool. Advisors should coach clients to listen to their team’s feedback. Also, mention that sometimes strategies need adjusting if communication reveals valid concerns – that’s okay; better to adjust early than to have silent pushback later.

Share a positive example where good communication can make a difference.

Case Example – Engaging a Team through Communication (Italy)

An agroforestry start-up in Italy had a brilliant strategic plan to develop a new line of tree-based herbal products. However, initially the farm workers were not performing their tasks toward the new plan; some did not understand why they were suddenly asked to collect tree leaves in addition to regular duties. The owner, with an advisor's help, realized the strategy had not been well communicated. They organized a team meeting on the farm. The owner told the *story* of how he got the idea during a farm visit in France where tree herbs were selling well (making it relatable), explained the vision (“*if this works, it could increase our revenue and everyone’s earnings*”), and showed a short video of the French farm successfully doing it. He invited questions, addressing concerns about workload by promising training and possibly hiring an additional seasonal worker during harvest. After this transparent communication, the workers became more engaged – some even suggested ideas to improve the process. Over the next year, productivity and morale improved, and the new product line launched successfully.

Key Takeaway:

Taking time to communicate the “why” and “how” of a strategic initiative with those who execute it can significantly improve implementation. Advisors can prompt business owners to not skip this human step and even facilitate these meetings to ensure clarity and inclusion.

Wrap-up Thought: Quote a proverb or saying, e.g., “*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*” Tying it to strategy: a leader with a plan will “go far” only if they bring others along through good communication. Encourage advisors to use these tools to be that bridge for their clients.

Methods Used: Brainstorming, short lecture with slides, writing exercise (messaging), small role-play demonstration, and case study. **Interactive element:** high – especially the message-crafting where each participant practices simplifying strategy concepts.

Session 5 Wrap-up

Reiterate that communication is not a one-off at the end of planning; it's woven throughout the strategic process – from gathering input, to announcing the plan, to updating on progress. “Next, we'll assume we have buy-in and understanding, and focus on turning that strategy into concrete actions – implementation time!”