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PROCESS SUPPORT, COMMUNICATION AND BRANDING

VINNOVA´s VINNVÄXT programme

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About VINNOVA

VINNOVA, Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems.

VINNOVA's mission is to *promote sustainable growth*
by funding *needs-driven research*
and developing *effective innovation systems*.

Through its activities in this field, VINNOVA aims to make a significant contribution to Sweden's development into a leading centre of economic growth.

VINNVÄXT is a programme that takes the form of a competition for regions. The aim is to promote sustainable growth by developing internationally competitive research and innovation environments in specific growth fields. The winning regions will receive funding of up to SEK 10 million per year for a period of 10 years. The objective is that the winners will become internationally competitive in their respective fields within this period. A prerequisite for the programme is the active participation of players from the private, public and research sectors and from the political sphere. VINNVÄXT also comprises a number of support activities such as seminars, training/education, the exchange of experience and the extension of knowledge/research.

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Process Support, Communication and Branding

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by

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Foreword

VINNOVA's communication coaching for the VINNVÄXT programme came about through networking and experience-sharing between the VINNVÄXT winners. At these meetings, a need for support emerged in respect of communication and marketing. This was to make the relevant initiative familiar and attractive and also help in mobilising research, industry and governmental actors in each region.

The VINNVÄXT programme comprises financial support to the VINNVÄXT winners over a ten-year period in order to develop their growth efforts. At the same time, VINNOVA offers process support and training for initiatives. The communication coaching which commenced in the winter of 2006 was implemented under the umbrella of this process support.

Through its communication coaching, VINNOVA wanted to give VINNVÄXT initiatives a greater understanding of strategic communication, i.e. communication clearly intended as a tool for developing the operation as a whole.

Communication coaching was offered to eight VINNVÄXT winners and five VINNVÄXT candidates during the period 2006-2008 in the form of joint knowledge and experience seminars plus individual coaching for the various initiatives. The knowledge and experience seminars will continue until further notice with two meetings per year.

In February-March 2008, VINNOVA asked the consultancy company Gullers Grupp to document the communication efforts being implemented with VINNVÄXT initiatives. The purpose of this was primarily to identify success factors leading to communication being integrated into the strategic development of those initiatives. What aspect of the various VINNVÄXT initiatives explains the clear contributions of traditional communication tools in setting aims and objectives, fixing priorities in the operation and structuring the interaction between researchers, companies and policy/public enterprise in a Triple Helix?

Thus, the intention was *not* to evaluate the communication coaching or the initiatives, but rather to concentrate on determining the conditions and circumstances which explain why communication coaching gives more or less clear impacts; not merely in initiatives' communication work but also in their strategic development.

The report is organised with an introductory presentation of the VINNVÄXT programme and the 13 VINNVÄXT initiatives studied.

Implementation of the communication coaching and its contents are then documented. Subsequently, the greater part of the report is devoted to the impacts of the support on their strategic development. It concludes with a section linking their experience to theory: Building innovation systems using communication.

VINNOVA in October 2009

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Abstract

VINNOVA's communication coaching for the VINNVÄXT initiatives grew up through networking and experience-sharing between the VINNVÄXT winners. The initiatives needed support in their communication and marketing. This was to make each initiative familiar and attractive and also help in mobilising research, industry and governmental actors in its region.

VINNOVA therefore decided to invest in communication coaching for the VINNVÄXT initiatives. This communication coaching was aimed at strategic communication with a clear link to their strategic planning. The support, which initially comprised the eight VINNVÄXT winners but later also the five VINNVÄXT candidates, comprised fundamental communication training at joint seminars, supplemented by individual coaching tailored to the needs of each initiative.

During the support, it became clearer that the initiatives' strategic communication work would increasingly encompass planning and control of the operation as a whole. Communication initiatives and strategic development were merging and it became apparent that communication tools could also be used to identify and analyse critical strategic issues.

At the interviews conducted during the winter of 2008 with process managers and communicators in the VINNVÄXT initiatives, it emerged that the communication coaching in several of them had been used to focus and develop the operation, identify and prioritise target groups, fix messages and strategic concepts and clarify the distribution of roles internally and the interaction between actors in the region. Elsewhere the support had a more limited effect on both the communication work and strategic development.

In summary, VINNOVA's communication coaching and other communication initiatives that were implemented gave clear impacts in the operation, chiefly through:

- clarifying and fixing strategic concepts and goals,
- identifying and prioritising target groups,
- pushing forward structures for the interaction between actors.

Where the communication coaching has had clear impacts on the operation, the explanation may reside in the organisation of that support; the fact that it was strategically orientated, combining joint training, experience-sharing and individually tailored coaching. Furthermore, the process management of

the VINNVÄXT-initiative had an open attitude to the support, was interested in it and fully welcomed it. Initiatives could also use the communicative tools in their strategic development.

Where the support had more limited impact on the operation, it was generally not in keeping with the initiative's own processes. It arrived later, when there was already an established operation, or earlier, when the organisation was not fully ready to implement the support in its operation. There were also ambiguities of organisation and leadership in a number of initiatives which influenced the opportunity to fully absorb and use the communication coaching in strategic development.

VINNOVA's VINNVÄXT programme evidences how it is possible to work systematically with communication to create and strengthen innovation systems. The communication coaching has indicated how this is possible and what challenges may be encountered. Thus, the initiative documented in this report is itself part of the learning.

1 The VINNOVÄXT programme

VINNOVA's VINNOVÄXT programme exists to promote sustainable growth in regions by developing internationally competitive research and innovation milieus within specific growth areas. The goal for a region is to become internationally competitive within 10 years. This is meant to occur through the creation of an effective Triple Helix collaboration around a joint regional strategic concept between companies, research and policy and public enterprise. The VINNOVÄXT programme contributes by funding needs-driven research and development which strengthens cutting-edge expertise and by strategic initiatives to develop the innovation system.

VINNOVÄXT exists to support growth in dynamic innovation systems at regional level. Research and experience have shown that geographical proximity and density create competitive advantages regarding interaction, learning, access to expertise and commercial and developmental collaborations. Regions which understand this can purposefully develop their competitive advantages and, through increased growth and international competitiveness, contribute to Sweden's overall growth.

The VINNOVÄXT programme is unique because it is based on a competitive element. Through calls for proposals in 2002 and 2004, some 70 functional regions applied for support from VINNOVA. A total of eight initiatives were selected as VINNOVÄXT winners, each receiving up to SEK 10 million per year for a ten-year period to develop their growth initiatives. The regions invest at least the same amount themselves. VINNOVA also offers process support and training for the VINNOVÄXT winners.

Common to VINNOVÄXT initiatives is that through their functional regions they have a well-established strategic concept, a strong research and innovation milieu, strong regional leadership and the active participation of research, industry and the public sector. One of the most important criteria is that they are considered to have good growth potential.

In 2005/2006, a new call for proposals was issued for early-stage innovation systems and five regional initiatives received funding and support for two years. In 2008, four of these were upgraded to VINNOVÄXT winners.

VINNOVÄXT initiatives are continuously evaluated during the course of their programmes with a final survey after 12 years, i.e. two years after conclusion. By then, the VINNOVÄXT programme as a whole should have contributed to:

- long-term and sustainable growth in the winning regions,

- internationally competitive innovation systems,
- a high degree of learning en regional as well as national level, contributing to growth in other regions as well.

Mobilising regional research, industry and society towards a common strategic concept requires professional leadership. For this reason, the process support forms a vital part of the VINNVÄXT programme and consists, amongst other things, of training courses and a process leadership network.

The network represents a forum for knowledge development, information dissemination and research. Examples of important areas are network building, identification of success indicators and how to communicate within a regional innovation system.

VINNOVA's communication coaching for the VINNVÄXT initiatives forms part of the process support and has partly used the process manager network for experience-sharing and knowledge dissemination. Profiling growth milieus is highly important in making the development process reliable and, above all, raising the interest of external actors.

1.1 VINNVÄXT winners and candidates

The following is a brief presentation of the eight VINNVÄXT winners and five VINNVÄXT candidates who were all offered the chance to participate in VINNOVA's communication coaching.

1.1.1 The VINNVÄXT winners

ProcessIT Innovations, Luleå/Umeå

ProcessIT Innovations works to supply the needs of the mining, steel and pulp and paper manufacturing industries for future new products and services based on information and communication technology (ICT). The initiative is run in collaboration between the process and manufacturing industry, Umeå and Luleå universities and ICT product companies in Västerbotten and Norrbotten. The operation is creating significant growth through major, coordinated initiatives from all parties involved including the region's governmental actors.

GöteborgBIO

The aim is to create a sound basis for long-term growth within the biomedical field in the Gothenburg region, by perfecting cutting-edge academic research into innovations in industry and healthcare applications. This initiative is enhancing the commercial development of R&D within biomaterials, self-care and cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, training

future leaders for advanced business development, strengthening and developing the commercialisation infrastructure and attracting qualified expertise and capital to the region.

Triple Steelix, Bergslagen

The steel industry Bergslagen is a world leader within its niche. Based on the steel industry, a cluster of companies has developed within steel production, engineering, processing and knowledge-based services. In conjunction with universities, Triple Steelix is focusing on developing expertise within such fields as materials, steel processing, nanotechnology, industrial IT and environment and energy efficiency. The initiative is backed by such major companies as Sandvik, Outokumpu and SSAB.

Fiber Optic Valley, south coast of Norrland

Fiber Optic Valley is an arena for developing and testing products and services based on fibre-optics. In conjunction with universities, society and industry, Fiber Optic Valley is building the broadband society of tomorrow in the region between Gävle and Sundsvall, centred on Hudiksvall. Fiber Optic Valley's offering includes a testbed with contract Test pilots, qualified assessors, research, training, business models, behavioural analysis and statistical models plus an advanced fibre laboratory.

New Tools for Health, East Sweden region

New Tools for Health is driving the development of individually tailored solutions for the best possible health. Growth is being created in distributed care, self-care, personal health and sport. Backing the initiative are some 60 companies, the county municipalities, the county council, Östern Regional Development Council, welfare organisations plus Linköping University and research companies.

Uppsala BIO

Uppsala BIO's long-term goal is to strengthen the growth of the biotech sector in the region. A long history of successful research and close collaboration with industry has led to a range of products and companies appearing within diagnostics, for biotech research tools and drugs. Its market is the entire world. Uppsala BIO is an initiative from the local biotech industry, universities and the public sector in the county of Uppsala and aims to strengthen the future competitiveness of the biotech sector.

Robotdalen, Mälardalen

Robotdalen's vision is to take a leading position within the research, development and manufacture of industrial, field and health robotics. The key to its success has been a milieu in which factors such as strong research, advanced training and industry collaborate and in which innovations and

new enterprise are encouraged. Robotdalen has mobilised interested parties from the entire region and Sweden's first university course in robotics is held here. Major companies such as ABB, Atlas Copco and Volvo are backing the endeavour.

Innovation at Interfaces, Skåne

Innovation at Interfaces is an innovation system for food in Skåne. The strategic concept is to increase the yield on investments in the food industry and "create the health food of the future" with high nutritional values. The creativity and innovative value come from a basis of interdisciplinary, cross-boundary research. Priority areas are health foods and good, nutritious food in schools and hospitals.

1.1.2 The VINNVAÄXT candidates (2006-2008)

Biorefinery of the Future, Örnsköldsvik

Forest raw materials will be used within a number of new product areas: chemicals, fuels and composites/plastics. There is major growth potential in the process industry, not least of all amongst the technology suppliers surrounding it. It is also of major social significance to utilise renewable raw materials which can replace oil.

Smart textiles, Borås

This initiative focuses on developing an innovation system for development, design and highly specialised manufacture of next-generation textiles. This is an example of a traditional industry which in recent years has entered a dynamic phase through new technological opportunities.

RobustIQ, Jönköping/Kronoberg

R&D within robust electronics will cross-fertilise small and medium-sized engineering enterprises with R&D-intensive actors within electronic systems. RobustIQ operates at the interface between modern IT/electronics and traditional manufacturing.

Printed Electronics Arena, Norrköping

Printed Electronics Arena is an initiative in the new technological field of "printed electronics". This facilitates entirely new areas of electronics and will mean development for a number of Swedish industrial sectors, including packaging.

Peak of Tech Adventure, Östersund/Åre

Peak of Tech Adventure is an initiative in travel, sports and active outdoor pursuits. The leisure industry and sports technology are growth industries and this area has major growth potential.

2 Communication coaching for VINNVÄXT initiatives

VINNOVA's communication coaching for the VINNVÄXT programme came about through networking and experience-sharing between the VINNVÄXT winners. At these meetings, a need for support emerged in respect of communication and marketing. This was to make each initiative familiar and attractive and also help in mobilising research, industry and governmental actors in each region.

There was a need and wish on the part of projects to be attractive both within the local region and beyond in order to attract companies, cutting-edge expertise and funding. The projects needed to explain who they are and what they stand for and work with their brand so as to be noticed and have their particular process confirmed by those around them. Naturally, products and services also needed to be marketed.

Attractiveness was highlighted as a central concept. Internal communication was required so as to focus attention on the common goal and external communication if an initiative was to grow its attraction increase. Attraction was seen as an important strategic goal for creating long-term sustainable growth in the region. At the same time, many initiatives lacked specific communication expertise and a deeper knowledge of strategic communication and brand-building.

A wish was communicated for communication training and access to communication coaching for the individual processes. For this reason, in the autumn of 2005, VINNOVA decided to invest in a communication plan for the VINNVÄXT programme with the tangible aim of producing individual communication strategies and communication plans.

At the same time, VINNOVA intended that communication should not merely describe research and development work but also clarify it by linking the communication to the strategic planning in something known as strategic communication. VINNVÄXT initiatives with their network organisations, meeting places and growth catalysts were considered an ideal testbed to develop the innovation system using communication.

The communication coaching ties in well with the success criteria of the VINNVÄXT programme to promote regional growth and develop internationally competitive innovation milieus. The programme has also been a learning process for the VINNVÄXT programme and VINNOVA.

2.1 Implementation of the communication coaching

In the light of this VINNOVA, in dialogue with the VINNVÄXT initiatives, developed a communication training course to support them in their development work. Prior to the training course, there were telephone interviews with the VINNVÄXT winners and a review of webpages and existing information so as to adapt the training to their needs.

During the preliminary work, a couple central issues recurred: what is a VINNVÄXT initiative as such? Should the region or the actual initiative be communicated? The training was largely based on these issues and the discussions dealt extensively with identity, message and prioritising of target groups.

As a goal for the training, VINNVÄXT initiatives should produce a communication plan around the following points:

- Who is the sender – the region or the initiative?
- What are we offering?
- What are our target groups – internal and external?
- What do we want our target groups to think?
- What shall we say and how shall we say it to make the initiative as attractive as possible?

The target group for the training was process managers and communicators in the various VINNVÄXT initiatives. It was important for the process managers to be involved, since communication is a tool in achieving the strategic goals.

VINNOVA commissioned the consultancy firm Gullers Grupp to carry out the communication training.

2.1.1 Communication coaching, stage one

Joint basic training

In its first stage, the basic training comprised three joint one-day seminars, or blocks during the first six months of 2006. The three training blocks consisted of the following:

Block 1: Communication challenges for knowledge regions

- What circumstances apply in marketing an anticipated value – growth?
- How can the right visibility for issues of growth and expertise be created in regional innovation systems?
- How are regions marketed?
- Workshop about the communication challenges of the VINNVÄXT initiatives.

Block 2: How do I get others to do as I want?

- How can communication efforts with a large number of actors and mixed interests be held together?
- Who and what is a VINNVÄXT winner? What do we want to be and in relation to what?
- Model for communication planning, target group analysis and message formulation.

Block 3. Discussion of individual communication challenges

- Discussion based on VINNVÄXT initiatives' draft communication plans.
- How can a basic VINNVÄXT message be combined with the initiatives' own messages? Results from the message workshop presenting some of the VINNVÄXT initiatives.

Individual coaching

During the joint seminars, it was quickly established that because the VINNVÄXT initiatives were operating in different sectors and at different stages of development, their progress in the communication planning differed. Some already had a well-functioning communications strategy, whilst others had not yet commenced the work. Since the needs of the individual initiatives were so different and communication was considered a vital tool for their strategic development, VINNOVA decided to supplement the joint seminars with individual coaching of up to five requested days.

Through coaching, the initiatives were offered individual advice with the consultants on-site assisting in the work of the individual communication plan. A special message workshop was also held with some of them relating to VINNVÄXT's basic message and those of the specific initiatives, and how these could be combined. A number also brought communicators and process managers and even management groups and steering groups to the exercises so that as many people as possible would get behind the vision and the goals and message that formed the basis of the particular initiative. All the VINNVÄXT initiatives except one requested the individual coaching.

Results of stage one

The results from the basic communication training and individual coaching indicated that communication was better established in the strategic process and that there was an increased understanding amongst the participants about the importance of strategic communication in order to achieve strategic goals. The training and individual coaching had jointly contributed to clarifying the initiatives' operations. The participants had also gained a tangible review and classification of communication tools and most of them

had started producing communication plans and were working towards these.

At the same time, the individual coaching had revealed several questions which needed further clarification in both the internal and external communication:

- What should be done to be clearer in our role?
- National and international visibility
- How are companies and researchers attracted to the effort?
- How should various efforts be prioritised within the initiative?
- Relationships with member companies
- How is confidence created between the actors in the region?

2.1.2 Communication coaching, stage two

The VINNVÄXT initiatives were consistently positive about the benefits of VINNOVA's communication coaching, but there were also important issues at the interface between communication and strategic planning, with initiatives requiring continued support. Therefore, in the autumn of 2006 VINNOVA decided to continue the communication coaching to a second stage, comprising biannual knowledge and experience meetings on various communication themes plus individual coaching which could be requested. Whereas VINNOVA had previously covered all the funding up to five days, the continued individual coaching would involve co-financing from the initiatives on a 50-50 basis for a further five days. After this, they had to find their own funding and could request communication coaching for themselves.

Continuing knowledge and experience meetings for the VINNVÄXT winners

The joint knowledge and experience meetings were arranged with one full day every six months starting in the spring of 2007. By the spring of 2008, three meetings had been held. As well as a specific theme on each occasion, the knowledge and experience meetings (which took the form of dialogues and used discussion leaders) were used to discuss the initiatives' communication work and lessons learned. These meetings were prepared on the basis of issues which the consultants had picked up during the individual coaching.

In the spring of 2007, the knowledge and experience meetings covered the influence of political decisions and how the initiatives could work with lobbying. In the autumn of 2007, a seminar was held on international marketing and there was a review of good English webpages. An advanced

session on international marketing of clusters and regions is planned for the spring of 2008.

VINNVÄXT candidates included

One early lesson from the communication coaching for VINNVÄXT winners was not to delay too long in introducing communication into the process. Therefore, VINNOVA decided to bring the VINNVÄXT candidates into the communication coaching early on, in parallel with the winners. The candidates were offered three days' joint basic communication training commencing January 2007. This included communication planning and regional competitive and innovation strategy. It also focused on issues regarding the initiatives' identity and attractiveness and the communication challenges they faced.

Individual coaching

A number of coaching sessions were held during the spring and autumn of 2007 and spring 2008. These involved the established VINNVÄXT winners as well as the new VINNVÄXT candidates. It was possible to subdivide the individual coaching of the candidates early on so that they could progress quickly to professional communication work.

The coaching in stage two was aimed at production and follow-up of the projects' communication plans. There was concrete support for the projects in the work of drafting communication goals, choice of target group, communication strategy, brand platform, message platform and message formulation, choice of media and control and follow-up.

The advice would also act as a catalyst for a range of overall issues affecting the initiatives' strategic development, identity and offering, collaboration within Triple Helix and marketing. Two brand strategies for growth efforts were followed up – Branded House and House of Brands. The Branded House strategy sets the organisation's identity and individual brand first, with other brands (offerings) adapting to it. With the House of Brands strategy, the individual organisation's brand (offering) is adapted to an overall brand.

2.1.3 Communication coaching, ongoing

VINNOVA is now continuing the joint knowledge and experience meetings for VINNVÄXT initiatives, with two meetings per year for as long as they express a need. However, the programme will be further developed and greater requirements placed upon them in terms of preparation and follow-up for the meetings. On the other hand, VINNOVA's support for individual coaching will cease.

2.2 Communication plans for the initiatives

A set goal for VINNOVA's communication coaching has been that it should result in a communication plan for each initiative. The work on communication plans is at different stages. Some already had communication plans when VINNOVA introduced its communication coaching and have progressed these. Others have had to start from scratch. In general, as of spring 2008 it can be said that the communication plans are still at different stages.

The following is a brief account of how the 10 communication plans in the documentation (see Supporting Data and Sources) specifically reflect strategic communication. That is, where communication was used as a tool to develop all the activities of the initiative, not just its communication work.

Communication plan grounded in the operation

In all the plans studied, strategic development and communication planning was taken as a whole. The communication plans are clearly based on the initiatives' strategic aims and objectives. The majority of plans lean towards a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the operation and from this, derive relevant communication goals and priority target groups. They refer to the region, the network or a product or strategic area as support for the communication.

One initiative introduces its communication plan by defining its purpose:

“To use strategic communication to raise awareness of the need for initiative X and its strategic direction and facilitate achievement of the project’s goal.”

Another states that its communication plan:

“... is based on the industrial development which the region has undergone... and the overall goals and offerings which constitute the actual basis for innovation system X. Thus, the plan aims to link together proposed communication goals and plans with the background and goal of the innovation system.”

In some cases, the communication plan was more in the nature of a strategic plan or business plan, with communication secondary to marketing, product and market development or strategic development.

However, the majority of communication plans grounded their communication in the operation and its circumstances whilst maintaining an emphasis on the contribution of strategic communication to the results. This is a criterion for strategic communication.

Vision, message and offering

The communication plans also pick up the operations' visions and overall goals, messages and offerings and carry these on in communication terms. One way is to frame the joint report on the initiative so as to clarify the background, why it exists, who is involved, what is desired and what is being offered. Based on this account, it is possible to then draft the core values, message and offering to be communicated.

Another way is to start with the operation's vision and mission (assignments) and build communication strategies based on these. For example:

“By 2025, Region X will be an internationally leading milieu for research and business development within Y strategic areas.”

(Vision)

“X contributes to the creation of new knowledge, new products and new markets as well as being internationally distinguished by collaboration with the knowledge of academia, the energy of entrepreneurs and their mutual development opportunities.”

(Mission)

Translated into strategies in the communication plan, this involves such things as increasing individual reliability by building legitimacy for the initiative and clarifying its offering through continuous dialogue with companies and researchers.

Linking strategic goals and communication goals

The link between the initiatives' strategic goals and the communication goals derived from them has been clearly worked into several communication plans. In some plans, this has been accomplished systematically so that each strategic goal is accompanied by a communication goal. In others, strategic goals and communication goals are stated on the basis of the priority target groups.

In general, strategic communication is characterised by a symbiosis between strategic goals and communication goals.

“Communication goals are based on X's strategic concept and vision. All participants must start their work from a commercial basis.”

It is also clear that strategic goals have had to guide communication goals and that the communication goals are drafted so as to contribute to the operation's aims and objectives.

Regional growth is included as an overall goal and default value in the majority of initiatives' communication plans, whilst some plans more readily bring out growth within their field of activity as an overall goal.

Networks and interactions between actors

Central to VINNVÄXT initiatives are the regional networks and interaction between the players in the Triple Helix which create regional growth and internationally leading innovation milieus. Ultimately, networks and interactions are what communication is about. Consistent with this, the internal mobilisation of partners and interested parties in the region is one of two recurrent themes in the communication plans.

A large number of the plans deal with identifying and prioritising the target groups at home and conducting communication activities targeted at these. One initiative describes its communication plan as:

"A regional initiative for increased involvement" with the aim of "having at least 50 participants in the affiliation... through the active cultivation of companies and departments in the local area".

Another focuses even more clearly on regional mobilisation, with the communication plan mentioning the initiative as a tool for regional leadership:

"The regional leadership is based on a collaboration between actors in different sectors (corporate, administrative and research), with different values and work situations. This sets a requirement that the process management will get everyone pulling in the same direction. A crucial success factor is the creation of common outlooks and approaches to circumstances and opportunities and the efforts required from everyone."

Attraction and brand

The other consistent theme in the communication plans is attraction and international prominence, but this has nothing like the same prominence as the internal regional mobilisation. The relative weighting can be illustrated by the initiative that aims to become well-known in Sweden, Europe and internationally and also be associated with cutting-edge expertise in its field of activity. However, it falls back on what is vital in the short term to engage and motivate its most important co-financiers.

Several communication plans emphasise the importance of attractiveness in generating regional growth and developing into an internationally strong research and innovation milieu. The plans most often employ an intraregional perspective in the short term and strategically, whilst the vision

and goals can aim further. One initiative states its external communication goal as follows:

“The external communication will generate interest in initiative X and our region. It will be associated with strong research and innovation milieus and attract researchers, innovators and businesspeople.”

A common identity and profile and a strong brand are important elements in the plans. Some initiatives have put a great deal of work into defining their brand in relation to those of the contributing actors, other regional actors and VINNVAÄXT and VINNOVA. This is a visible result of the brand discussions held with a number of initiatives under the auspices of VINNOVA’s communication coaching and which for many of them has acted as a catalyst in clarifying identity and core values.

Target groups, channels and activities

The traditional elements of the communication plan such as goal, message, target groups, channels and activities were present in all communication plans studied. The emphasis was consistently on the target groups. Many plans design their messages or offerings on a strategic level and link them to their priority target groups, which then acted as guidance in designing the plans.

The plans also had a very strong emphasis on target groups in industry, academia and the public sector within the individual initiative and region. In a number of plans, the target groups were precisely defined, occasionally even by name, giving the communication plan more of the nature of an activity or action plan. Target groups outside the initiative or region often end up categorised as “Other” or “Miscellaneous”.

“The communication plan for initiative X is clearly limited to five well-defined target groups. In total, these groups consist of about 300 people.”

“In total, we estimate the target group to be about 50-70 people involved in or vital to initiative X and we will therefore be working via direct contact and involvement in various projects.”

The chosen channels and activities in the communication plans are essentially the standard ones.

3 Impacts of communication coaching on strategic development

Prior to the start of the communication coaching in 2006, a number of the VINNVÄXT winners were interviewed (Uppsala BIO, ProcessIT Innovations, New Tools for Health and Fiber Optic Valley) about their position on the communication work and the challenges they saw ahead.

Common to all four winners were difficulties in getting the right balance between internal communication in the region on the one hand and external communication nationally and internationally on the other. Another difficulty was getting the participants in the initiative to put across a common message. There were also problems in communicating the meaning of the Triple Helix concept.

The winners also expressed hopes for VINNOVA's communication coaching. They looked forward to an opportunity for experience-sharing and learning from other initiatives, but also wanted the emphasis of support to be more on communication strategies than communication tools and techniques.

During implementation of the communication coaching, it became much clearer that winners' work on strategic communication will increasingly involve planning and control of the operation as a whole. Communication efforts and strategic development were merging and it became apparent that communication tools could be used to identify and analyse critical strategic issues.

In the spring of 2008, two years after the introduction, VINNOVA held interviews with the process managers and communicators with the eight VINNVÄXT winners and five candidates to follow up the impacts of the communication coaching. A total of 20 people were interviewed. Those present were asked how they had found the communication coaching and what role it would play in their communication work and strategic development of their programmes.

The interviews showed that the communication coaching in a number of initiatives had been used to focus and develop the operation, identify and prioritise target groups, define messages and strategic concepts and clarify the division of internal roles and in the interaction between the actors in the

region. Elsewhere, the support had a more limited effect on the communication work and strategic development.

The following is a list of three areas in which the interviewees indicated that VINNOVA's communication coaching and other communication efforts had given clear impacts on the operation and in which communication tools contributed to:

- clarifying and setting a strategic concept or strategic goal.

By working to draft a primary message and tailored message, several of the initiatives were able to clarify their business concepts and set strategic goals. Aided by "storytelling", reports on their activity and an analysis of their core values, they were able to build a common, clear basis for their activity.

In several initiatives, brand discussions were held which helped demarcate the responsibility boundaries of the initiative and define it in relation to its members, other actors in the region, and VINNOVA and VINNVÄXT. At the same time, a clearer brand helped in stipulating the particular activity.

- identifying and prioritising target groups

For many initiatives, the target group analysis played an important role, not only in the communication work but also in identifying and prioritising their partners, supporters and customers. Thanks to the target group analysis, the role division was put on the agenda and it was possible to clarify relationships with important actors in the Triple Helix.

With some prioritising target groups also led on to a focus in the operation and prioritisation of strategic areas.

- driving interaction structures between actors

The work with communication strategies and creating effective communication channels has also contributed to the creation of effective interaction structures, both within the initiative and between it and the regional actors. Many initiatives were the driving force in starting a regional Triple Helix and forming new meeting places and networks.

The very essence of several of the initiatives is the creation of structures for communication and mutual confidence. This in turn creates values in the operation amongst its members and typifies the way in which strategic communication and strategic development are merging.

Based on the interviews conducted, the following two sections examine conditions and circumstances which could explain why the communication efforts of many of the initiatives gave clear results, not just in their communication work but also in their operations and overall development. At the same time, communication coaching in other initiatives had a more limited impact.

Please note that the assessments made relate to how it was possible to use VINNOVA's communication coaching in the initiative and the impacts on their strategic development. As such, the assessments do not evaluate individual initiatives, whether they are functioning well or less well, or whether they are more or less successful.

3.1 Occasions when the support had clear impacts on the operation

With a number of initiatives, VINNOVA's communication coaching had obvious positive impacts. These are at different stages of development and include both existing VINNÄXT winners and candidates.

Common to all of them was an interest in receiving the communication coaching. All of them fully utilised the support – they took part in joint meetings and accepted the opportunity of individual coaching. They also all appeared to have stable organisations with no internal battles, which enabled them to receive communicative support.

What they also had in common was some kind of communication plan, even if some candidates had not progressed very far with them. They were able to utilise the support to work out more or less clear communication strategies.

Through VINNOVA's communication coaching, the initiatives have also moved from being heavily product-orientated to being more customer-orientated in their operations.

One explanation for the ability of VINNOVA's communication coaching to impact on the strategic development is the actual organisation of the support. The combination of joint training sessions, experience-sharing and coaching did work well for a number of them.

Through the joint training sessions, the participants learned the basic principles of communication and gained access to communicative tools. The experience-sharing made it possible to learn from each other's work whilst the individual coaching, which was often particularly worthwhile, afforded the opportunity for initiatives to get to grips with their own challenges.

Another explanation for the communication coaching in these initiatives having more pronounced impacts on the strategic planning is that their process managers were interested in participating in the communication coaching and had the ability to fully take it on board.

Furthermore, it was highly significant that process managers and communicators participated in both the mutual training sessions and seminars and the individual coaching. The process managers thereby

understood the strategic importance of communication. The communicators felt strengthened in their roles and less isolated than previously.

A third explanation for the obvious impacts is that they were also able to use the communicative tools they could access, e.g. target group analysis and message formulation, in their own strategic development. Aided by these tools, they could identify target groups and define the various actors' roles in the initiative and region.

Because the division of roles was clearer, the interaction within the initiative and region could be developed and messages tailored to different target groups. This in turn occasioned smooth running of the innovation system. A number of the interviewees also considered the communication coaching to have contributed in speeding up their internal processes

“VINNOVA’s communication coaching is the single most important factor in our initiative progressing so rapidly. We have had international benchmarking and they were impressed by how far we have come on relatively small sums. This was because we were able to mobilise around a concept.”

Initially, a number of programmes were not expecting much from the communication coaching, although they did welcome experience-sharing with the others. However, during the course of the support their eyes were opened to the importance of communication to strategic development.

This in turn meant that initiatives became stiffer in their requirements of the communication coaching. In some cases it was felt that VINNOVA's support had been too general and therefore not sufficiently worthwhile. It was therefore impressed upon VINNOVA that it should gradually develop the support into something more operational.

3.1.1 When communication coaching was strategically orientated

Several initiatives emphasised the importance of VINNOVA's requirement for a communication plan, which for many meant holding a more focused discussion about their operations. They were able to clarify the division of roles within the particular process, set priorities within the operator and gain an increased understanding of their target groups and how to communicate with them

The work of producing communication plans was eased due to there being both joint and individual elements to the communication coaching. The joint training provided instruction in the basic principles of communication and important tools in the work of identifying target groups and bringing out core values and messages. Above all, the joint meetings laid the groundwork

for an enhanced understanding of the importance of communication in the initiatives' overall strategic development.

Through the individual coaching, they were aided in identifying their own problems and opportunities. For the communicators, there has been the valuable opportunity of a professional sounding board to test ideas.

The process manager of one initiative thinks that for their part, the joint meetings got them interested in the individual support. Without the joint meetings, they would not have chosen to progress to individual coaching, which for them had greater impacts than they could have anticipated.

“You have to go and hold discussions with each initiative; relatively minor efforts produce a lot. I think the large, general initiatives are a way of understanding the importance of the individual support. If we hadn’t had those general meetings, I don’t suppose we would have gone on to the individual support.”

The experience-sharing with the other initiatives was also felt to be important. Although they operate within widely diverse fields of activity, they do face similar challenges on the particular issue of communication.

Several initiatives initially had difficulty in seeing the importance of communication in a broader strategic perspective. For these, the support initially seemed a little coercive, like something they were compelled to attend in order to get funding from VINNOVA.

As things have progressed however, the importance of communication has become much clearer and they have started making demands on VINNOVA concerning the design of the communication coaching.

In many respects, for VINNOVA, it has been a challenge to adapt the joint elements of the support to suit both those initiatives which have not got so far with the strategic process and their communication work, and those which are already established and have sound expertise in communication.

For this balancing act to succeed, it has been of the greatest importance for the VINNOVA programme managers to show that they are listening and taking on board both criticism and good advice from the initiatives. A number of those interviewed emphasised this listening as something of major significance to the impacts of the communication throughout the operation.

3.1.2 Process management's open attitude to the support

The communication coaching has also had clear impacts on strategic development in those initiatives where process management is early to realise the strategic importance of communication.

For one initiative, which previously had no particular communicator, the involvement of the process management in the communication coaching made them realise that they actually needed a “proper” communicator.

For a number of the process managers, the opportunities of the communication have been something of an eye-opener. One process manager said that through the communication training, he had learnt that communication is not only handled by communicators. The communicator in the same initiative confirmed that from the outset, communication had been something of a side-issue. Now, people’s eyes have been opened to the importance of prioritising communication and having it as an integral part of the operation.

Communication has also had an impact. When a major American concern bought out a company in the region some while back, they were so impressed that they chose to locate their European sales office there. The purchased company is now undergoing major expansion.

“I believe that the communication coaching has been significant to the region’s competitiveness. It has brought a new dimension to research and development. Our region is not known for R&D or a qualified workforce. Through communicating this effort outwardly, we are strengthening our region inwardly.”

For the communicators, it was very important for the process managers to also take an active part in the communication coaching, thus raising the importance of communication in strategic development. For this reason, it has been possible to bring a communication perspective into the strategic planning.

“It has helped us to define what we really are. This would not have been the case if just one communicator and not the whole management had attended the support.”

The process leader for one initiative confirms that by taking active part in the communication coaching, he now realises the strategic importance of communication to the operation.

“It is a good thing that VINNOVA has invested in this. I had underestimated how important the communication work is to the whole process. Through the communication work, we formulate

what we stand for, our core values, our target groups etc. We are forced to prioritise and focus.”

The fact that VINNOVA has emphasised communication in this way is highly significant in itself. Communication issues have gained increased status. There has been a realisation on several levels within the initiatives that communication is more than a graphic profile and nice websites and brochures.

One communicator indicated that because VINNOVA has raised this issue, she has received backup in the management group in entirely different way than previously. The process management is beginning to understand that communication is not something separate and belongs with the overall strategic development. For her part, this communicator believes that, despite a university education specifically in communication, VINNOVA's support has given her new tools for things like media relations.

According to this communicator, one important lesson for VINNOVA is involving the entire process management in the communication work right from the start. One way is to invite the entire management to an introductory meeting or kick-off and then allow the process manager and communicator to take an active part in the support.

One conclusion from the interviews is that a prerequisite for the communication coaching to impact on strategic development is for the process management to be involved right from the start. This has been the case in all initiatives where the support held major significance.

3.1.3 Communication tools used for strategic development

In those initiatives where the communication work has been integrated into strategic development, it has been possible to make practical use of the communicative tools available via the support, such as target group analysis and message formulation.

This has led to increased organisational clarity within initiatives. They have been able to identify their target groups and gain greater clarity in regard to internal role division. Thus, they have found it easier to prioritise fields of activity and between partners, interested parties and other actors.

One example is an initiative which initially lacked a communication plan and which had paid no attention to the role of communication in its operation. Chiefly through the individual coaching, they realised the importance of communication in strategic development. Aided by the consultants, they were then able to produce a better conceived communication plan.

In conjunction with this, the division of roles was clarified. There was the realisation that a vital target group had previously been overlooked, namely other growth factors in the region such as incubators, financiers and the regional growth companies.

This new insight has affected the working method. It now seems easier to communicate with the actors and for outside actors to see what the initiative is offering. This has speeded up the process and the network has grown more rapidly.

“The most important innovation system became tighter and more stable, thanks to the communication plan and our becoming more reliable.”

“As we have got better at communicating, we have clarified other growth actors. It has become easier for those who are not direct project partners to see their overall role.”

The process manager confirmed that a great deal more money is now being spent on communication than before and sees this as necessary investment.

The process manager of another initiative said that through the target group analysis, they realised they were “aiming too wide”. From originally having 100 companies as a target group, they have now chosen to focus on 25.

“The support gave the strategic planning clearer content. We focused on developing our field and generating interest in the project. This was how we brought the actors together into a Triple Helix. I already have access to them all through my network, but the coaching gave me a message to give them which made them choose to join in.”

Several of the initiatives encountered a need for communicative support from the outset of which they had initially been unaware. One process manager said that an unexpected (and significant) result of the communication coaching was that they had succeeded in formulating their brand.

“We had no real expectations. On our way there, we were wondering what sort of thing it might be. We attend so many meetings; there’s a plethora of meeting venues. The communication coaching was yet another meeting. We had hoped it would be good and we were pleasantly surprised.”

The brand discussion facilitated network-building for this initiative. A common brand has been created to which all actors can belong without relinquishing their own.

3.2 Occasions when the support had more limited impacts on the operation

VINNOVA's communication coaching had more limited impacts on the strategic development of some initiatives. This was the case for both VINNVÄXT winners and candidates. Above all, the explanation may lie partly in that the communication coaching was not in step with their other processes and partly that organisation, structures and personal composition were unstable and that they were not therefore entirely prepared to accept or incorporate the support.

With some of the established VINNVÄXT initiatives, VINNOVA's communication coaching was offered when there was already a functioning communication network with a communication manager and other activities in progress. In these cases, VINNOVA's communication coaching was seen as good and beneficial, if somewhat basic. They also received individual coaching. However, the support has not had the same clear impacts on strategic development observable in the above initiatives, where the communication coaching could drive forward, clarify and even change the emphasis of the operation.

With the VINNVÄXT candidates, the communication coaching came into the process early, in some cases perhaps too early to be fully utilised. Through the support, they have come to see strategic communication as a tool for developing their operations, positioning themselves and creating attractiveness in the region and beyond. However, there has not been time or resources to fully process the knowledge in the operation. There again, the support has made them well aware of the opportunities of strategic communication for ongoing strategic development.

A lack of clarity in the initiatives' organisations entailing a failure to assimilate the support also explains why the impacts of the communication coaching were more limited. Several have implemented changes to their organisations or direction and new people have come into the process management. There may also have been a lack of involvement by the management which has affected their chances of using the communication coaching in strategic development.

When support did not keep pace with the programme

One initiative found it had better communication expertise than several others. For these, the primary benefit of the communication coaching was that, through the joint knowledge and experience meetings, they received feedback and affirmation of their own communication activities and assistance in developing these further. This applied to webpages, communication strategies and plans and the internal communication work.

There again, the communication coaching has not meant any overall change to them. They have sharpened up and their communicators have been supported in promoting the importance of communication internally.

“I think the communication coaching has been a good tool when speaking to those who don’t believe communication is very important. It makes a good bat.”

At the same time, the interviewees from the same initiative stressed the importance of including communication from the outset in order to achieve goals for growth and competitiveness established for the VINNVÄXT winners by VINNOVA.

Another initiative, already established for a number of years, was already working with traditional communication tools such as meetings, press contacts, trade fairs, brochures and websites to raise awareness with its internal target groups and profile itself outwardly. It also utilised individual coaching to a limited extent, largely relying on its own resources.

However, they are aware of the importance of communication and see the principal value of the communication coaching in its quality assurance of communication. The support has also contributed by adding professionalism to the communication.

“I understand VINNOVA’s principal of having a joint programme. It serves as a lowest common denominator for the initiatives. We all have different circumstances and it is good to have a discussion partner and an assessment point.”

VINNOVA has provided a toolbox from which things can be selected as required. This was confirmed in parts of the activities that drew investment. However, the communication coaching has not had any vital strategic significance or influenced the strategic development in any particular direction. The efforts which this initiative made for increased visibility and a higher profile, and which helped heighten self-esteem and self-confidence, are not seen primarily as a result of the communication coaching although it may have contributed.

The VINNVÄXT candidates gained access to VINNOVA’s communication coaching one year later than the VINNVÄXT winners. They are also at an earlier stage of growth than the winners. It was therefore harder to determine how the communication coaching has contributed to the strategic development of the candidates than it was for the winners.

With one of the candidates, the support gave them the ability early on to focus on their inherent contradictions. They were therefore compelled to lay

aside work on the communication plan for a while and still do not feel they are there yet.

However, it is still valuable to have the communication coaching early on. The programme was helped in identifying certain target groups they had missed and which were important to regional mobilisation; informal regional powers, opinion makers and politicians for example. The support has helped them gain a structure and professionalism in the field of communication rather than just “firing off some activities”.

“We have got into this issue and held discussions in the process management. We have jointly work through the issues of target groups and messages etc. It has been most significant. We have gained a view of the strategic importance of communication.”

For another VINNVÄXT candidate, the communication coaching was the catalyst in getting on course. They received help in becoming visible, reaching out broadly and generally getting known in the region’s Triple Helix. The communication coaching also provided an awareness of the importance of communication by talking about the issues and thus making them visible. However, it is too early to comment on its effects on strategic development.

“Raising awareness of the role of communication has been important, but not crucial to the strategic development. We have now taken on board the message and commenced a process which leads further.”

It was a good thing and important to have the communication coaching right from the start and this shortened the maturing process. However, at the same time they have not really managed to follow it up. The knowledge and experience meetings were good, but the coaching was far too little of an ongoing process and more of a flash in the pan. There has also been a lack of incentive to collaborate with other initiatives.

One conclusion is that it is important for the communication coaching to reach the initiative early so as to have a greater impact. However, at the same time there are greater requirements in an immature organisation for the support to be adapted to its own processes and followed up with well-implemented coaching.

3.2.1 When the organisation did not fully absorb the support

When the initiatives did not fully familiar themselves with the communication coaching or had difficulty utilising it in its strategic development, this was often because the structure internally and towards

other actors was unclear. Alternatively, the organisation or personnel at the time may have been unable to assimilate the support.

Only following organisational changes or a repetition was it possible to start utilising the communication coaching more actively. One interviewee pointed out that VINNOVA should have had a more in-depth discussion with the initiatives before starting the support, so as to bring out wishes and clear goals. VINNOVA could also have set higher and clearer standards for them.

A newly appointed representative of one initiative that did not use the individual coaching until later in the process thinks the individual support would have been very important, had they chosen to utilise it effectively. They now lack a proper communication strategy and a clear message. It would have been effective to have coaching in producing the communication strategy right from the outset.

One explanation for the individual coaching not being fully absorbed was that they already felt their outreach was good and that they were well known in the region. However, they did not feel they had really moved forward in the joint training and that there could have been more emphasis on the initiatives and experience-sharing between them.

Following a repetition of the individual coaching, there is now an increased awareness of communication coaching by the initiative. The communication has been integrated into the strategic process and through the target group analysis, the working method has been systematised. The aim is not reaching everyone so much as realising the importance of addressing the individual.

One VINNVÄXT candidate, which also had a newly appointed process management, was active for many years in a different form but had communication difficulties and had not succeeded in “getting anywhere”, as they put it. Aided by individual coaching and support from VINNOVA in the brand strategy work – “Branded House”/”House of Brands”– it has now been able to define itself in relation to its members and other surrounding actors, where the boundaries had previously been unclear.

“One lesson which VINNOVA can draw is to include the brand strategy – ‘Branded House/House of Brands’ – and the relationship between the Triple Helix and the brand strategy early on in the communication training. VINNOVA can do a great deal of good there.”

The initiative has now gained a clearer role both internally and externally. On the other hand, there is the feeling that the communication coaching had

limited impacts on their strategic planning or on network-building in the region.

A third initiative implemented a major reorganisation of its communication activity during the period and therefore did not use VINNOVA's communication coaching at all. It set out its own vision, goals and communication strategy for its operation and a range of communication activities such as seminars and a newsletter have been implemented. A communication plan linked to the strategic plan has also been produced. Only now is a need being felt within the programme for communication coaching from VINNOVA.

In the beginning, many initiatives also had a vague understanding of the content of the communication coaching and its benefits to them. The expectations had been set low and in many cases were exceeded.

"VINNOVA's aim was not expressed particularly clearly. After the first meeting, it became clear that it would be about communication. The fact that it would lead to a communication plan was above expectations."

It is also the case that VINNOVA did not always managed to show the benefit of the communication coaching being offered to the initiatives. Also, they would not always find the joint meetings or coaching worthwhile. For this reason it was essential, particularly in the individual coaching, for the operational support to be adapted to their set requirements. For example, communications strategy help in defining themselves and their offering, determining their role in the interaction with other actors in the region, or clarifying their brand. In the absence of definite benefit, interest in the support as well as its impacts was limited.

However, the process managers and communicators generally expressed great appreciation for VINNOVA's communication coaching and the efforts of the consultants. They also stated that they benefited from the joint knowledge and experience meetings and the individual coaching.

3.3 Lessons from the VINNVÄXT programme's perspective

When VINNOVA introduced its communication coaching to the VINNVÄXT programme in January 2006, the underlying idea was that communication was an important component of the initiatives' development and that it should be possible to integrate it into the operation. At the same time, there was a fairly vague idea about what form the support should take. This was gradually sorted out as attempts were made to solve problems which arose.

For example, in the beginning it was not envisaged that individual coaching would be offered. However it became clear quite early on that a number of initiatives needed support in a way which they could not get merely through joint communication training. Because the participants had such changing needs and changing communication abilities, a more individually orientated support became desirable.

For several of the initiatives, message exercises, target group analysis and brand issues were central parts of the communication coaching. Clarifying roles within the initiatives was important not least of all because a number of them are linked to universities with their own informants and because a number also had strong companies which had chosen to promote their own brands.

The programme managers at VINNOVA think one of the most important lessons is that the support must be needs-driven. It is not enough to offer the initiatives general talks on communication. Since many of the participants lack a communication background, communication issues in themselves have not been enough to arouse interest.

For the programme managers, it has been a challenge to highlight the concrete help which the communication coaching has offered and thereby get the process managers to set aside time for communication training, individual coaching and experience-sharing.

“Where it concerns communication knowledge, the participants’ levels are very diverse. However, if there is a major focus on reality it becomes interesting to everyone.”

“It has to be extremely individually based. You have to really show ‘what’s in it for you’, otherwise nobody will come.”

The initiatives themselves have expressed their wish that the support should be operationally designed. Working in this way from a bottom-up perspective with initiatives bringing their own requests has been a guiding principle for all the communication coaching work.

For their part, the programme managers have made it a requirement that both the communication managers and process managers should take an active part in the communication coaching. This has been pushed hard and is something which the programme managers now regard as an important success factor. Because the process managers’ eyes were opened to the importance of communication, it was possible to integrate it into the strategic planning in a way which would otherwise have been impossible. It has actually been difficult to distinguish between communication coaching and support for the strategic development.

This is borne out by the VINNOVA programme managers:

“We don’t just finance R&D. We also talk about strategic development. It’s completely wrong to call that communication training. We’re actually offering a form of strategic development which leads to a number of strategic decisions in projects.”

One lesson has been that it is important for the communication coaching to be brought in early. By request from the original VINNVÄXT winners, the five candidates have therefore been allowed to benefit from the support before being appointed as VINNVÄXT winners.

The programme managers can now see that the candidates are generally better at expressing what they are and who their target groups are than the original VINNVÄXT winners were at the same stage.

For the initiatives, it is entirely central to be able to craft their message. In this regard, the programme managers think several initiatives still have some way to go before they can demonstrate definite examples and communicate why and for whom they exist.

“Communication planning has proved an important tool in strategic development and for project action plans. It has helped clarify messages and offerings to important target groups. Projects must be able to communicate with their important target groups in order to mobilise in their regions and convince new markets. For this reason, communication is more than just learning how to communicate.”

In those cases where the communication coaching only had limited impacts on the strategic development, the initiatives found it difficult for various reasons to absorb the communication coaching. Some believe they were left too much to their own devices in regard to designing the individual coaching.

The programme managers believe that clearer individual plans would have been needed for the coaching in order to get to grips with this. It would also be desirable for the VINNOVA programme managers to take a more active part in this work initially. The communication coaching could also have been more clearly designed as an undertaking by the initiative.

The programme managers confirmed that they have been more involved in the communication coaching than was originally conceived. Their reward has been to see their communication coaching to some of the projects having major significance in their strategic development.

The VINNVÄXT programme's communication coaching has been an inspiration to such things as the EU project Baltic Sea Region Innonet, in which the cluster managers in the Baltic Sea Region were offered similar support as part of an overall process support. Also the EU-funded regional structural funds programmes in which communication is frequently offered as part of the support to the cluster managers.

4 Building innovation systems using communication – closing thoughts

Not uncommonly, there is a perception that communication issues should be distinct from strategic ones. This is sometimes evident in how operations are organised, with the communicators located barely a stone's throw from where strategic decisions are taken. This is seen with fair regularity in the strategies. First to be solved are strategic issues, decision about goals, visions, strategies and plans. Then there are discussions on how to take what has been decided to personnel and the outside world.

VINNOVA's VINNVÄXT programme offers many examples of a different approach. This documentation of the VINNVÄXT programme's communication coaching has been able to demonstrate how communication issues and strategic issues have merged and how the discussion on communication issues has honed the communication concept and raised questions about how this can be successfully realised.

In a way, an old adage has again been proved true. Communication and power to act belong together. This insight was already behind the classic rhetoric: capacity to influence is strongest with the best speaker. In recent times, the political scientist, Joseph S. Nye's concept of "soft power"¹ has gained credence. His theory is that actors can win power not just by stick and carrot, but also by making the surrounding world *want* to support their aims. This happens by communicating their ideals and values so as to win supporters. Thus, to take an example from Nye, maybe the film industry and Oscar ceremony are at least as important a part of the American geopolitical strategy as trade and security policy.

In regard to the question of innovation systems, the connection is more than apparent. Innovation systems are not just about "hard" questions such as funding, infrastructure and physical communications. According to its originators, the role of these factors is to support the human interaction which constitutes the core of the concept.² Others have pointed out that "the innovation system is an information system" and focused particularly on the strategic role of journalists and communicators in such systems.³

¹ See Nye, J.S: "Soft Power". Public Affairs Books, New York 2004.

² See e.g. Lundvall, B-Å: "National Systems of Innovation: Towards a Theory of Innovation and Interactive Learning". Pinter Publishers, London 1992.

³ See Nordfors, D: "PR and the Innovation System", Strategic Innovations, vol 1, issue 3.

Thus, the innovation system is a social system for learning and mutual creation and is held together by certain common values. In recent times, there has been an attempt to explain the occurrence of agglomerations or clusters of a given type of company in a certain place by saying that these depend on people having face-to-face contact and access to the general “buzz” of information which characterises tight innovation milieus.⁴ When Etzkowitz designed the Triple Helix model, which formed the basis amongst other things for the VINNVÄXT programme, he focused on the central role played by meeting places (“rooms”) in the innovation process: meetings take place in knowledge rooms, consensus rooms and innovation rooms.⁵

Solutions to “hard questions” are needed in order to line up the opportunities, but it is the “soft factors” which determine the intensity and quality of the innovation process. Meetings, information and communication are strategic components of the strategy.

At first glance, the communication coaching documented in this report relates specifically to communication. One of the aims of the support was for the VINNVÄXT initiatives to design communication plans. However, in a number of cases, the discussion about communication was a catalyst for a discussion on the significance of the operation itself. Questions which had previously been discussed in more general terms became “clear-cut” and tangible when set in the context of communication. For each of the questions meant for inclusion in the communication plan – the communicator language – there is an equivalent relating to the content of the operation – the operational language – which the discussions would touch on in several cases.

Communication question, example:	Operational question, example:
Who is the sender – region/initiative?	Relationship region/initiative?
What we offer – message?	What services are crucial?
Who are our target groups?	Who are the main actors?
What should the target groups think?	What value should the actors gain?
How to present the initiative as attractive?	Relationship to the actors' operation?

The relationship between the questions in the left and right-hand columns became particularly clear in connection with the individual coaching. In this context, there was opportunity to link in depth to the situation, aims and strategies of the individual initiative. There was the question of how to

⁴ See Asheim B, Coenen L, Vang J: “Face-to-face, buzz and knowledge bases”. Circle Electronic Working Papers no. 2005/4.

⁵ Etzkowitz, H: “Trippelhelix – den nya innovationsmodellen.” SNS förlag, Stockholm 2005.

support the innovation system by putting communication in its place: how to ensure that, through communication, the roles are clarified, how to prioritise various efforts within the initiative and how priority companies and researchers should be stimulated to participate and contribute in such a way that good relationships arise and confidence (“social capital”) is strengthened.

The challenge was to bridge the divide mentioned earlier between the “communication culture” and the “decision-making culture”. The seminars often related to both aspects, and links between them were sought. It was crucial that the communication coaching did not just involve traditional training but also individual coaching. However, at the same time, it was possible to note a variation between different initiatives in regard to the scope of the discussions being conducted. Some crucial factors (a more complete review appears in the section “Impacts of communication coaching”) included:

- *Timing*. If initiatives come too late, then there will be a divided organisation, distinguishing between communication and operational questions and making integration harder.
- *Interest*. When process managers as well as communicators have taken part in the seminars and coaching, the integration of operational and information questions has been easier.
- *Stability*. This is really a prerequisite for strategic action in general. When an initiative is characterised by, say, instability by the process management, the integration between communication and strategic development has suffered. Keeping an operation going under such circumstances is a challenge; integrating different functions even more so.

The fact that learning and innovating is primarily about human behaviour is nothing new. Pedagogy is classed as a behavioural science. The theories of innovation also deal with “soft” factors – from the individual level (cf theories of “lateral thinking”) to the system level (the “innovation system” concept). In a modern knowledge society, communication, meetings and information play the decisive role in stimulating such processes. It has been a long time since hierarchical organisations or centrally planned initiatives were the main solutions.

In summary, VINNOVA’s VINNVÄXT programme provides a systematic test of how to work with communication with the aim of creating and strengthening innovation systems. The communication has indicated how this is possible, as well as the challenges which may be encountered. Thus, the effort documented in this report is part of the learning in itself.

Appendix: Tools for communication coaching

VINNOVA's communication coaching aimed to give the VINNVÄXT programme a greater understanding of strategic communication, i.e. communication with a clear aim of being a tool to develop the operation in its entirety and not primarily for describing activities and portraying a positive image.

The support has been organised in joint seminars so that the VINNVÄXT winners can pass on knowledge and bring out problems of relevance to their communication planning so as to then go back to the individual initiative with coaching tailored to their own circumstances and realities.

The communication coaching was based on the communicative challenges which the initiatives faced:

- How can we be clear in our roles?
- How can we be nationally and internationally visible?
- How do we get companies, researchers and governmental actors to apply to the initiative?
- How do we prioritise between different projects within the initiative?
- What are the relationships with our members like?
- How do we generate confidence?

The concept of "attraction" has been central. The initiative must be attractive inwardly to the region, to mobilise local resources and strengthen the regional self image, and outwardly, to attract expertise, capital and people. Attractiveness has been emphasised as a strategic goal for long-term sustainable regional growth.

Translated into communication terms, the initiatives were faced with the task of defining a number of central concepts and using these in a concrete action plan for the individual initiative:

- Who is the sender?
- What is our offering?
- Who are our target groups?
- What is our message?
- What does our brand look like?

The following headings briefly review the tools which presented at the joint knowledge and experience seminars and at the individual coaching with the various initiatives.

Joint seminars

How do regions communicate? What is strategic communication?

- What are and what are not communication challenges?
 - What do we want to achieve with the communication?
 - Who do we want to reach?
- How do we communicate well?
 - Message formulation
 - Mobilisation of allies
 - Evaluation and outside monitoring
- Strategic and communication goals
 - Communication determined by targets
 - Survey the target groups – actor map
 - Formulate principal message and tailored message

“Branding Innovation”

- Regional competition and science and technology-driven innovation strategy
- Innovation milieus as brands
- Examples of regional innovation models
- Who you are—identity, context, profile, image

Communication in practice –messages and brands

- Building effective messages
 - Main message, secondary message etc.
 - ABC-bridging (answer, bridge, communicate)
- Evaluating brands
 - Include what is measurable
 - Evaluation from a communication perspective

The VINNVÄXT initiatives’ communication

- Stages in the communication planning
- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Strategic goals as the offering
- The target group analysis
- The message hierarchy
 - The VINNVÄXT effort – how do the brands relate to each other?

Communication challenges

- Changed circumstances of the communication landscape
- Communication challenges
 - Developing the principal message
 - Developing offerings
 - Explaining the brand
 - Clarifying the roles
- Communication planning – model
- Target group analysis
 - Communication goals
 - Communication strategies
 - Messages

Influence on political decisions

- Influence at national and regional level
- EU, development of structural funds and framework programmes

Trends in the marketing of innovation systems/clusters

- Trends in marketing generally and innovation systems in particular
 - Communication and strategic development fusing together
 - Trends in marketing of clusters – five voices
 - Is the Swedish trend advantageous in international communication?
- Good examples of webpages for regional efforts
 - The VINNVÄXT initiatives' webpages in English

Individual coaching

Basic organisation of individual communication planning in the initiatives

- Current situation – where are we now?
 - Strategic goals – what do we want the recipient to know, think or do?
 - Communication goals – what do we want to achieve?
 - Target groups – with whom will we be communicating?
 - Message – how do we want our message to look?
 - Channels – what channels will we use?
 - Activities – what will be done when, how and by whom?
 - Schedule and budget – what are our resources?
 - Follow-up – how we measure the results?

Communication challenges in the VINNVÄXT initiatives

- Formulating reliable and interesting accounts
- Formulating clear offerings
- Clarifying the target groups
- Selecting a communication strategy

Communication planning starting with a SWOT analysis and strategic goals

- Situation analysis using SWOT
- Determine strategic goals – what can be achieved with communication?
- Strategic goals and communication goals– how do we link the target areas to each other?
- Clarifying the target groups – which are the most important actors in order to succeed?
- Formulating the message –what can we offer the actors?

Identity and brand for growth efforts

- Why? – reason for brand orientation
- Brand work – what does it entail?
- Brand strategy for growth efforts – two ways to proceed
 - “Branded House” –identity/own brand relating to the organisation; other brands must adapt to the organisation
 - “House of Brands” – identity/own brand relating to the offering; the organisation must adapt itself to other brands
- Identity and profile

Myths and truths about communication in projects

- Common success criteria – fixed, clear goals, well-planned, keeping to scheduling and cost restraints
- Truth 1 – there is often a difference between what one does what one says
- Truth 2 – the bigger the project and the more people involved, the more important it is to have joint, *imprecise* goals
- Truth 3 – successful projects do not need to be well-planned, they just need to look it.

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VINNOVA's mission is to promote sustainable growth
by funding needs-driven research
and developing effective innovation systems

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