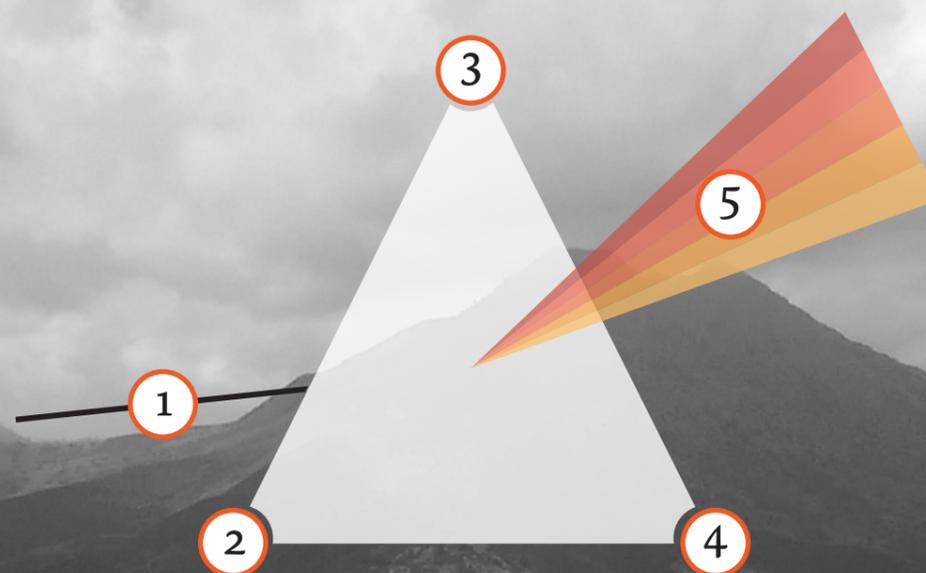


Five phases of a thought leadership strategy and the role of a communication professional in each phase

Implementing a thought leadership strategy is a continuous process that consists of several phases: discover, shape, engage, translate and communicate. These phases are illustrated in the framework below, which is a free interpretation of the Thought Leadership Framework™. Given the versatility of communication professionals, this means that there are different roles for them in the offing. To gain a better understanding of this, it is a good idea to explain the role communication can play in each phase.



“The concept of this cover was to try and connect with Pink Floyd's live shows; famous for their lighting, ambition and madness... hence the prism, the triangle and the pyramids. It all connects, somehow, somewhere.” Storm Thorgerson

1

DISCOVER

During this phase, it is up to the communication professional to study the organisation's potential for a thought leadership strategy. The question is whether or not the organisation is ready (mentally and in terms of processes) to pursue a thought leadership strategy. Communication professionals play an important role in this discovery process. It means that communication professionals must not only be given the space, but also create the space they need, to take a critical look at the organisation and to activate management to challenge conventional thinking and doing. They should at the same time have the duty to ensure that newly discovered paths are aligned with the organisation's identity and different business strategies. The relationship between these must be safeguarded.

2

SHAPE

The core of a thought leadership strategy is made up of the novel viewpoint that an organisation has. It is the communication professional's task to guide and facilitate the process of shaping this novel viewpoint and finding internal consensus on it. In this process, communication professionals are not just facilitators but also the organisations' creative partners in crime. Brainstorm sessions must be set up to elicit employees' body of ideas and to synthesize their ideas into a compelling viewpoint and storyline. Once this has fully taken shape, the communication professional is responsible for engaging employees.

3

ENGAGE

Ensuring departments feel energised by the novel viewpoint is not enough on its own. Their actual contribution to the greater good is just as important. The departments have to become empowered so that there is room for internal innovation. The shaping of a thought leadership position is intended for creating a framework; the actual content must have a broad support base. The philosophy behind the company's viewpoints has to penetrate to the very core of the organisation so that it becomes everyone's story. The communication professional must consciously capitalise on this by constantly getting employees involved, asking for feedback, keeping them up-to-date as transparently as possible, and inviting them to contribute ideas.

4

TRANSLATE

It is important that the novel viewpoint aligns with the various activities within the organisation. Thought leadership is not just about the mental aspects, but it must also trickle down into the processes. As someone monitoring the process, the communication professional can make this necessary conversion in cooperation with the relevant members of management.

5

COMMUNICATE

This phase is focused on 'evangelising' the novel viewpoint. The goal is of course to inspire the market and society, to point out new paths, and to find a listening ear among likeminded stakeholders. Communication naturally plays a central role in this. Efforts must be made to find an effective strategy (and a mix of resources geared toward this) so that it is possible to create a platform for dialogue, conversation and future collaboration with like-minded stakeholders. After all, the novel viewpoint must be able to connect with the audience, and be placed on the public agenda.