Case study – Swiss Federal Audit Office

Inputs on national practices and practical experiences

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Agenda

1. Reasons of a SFAO New communication strategy
2. Concrete measures
3. Indicators and monitoring
4. Examples and lessons learning
5. Challenges
1. New communication strategy – Reasons

• From 2014 onwards
• New SFAO Management
• Reasons :
  
  o More and more transparency: Extensive use of the Federal Act on Freedom of Information in the Administration (FoAI, 2006) by NGOs, private associations, lobbies, journalists...
  
  o Termination of a governmental IT Project (2012, circa €120 mio) and strong political reactions at Swiss Parliament (2014).
  
  o Multiple risks for SFAO and our audited entities:
    • Suboptimal and uncoordinated communication
    • Misunderstandings with audited entities
    • Unequal treatment of media (suspicion of connivance, lost of credibility...)
    • Press articles and quality of information (where are the efforts/measures of audited entities?)

DeGEval Jahrestagung Online, 17.9-18.9.2020
2. New communication strategy – Measures

• Publish, publish, publish...

• Since 2014: SFAO published *circa 50 audits and evaluations* per year

• **Annual Report** (4 languages, new layout...) & **Publications’ programme** issued 6 times per year

• **Internet** – New website, social media (Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram) and soon, short videos (YouTube)

• **Equal treatment** (Parliament, Associations, Lobbies, Journalists, Medias...)

• **Reply quickly and comprehensively** to the Parliament, to the press and to the public
2. New communication strategy – Lessons

• No more media release / Press embargo : 3 days
  o Importance of summary (max. 2 pages, in a journalistic way)
  o Journalists need time to understand, to contact audited entities and... to write

• Vulgarisation as a cornerstone of our strategy
  o avoid the blah blah trap
  o use of cartoons, visualisation, videos...

• Training – Courses for auditors and evaluators
  o how to write clearly... to be read
  o focus on the reader (do not write for your colleague...)
  o concrete vs abstraction, concrete examples
  o media training / My Three Minute Audit / Evaluation
3. New communication strategy – Indicators

- **Active publications** vs publications based upon FoAI

![Graph showing the constant increase in publications since 2014](image)
3. New communication strategy – Indicators

• Measuring the media presence

Résonnance médiatique du CDF (2014–2020, prov.)
Nombre d'articles de presse écrite, en ligne ou radio/TV citant le CDF (articles en langue allemande en bleu, en français en rouge)

Source : Swissdox, CDF

Remarque : en raison de la concentration des médias, un même article peut être compté plusieurs fois alors qu'il est diffusé dans plusieurs titres différents.
3. New communication strategy – Indicators

- Media Monitoring for SFAO Management
3. New communication strategy – Evaluation

• Evaluation of SFAO external communication by a PR Agency (2014 and 2017).
  
  o Very good results in terms of media presence, quality of publication (even if, still complex to understand) and institutional trustworthiness.

  o SFAO media presence : well improved without negative impact on our image.

  o Areas to improve and recommendations
4. New communication strategy – examples

• Four evaluations / audits that have provided information for the public debate
  
  o **Free ports** and open customs warehouses, 2014
  o Decommissioning and disposal for funds for **nuclear installations**, 2014
  o **Prospective impact assessments** conducted for legislative projects (Federal Council dispatches), 2016
  o Transfer of **war material**, 2018

It will be a “professional mistake” to forget to mention these audits in a newspaper article regarding these topics. Or in a political intervention in the Parliament. Or in an official governmental paper.
4. New communication strategy – examples

• Good topics to investigate, because resulting from highly valuable risks analysis

• Very critical results (E=Evaluation / A=Audits)
  
  o E / Free ports: lack of federal surveillance and risks in terms of money-laundering activities in relation with illicit tracking in cultural propriety.

  o E / Prospective impact assessments: official projections are unreliable and reflections are incomplete.

  o A / Transfer of war material: federal control network for war material exports is too weak and insufficiently coordinated.
4. New communication strategy – examples

• **Political debate** already launched several years ago
  - Free ports: Switzerland and money-laundering issues
  - Decommissioning and disposal funds: Switzerland plans to phase out nuclear power
  - Prospective impact assessments: Switzerland votes four times per year and the Federal Council previsions are always a matter of debate
  - Transfer of war material: Switzerland debates for years about its neutral and peaceful tradition vs exporting arms

• **Huge media impact** (more than 500 articles in a case...)

• Audited **Entities Feedback** was sometimes strong... and add fuel to the fire.
5. New communication strategy – challenges

• Auditors and evaluators have to **deal more and more with communication issues**
  
  o With audited entities: “Yes, the report will be published”
  o Contact with the press

    -> Training and media courses / A step in internal QS

• SFAO Management take **more and more time to justify why and how we published our works**

  o Risk: the public debate is sometimes not about our results but on SFAO as information provider.
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