

Evaluation Study of the Human Capital Operational Programme's Communication Strategy

By Quaternaire Portugal

Executive Summary

Scope

This report presents the Executive Summary of the Evaluation Study of the Human Capital Operational Programme (HCOP) 2014-2020's Communication Strategy (CS), analysing its implementation till 30 th june 2020 and covering the approach to four evaluation questions (EQ), relevance/pertinence; effectiveness, efficiency and impacts.

About the Communication Strategy

The HCOP's Communication Strategy has been programmed on a basis of 4,3 million €, presenting at 30.06.2020 an execution rate of 51,7% of the total amount of funds programmed. This is a very ambitious CS concerning its expected results: not only results regarding the divulgation and communication of the instruments supported by the HCOP, fostering demand, but also results concerning the improvement of the public perception about the use of ESF in Portugal and the perception that Portuguese people has about the skills and inclusion of Portuguese society.

The CS is structured in three implementation phases: take-off (universal access); divulgation (public notoriety) and consolidation (good practices and final evaluation). The ambition concerning results is in line with a vast set of diversified materials and communication instruments, principally Fairs and External Events and the TV and the digital communication campaigns (press and social media).

Methodology

The HCOP's Communication Strategy evaluation represents a pioneer application of a Theory-based evaluation, combining the elaboration of a Theory of Change (ToC), that has been discussed and validated in meetings with the HCOP Management Body and with members of the Evaluation Follow-up Group, with principles of realistic and evidence-based evaluation. This methodology is the formalised result of Quaternaire Portugal's experience developed along different evaluation exercises. The evaluation encompassed a sequence of three reports, as Initial Report dedicated to methodological questions, an Interim Report conceived by the evaluation team as an anticipation of the Final Report and a Final Report, culminating all the evaluation work, after having incorporated in all the three phases the commentaries elaborated by the Follow-up Group.

All the evaluation work has been based on a multi-method analysis, with the ToC framework supporting the process, involving principally the following gathering and treatment information processes: (i) desk-research of all the communication materials used by the Communication Team, HCOP Execution Reports, CS's implementation reports and literature about the evolution of communication processes; (ii) a very robust survey targeted at the Portuguese population in general and two electronic surveys addresses to beneficiaries and final recipients of the OP; (iii)

semi-directive interviews with institutional actors involved in the HCOP’s implementation and in communication processes; (iv) three focus-groups with communication experts and people charged of leading the communication of programmes and projects involving ESIF and people involved in the HCOP’s implementation. As the evaluation has been done in pandemic context, all the interactions with stakeholders have been developed through ZOOM and TEAMS platforms.

The Evaluation Narrative

Considering that the CS’s implementation phases targeted different publics and the ambitious goals established and strictly in line with the ToC supporting the evaluation, mainly of the CS impacts, the evaluation narrative is built from the robust results achieved by the survey to the Portuguese population and comparing them with the results achieved by the electronic surveys addressed to beneficiaries and final recipients of HCOP measures. This approach is important since it works first with the notoriety results revealed by publics which are more distant from the HCOP actions and of ESIF in general, evolving progressively towards a higher proximity to the HCOP, beneficiaries and final recipients. Meanwhile, the influence of the implementation phases cannot be ignored. As programmed, only at the final stages of the CS the notoriety across population in general is dominant as an objective. Or the evaluation is reported to 30.06.2020, not covering the communication actions of the last implementation phase.

It is relevant to stress that, concerning their statistical significance and according to its central role in the evaluation narrative, the surveys are very robust.

	Number of valid questionnaires
Population in general	646 Considering a total universe of 4.244.152 individuals, the number of answers received corresponds to an error margin of 3,86% for a confidence interval of 95%.
Final Recipients including schools and psychologists (SPO)	1.919 Final Recipients+ 110 Schools PNPSE and Psychologists SPO For a total group of 685.890 final recipients supported by HCOP, the total number of answers obtained corresponds to an error margin of 2,23% for a confidence interval of 95%. It has been also guaranteed the representativeness for big intervention areas – young education, higher education and long-life training with error margins of 4,49%, 4,76% e 3,06%, respectively, for a confidence interval of 95%. Questionnaires have been sent to the total sample of schools involved in National Programme target at promoting school success (PNPSE) and of the Psychologists working at the SPO supported by the HCOP.
Beneficiaries	323 For na universe of 767 beneficiaries the number of answers received corresponds to na error margin of 4,15% for a confidence interval of 95%. The segmentation by NUTS II regions, intermediate bodies and entity type has been respected.

Although the comparison between the notoriety levels across population in general and those perceived by stakeholders more involved in the HCOP implementation is in itself very conclusive – very low notoriety across population in general and very high concerning beneficiaries – those results should be seen in the context of the HCOP implementation phases. Only at the final stages of the CS’s implementation the approach to population in general was the main target. Another question deserving attention and registered by the evaluation as having a high margin of progression is the relatively notoriety achieved by the CS regarding HCOP final recipients, mainly young people.

Main conclusions

The evaluation elaborated two types of conclusions, more general conclusions in line with the global evaluation narrative and specific conclusions supported by the answer to the evaluation questions. All of them have been elaborated as instruments supporting decision -process making process (recommendations), covering not only future programming periods, but also the remaining 2014-2020 programming period.

General conclusions

The ambition of the HCOP'S Communication Strategy is structured around two types of objectives: (i) objectives concerning the OP (information about the OP segmented by publics supported by the programme, in line with the OP strategic objectives, contribution for generating the demand to OP support, mainly in more innovative operations showing a less solvent demand, communication of the OP results, consolidation of the corporative brand POCH regarding the previous programme POPH); (ii) broader objectives associated to the contribution of the HCOP for disseminating a more positive global perception of the ESIF (particularly ESF) use in Portugal and to the contribution for generating a more positive perception about the growth model regarding the gains in skills and social inclusion upgrade vehiculated through education and training.

In line with these ambitious objectives, the CS covers practically all the communication actions normally mobilised in this kind of communication processes, involving a financial budget which is higher of other OP's (Thematic OP's) presenting similar budget and nature. In this context, the evaluation concluded that the margins to improve the CS results don't depend on mobilising other instruments, depending on the contrary in exploring new dynamic combinations between instruments. The evaluation also concluded that there is room to format more innovative processes, to lead a more intense and professionalised management of communication initiatives or even to create new intermediation processes between launching communication initiatives and targeted publics mobilising personalities (ambassadors, influencers or other personal brands able to lever a higher communicational impact). The evaluation also underlines the need to incorporate the singularities of the actual communicational context, principally understanding better the context in which some HCOP final recipients (young people) operate.

The big conclusion that points out that the HCOP's Communication Strategy presents a very diversified notoriety, falling significantly from relative high values achieved across beneficiaries to a low notoriety across population in general, passing through an unexpected low notoriety across final recipients needs a very careful contextualisation. The high notoriety across beneficiaries is strongly linked to the OP implementation. The low notoriety across population in general should be understood considering the following evidence: (i) the targeted goals are very ambitious and face a strong penalising inertia, generated by media agendas concerning the use of ESIF in Portugal or by the perceptions about the low level of skills of Portuguese active population and its influence on the economic growth model of the country; (ii) the atomised diversity of logos communicating PT 2020 strongly penalises the achievement of the HCOP' Communication Strategy ambitious goals; (iii) the implementation of the CS itself reserves for final stages the approach to the public in general, determining that the communication actions will be largely concentrated in a period not covered by the evaluation and the pandemic effects

should also to be considered. The relatively low notoriety achieved across final recipients requires a different attention and interpretation. Incorporating that conclusion, the evaluation registered the already mentioned need to explore new combinations between instruments and communication materials, particularly targeted at “young people” supported by the programme.

This is a relevant conclusion considering that the HCOP created a strong and appealing brand, that succeeded in achieving public notoriety in events oriented towards the promotion of this brand. Considering the low notoriety achieved across final recipients, the evaluation also concluded that intermediate bodies (OI) and beneficiaries (Schools and other training institutions) should be stimulated to develop a more active co-participation and compromised with the objective to achieve higher levels of notoriety across young people supported by the HCOP, transforming themselves in ambassadors /key points to promote the divulgation and dissemination of the HCOP brand, extending the legal and reglementary obligations prescribed by European Funds.

The evaluation concludes additionally that, at least as far as the preparation of the new programming period is concerned, would be important that the HCOP Communication Team could animate several debates with researchers and experts in communication and members of the European Commission to discuss the challenges that OP’s CS funded by ESIF afce in new communicational environment, namely discussing about the need to orient CS towards the ESF objectives within the framework of ESIS’s CS. This debate could be even organised within the events targeted to divulgate the results of this evaluation.

Conclusions inspired by the approach to evaluation questions

Concerning the relevance/pertinence of the planned and implemented actions, the evaluation concluded that the CS covers in a pertinent and relevant way the diversity of instruments generally mobilises for these communication processes. Taking into account the diversity of the objectives to tackle, the CS tries to achieve a balanced approach to more institutional communication and other more creative communication modalities, exploring in this last category new dynamic combinations between instruments. In line with this, there is room to assume the falling influence of more traditional instruments, like Pen Drives, some merchandising types and even newsletters, favouring a more professional use of social media as focal points of new combinations. The mobilisation of personalities showing a great capacity to induce the access to social media networks and the joint use of *off* and *on line* CS, with good results in school environments, illustrate that conclusion. Additionally, the evaluation concluded that the central role of the social media cannot be dissociated form a more proactive management of those networks, principally from the point of view of mobilising complementary elements targeted at increasing the density of followers. Considering the results already achieved, the “*storytelling*” dimension still presents a vast potential of growth, conducive to a higher notoriety of the HCOP support.

In terms of effectiveness

Although the metrics established by the CS to assess the expected results of the planned and implemented communication actions have not facilitated the effectiveness analysis, the

increasing intensity of actions implementation counterbalanced those limitations, not ignoring the restrictions imposed by the pandemic period after March 2020. Regarding social media, the inexistence of metrics may allow for introducing a vaster set of indicators than followers indicators. The first implementation phase linked with the promotion of universal access to the OP presents high implementation levels, principally regarding the WEB page and the Fairs that revealed themselves as very important instruments to divulgate the scope and the supporting measures of the HCOP. The second phase that has been focused in public notoriety present a lower level of effectiveness, given the lower notoriety achieved across population in general, not ignoring that evaluation not covers actions implemented after 30.06.2020. The third phase will be strongly influenced by the practices and adaptative answers induced by the pandemic context, with no enough evidence available to support evaluation.

In terms of efficiency

Although without comparative figures between the HCCS and other similar experiences, the evaluation integrated data about costs concerning mobilised resources and investments and estimations of costs for the different typologies linked to achieved results. The conclusions about the efficiency of the CS have been elaborated analysing the proportionality between the achieved results and the goals (outcomes and results).

Reported to 30.06.2021, the incurred expenditures of 2,22 million of € represented an execution rate of 51,7% of the total programmed amount of 4,3 million of €, a relatively low execution rate that obviously reflect the four pandemic months (March to June 2020). The Qualifica and Futurália Fairs and the annual event (2016) are the main CS's investments in this period, absorbing 38% of the total expenditure. We may conclude that, considering the already achieved results with implementation of a little more than 50% of the programmed resources, the efficiency of the mobilised resources is high and opens good perspectives to invest more resources in mitigating the notoriety gap existing between, for one hand, the publics more directly involved kin the HCOP implementation and for the other hand, the final recipients and the public in general.

Given the magnitude of investment allocated to Fairs, the evaluation concludes that the increase of efficiency of the resources allocated to these activities induced by new synergies between the Fairs and the utilisation of social media and of the HCOP WEB page represents an "excellent" practice, showing us that also concerning efficiency the combination between instruments and communication materials is in a very promising mood.

In terms of impacts

One of the main results of applying the ToC puts in evidence that the impact chains begin to be weaker in terms of anticipated transformations as the targeted publics are more distant of the implementation core of the HCOP. It exists indeed a gap of notoriety/knowledge of the OP between the targeted publics more directly involved in the OP implementation (the beneficiaries) and the population in general and the OP actions final recipients. The evaluation concluded that exists a vast typology of mediations till reaching these targeted publics, that will require either reconsidering the past orientations in targeting the media or being out of the control of the HCOP's CS. The evaluation also concluded that the margins of progress in

mitigating that gap are higher concerning the final recipients than concerning the public in general, principally if the CS succeeds in inducing a more proactive collaboration of OI and beneficiaries (Schools), obviously with the help of the OP Management Body, assuming the compromise to increase the divulgation of OP actions across final recipients, segmented by measures and publics involved.

In line with the relevance that impact analysis assumed in establishing the general conclusions, the evaluation concluded that it exists a vast potential to reorient the portfolio of communication initiatives developed by the HCOP'CS. That reorientation means that the dynamic combination of processes and communication materials organised around the new centrality of social media networks should be focused on a proactive management of those resources, tending to reduce the importance of more institutional communication materials.

Recommendations

As we have already mentioned, two types of recommendations have been formulated: those that it is still possible to apply in this programming period and those dedicated to the next programming period.

Recommendations for the present programming period

To explore new dynamic combinations of communication instruments and materials

- Campaigns dedicated to schools combining the use of on line resources, namely social media networks, and of offline resources, as for example the display of posters, the distribution of self-adhesive materials or merchandising with a *qr* code ou *hashtag* linked with the on line resources;
- Events at schools focused on the divulgation/promotion of courses supported by the HCOP with the collaboration of influencers, promoting the link with young people and increasing their involvement with the HCOP brand;
- Games/ dynamics for young people inducing them to access the HCOP social media and the Web page;
- *Storytelling* actions in which young people (or adults) may share their experiences, in a nan interactive and dynamic way, with other young people (or adults);
- Participation in TV programmes, through *storytelling*.
- Appealing infographics to communicate the HCOP results in social media.
- Elaboration of dynamic materials, simple and appealing to the schools actions across students, in order to debunk the HCOP, the funding of courses and also introduce in teachers language concepts related to the ESF.

To divulgate the evaluation results

Organise a debate about the scope and limits of communication strategies supporting the ESIF programming in a new communication environment in which social media and their evolution play a central role.

A new cycle of life stories

Allocate more resources to communication materials based on the results of the HCOP implementation, opening new opportunities for communicational work with well succeeded life stories in using the HCOP support.

Exchange of experiences within the framework of PT 2020 communication

Organise a meeting involving the exchange of evaluation results and experiences between the communication teams charged of leading the CS of Thematic Programmes and Regional OP's, targeted at discussing experience, strategies and principally new guidelines for the 2021-2027 programming.

Recommendations for the next programming period

A more proactive management of social media

- Proactive and professionalised management through the creation of specific, eye-catching and regular contents to the HCOP social media, combined with other dynamics elaborated by the Programme (online e offline);
- Reinforcement of human and technical resources specialised in managing and fostering social media;
- Conceive and implement new metrics to follow-up and monitor social media;
- Increase investment in conceptual approaches through the organisation of exploratory meetings with researchers and experts.

To deep and extend explorative initiatives to generate new combinations of communicational initiatives and materials already tried in the actual programming period

To promote more integrated communication initiatives, through the use of *online* resources, in which social media play a new central role and the use of *offline* resources targeted at inducing the involvement of targeted publics in on line resources.

To fight against the biased image of ESIF use in Portugal

To bring the media agendas into the debate about the putative bad use of European Funds, enriching that debate with solid and clarifying evidence.

To make the co-operation and collaborative communication within the next PT 2039 more robust

Articulate the communication options of PT 2030 with those of PRR, within the framework of a global and integrated strategy of disseminating good practices in using European Funds.

New modalities of participation/involvement of Intermediate Bodies (IB) and beneficiaries in the CS.

Elaborate a new CS to the HCOP within a framework of an enlarged co-operation and focused in strategic objectives between the MB of the HCOP, IB's and beneficiaries with a

metric of results to accomplish.

Communication Strategy based on a network of stories and integrating new communication modalities

Focus on individual stories and case-based, as a central dimension to improve the HCOP's notoriety, creating a bottom-up built network of stories, able to be understood by the different publics previously defined as the "product" of the Programme and as its common element.

To promote the proximity concerning the public in general

Focus on *storytelling* actions, bringing the final recipients into the core of the communication strategy, leading them to be themselves the ambassadors of the brand and stimulating the link with the experiences of the final recipients and not only of the brand by itself.

To design metrics, indicators and goals to monitor and evaluate the CS

To conceive metrics, indicators and goals for monitoring and evaluating the CS, in order to assess results in a more objective and systematic way during the CS implementation, taking into account the particularities of the different communication instruments mobilised for the CS.