Chapter 5

Communications strategy recommendations for the NAICM project

Mega infrastructure projects require building broad social and political support. This effort calls for an effective and proactive communications strategy. In fact, a common weakness in many projects is the lack of a coherent communications strategy linking the needs, expectations, and concerns of the project’s stakeholders. Until November 2015, the New International Airport of Mexico City (Nuevo Aeropuerto Internacional de la Ciudad de México, NAICM) had not developed such a strategy, nor the Airport Group of Mexico City (Grupo Aeroportuario de la Ciudad de México, GACM) had established a communications office with the mandates of building consensus and enabling more inclusive decision making. This chapter will describe the communications efforts carried out in relation to NAICM and how they can be improved to abide by international good practices.
The need for a solid communications strategy

The New International Airport of Mexico City (Nuevo Aeropuerto Internacional de la Ciudad de México, NAICM) is at the core of the current administration’s (2012-18) infrastructure plan. Given the potential long-term benefits of the project, building broad social and political support, which can only be achieved through an effective communications strategy, should be a top priority.

A successful communications strategy would help to improve the project perceptions among key players to achieve certainty, transparency and trust as the core vectors of the project (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. A successful transition as a result of a communications strategy

<table>
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<tr>
<th>From:</th>
<th>To:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rational, distant, technical language that does not connect with the audience</td>
<td>Attractive, engaging storytelling about the project and its positive impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sending the same messages to all stakeholders</td>
<td>Eliciting differentiated messages that address the aspirations and concerns of specific audiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low community engagement</td>
<td>Construction of shared meaning among communities in the project’s vicinity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scepticism, uncertainty, and biased perceptions among key players</td>
<td>Certainty, confidence, transparency, and trust as the core of the project</td>
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Source: Author’s own work.

Political inequality in access to decision-making processes can lead to an unequal distribution in the risks, burdens, and benefits of megaprojects. The general public is often sceptical or negative towards such projects. In fact, citizens and interest groups may orchestrate hostile protests against the undertaking of major infrastructure projects.

The use of proper communication enhances sustainable infrastructure and facilitates good governance. Development communication, which is “the social process designed to seek a common understanding among all the participants of a development initiative, creating a basis for concerted action” strengthens the foundations for good governance by promoting open government, increased accountability, and the active engagement of participants in civil society (Hass, Mazzei, and O’Leary, 2007) (Box 5.1).

Communication also provides a crucial analytical device and management tool to promote sustainable infrastructure development in three respects:

- Improving the quality of infrastructure: enabling more inclusive and informed decision making at all stages of the project cycle; driving new thinking and innovation to create sustainable infrastructure; and establishing consensus based on service-provision priorities and delivery methods.
- Building consensus on infrastructure-related government reforms: raising awareness of corruption vulnerabilities at all stages of infrastructure development and establishing consensus on reform programmes, including the partnerships and tariffs needed to make services sustainable.
International experience shows that effective communication is of utmost importance to the development and completion of any project. According to the Project Management Institute, in organisations whose communicators are considered highly effective, 80% of projects meet their original goals, versus only 52% at their minimally effective counterparts.

The same source estimates that highly effective communicators are also more likely to deliver projects on time (71% vs. 37%) and within budget (76% vs. 48%). Executives claim organisations with effective and efficient communication methods are more likely to stay within scope, meet quality standards, and deliver intended business benefits.

A good communication process keeps stakeholders engaged and project teams motivated. Yet, true communication both inside and outside enterprise walls remains a rare commodity — much of which comes down to the fundamental difficulty of communicating with the right level of clarity and detail.


Taking concerted action to manage corruption risks on infrastructure: maintaining pressure for the implementation of anti-corruption reform and building popular consensus on specific efforts, improving transparency and visibility of actions taken.

A common weakness in many large projects is the lack of a coherent and effective communications strategy linking the needs, expectations, and concerns of the project’s different stakeholder interests. Besides controversy, symptoms of underfunding communication functions include ad hoc approaches and a lack of up-front communication and strategic planning. Project managers must balance competing priorities for resources by upholding communications at each stage of the project cycle.

Another important line of argument to support resource allocation for communications is to link it to gains in corruption savings.

Main communications actions of the NAICM

As of August 2015, three milestones have required intense communications efforts:

- the initial announcement of the NAICM (September 2014)
- the agreement with the OECD (January 2015)
- the presentation of the procurement packaging strategy (July 2015).

The initial announcement

On 2 September 2014, Mexico’s President announced the administration’s plans to build the NAICM. The President explained that the public work’s development would take place in five stages, with an investment of approximately MXN 169 000 million: MXN 120 000 million would go to the airport’s infrastructure and the rest would finance various complementary works (i.e. preparing land for construction). The President assured the public that the project would be financed with tax revenue from Mexico
City’s International Airport (AICM) together with tax revenue from the NAICM, once it becomes operational (Box 5.2.).

**Box 5.2. Analysis of the initial announcement speech (2 September 2014)**

1. **Argument:**
   - There is a clear sense of urgency.
     - The current airport has reached its operational limits.
     - It lacks the ability to carry on simultaneous operations, which is unacceptable for an airport in a city as globally important as Mexico City.
   - The decision was made on a technical basis.
     - We asked experts and specialists to conduct an analysis to find better alternatives.
   - We have selected the best people for the project.
     - Experts evaluated and qualified proposals.
     - We have selected prestigious architects for the design work.
   - The project will have many benefits.
     - Economic: 160,000 direct and indirect new jobs; hundreds of SMEs will benefit from contracts.
     - Social: A new Aeronautics University as well as housing projects for people working on the new airport.
     - Environmental: Clean energies and water-saving technologies in the buildings; the surrounding area will have new lakes and forests.

2. **Tone:** Positive. The airport will be one of the most advanced in the world. It will be a logistical and engineering challenge, but also a unique opportunity to showcase Mexico as a rising nation.

3. **Language:** Clear and understandable. Avoids technical jargon; conveys optimism and pride for the project.


The administration mentioned this would be the world’s most sustainable airport—a hallmark of Mexican innovation to be built to the possible extent by national contractors and engineers. Given its symbolic nature, the Federal Government committed to make the airport a world reference in terms of design, construction, and sustainable operation with clean and renewable energy, green technologies, and efficient ventilation and air conditioning units to optimise water and energy use. The airport’s engineers also plan to take advantage of biogas from the *Bordo Poniente* dump as an energy source for the new airport.¹

Immediately after NAICM’s construction was announced in September 2014, government communications put the spotlight on the project’s modern architectural
design, costs, construction phases, and expected completion dates. Among the most stressed positive aspects, the following messages stood out:

- The economic growth, job creation, and mobility projects that will go hand in hand with NAICM.
- The unprecedented nature of this infrastructure project’s architectural design.
- The eco-friendly aspects and the positive impact NAICM will have on the area, which currently struggles with high levels of environmental degradation.
- The fact that this will be one of the largest airports in the world, serving up to 120 million passengers a year (phase 2).
- The modernity of “the airport of the future”: the project is expected to benefit from the collaboration of top national and international experts.

**Agreement with the OECD**

In January 2015, the OECD and the Ministry for Communication and Transport (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, SCT) signed an agreement by which the OECD would “share its knowledge on best practices with Mexico’s government in order to implement a comprehensive strategy during the NAICM’s construction phase, particularly regarding integrity, transparency, accountability, procurement, and concessions.”

**The procurement packaging strategy announcement**

On 8 July 2015, the SCT announced that the bidding process to award contracts for the construction of the NAICM would begin with preliminary works packages in September 2015. The communication highlights were the following:

- The NAICM is the most important infrastructure project of this administration and one of the largest of its kind in the world.
- The packaging scheme for the bids allows the Government to receive proposals from contractors with proven experience.
- Contractors will work using state-of-the-art technology, as well as the highest quality and fastest execution rates possible.
- Transparency is a top concern for the Government and social witnesses appointed by the Ministry of Public Administration (Secretaría de la Función Pública, SFP) will oversee the process.

During 2015-16, several relevant contracts will be awarded for the construction of the airport’s main infrastructure, like the terminal building, fuel-storage facilities, arrival platform, and fuel-distribution lines. According to the official schedule, the second set of contracts will be awarded to build notably navigation systems, the central service tunnel, and audio-visual assistance. During the second half of 2016, bids will be open for fire stations. Contracts will be awarded for support buildings in August 2016 and for the first building phase of the surrounding road infrastructure in October 2016. Contracts for the multimodal transport centre and parking lots will follow in 2017.
Media coverage

The announcement of the NAICM project was significantly covered in the national media, with 1 218 mentions during September and October 2014.

The participation of the selected architect as head of the new airport’s interior design, together with the announcement of the project’s environmental impact studies, were the topics with the most media coverage.

Between April and May 2015, the media mostly covered the NAICM’s Master Plan, financing, and investment, and, yet again, the architectural design and its sustainable strategy (the use of clean energy and green technologies). The media also showcased stories about how the new airport will have its own “mini city” in 2028 (Aerotrópolis, with malls and hotels). Descriptions about the construction and enlargement of highways, subway lines (metro), rapid transit bus lines (metrobús), and the creation of an express train that will go from downtown Mexico City to the new terminal were also featured.

During May and June 2015, the GACM and SCT insisted upon the project’s social component. The Government emphasised the importance of the social benefits NAICM will trigger.

The GACM’s Director General noted that NAICM would benefit youth, as the terminal’s operation and construction process will be a great source of employment. The NAICM will be an economic detonator for the whole country, especially for the heavily challenged Ex Vaso de Texcoco Federal Zone.

Government officials have highlighted the positive social impact the new airport will bring. In the medium and long term, the surrounding areas have the potential to become hubs for social and economic development, with higher-education institutions, such as the Metropolitan University of Aeronautics and Aviation, as well as training centres for aviation-related professionals. Hotels, convention centres, shopping malls, and other amenities for travellers are being anticipated as part of the NAICM.

As the official announcement for NAICM’s bid-packaging strategy took place in early July 2015, NAICM’s media coverage shot up in said month, with 73 more mentions than those registered in June. All in all, 88% of the total coverage was informative or neutral, while 9% was negative, and only 3% percent had a positive tone.

The bids’ packaging strategy alone received 148 media mentions, with an advertising value equivalency (AVE) of MXN 7.1 million. Most of these mentions took place within three days of the announcement (7-9 July) and received little follow up in the media. Mobility and transportation solutions for the airport’s new access routes to Mexico City are still key issues. The issuance of the first package in late September 2015 also attracted attention in the media.

By late July 2015, the future of the current airport’s grounds became a central topic to many stakeholders. This issue poses a looming debate between federal and local (Mexico City) authorities, which will be responsible for the outcome, as discussed in further sections of this chapter.
The website

In the follow-up to a series of previous discussions initiated in February 2015 and as per the agreement signed with the SCT, the OECD made on 18 June 2015 seven recommendations to improve the GACM’s operations in the website (www.aeropuerto.gob.mx).

These recommendations, which focus on transparency issues and access to information, have already been taken into account. However, further actions need to be considered.

The first recommendation was to include a normatividad (regulations) button on the website’s Documents section, so that users could find the regulatory framework for the procurement process, the GACM, and transparency. This has already been incorporated (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Website content regarding regulations

Translation: Regulations, procurement regulations, GACM regulations, transparency regulations.
The second recommendation, which is also already incorporated, was that in the *Most Important Purchases* section, there should be a small description of each item (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. *Website content: The most important purchases section*

*Translation: The most important purchases, services, public works, services related to public works.*

*Source: [www.aeropuerto.gob.mx/gacm/index.php](http://www.aeropuerto.gob.mx/gacm/index.php) (accessed 1 August 2015).*
The third recommendation was having direct access to the social witnesses’ reports instead of having to go to the CompraNet webpage when reviewing the details of each procurement process. This recommendation was also implemented (Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4. Website content: The section on procurement procedures (ongoing, followed up, and completed)**

Translation: Get to know the procedures, current, under monitoring, and concluded, that GACM carries out through Compranet. Link to: https://compranet.funcionpublica.gob.mx. Enter, select, filter, search. By following these steps, you will find GACM’s information in Compranet.

The fourth recommendation was to enlist the NAICM’s resource-oversight organisations in the *Transparency* section and to link their icons to the organisations’ official websites. This can already be seen in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5. **Website content: Transparency section**

*Translation:* The project is carried out following a commitment with transparency and accountability, transparency and access to information.

Next, the OECD recommended that in the *Sites of Interest* section, a transparency label be included with a list of the responsible organisations and their descriptions. This is already in the website (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6. **Website content: Transparency label in the sites of interest section**

*Translation:* There are other government entities related with the new airport project and, in general, dealing with aeronautics. Hence, we make available their websites in which you may find related information: Aeronautics.

Transparency and access to information. INAI: It is the entity in charge of ensuring access to government information and protecting personal data in possession of the Federal Government, private individuals, as well as deciding on the challenges to denied requests to access information issued by government entities.

Infomex: It is the system by which individuals may submit their requests to access government information and to access, rectify, cancel, or challenge personal data.

Transparency Duties Portal: In this system you will find information from the Federal Government regarding staff directory, contracts, reports, salaries, regulations, subsidies, services, concessions, and permits, published in compliance with the Federal Law for Transparency and Access to Government Information.

Other national authorities.

In addition, it was recommended that the Site Map section include a guide question: What are you looking for? (¿Qué estás buscando?). The answers would be drawn from two previously established areas: Get to Know the Project (NAICM) and Get to Know Those Responsible for the Project (GACM). The recommendation has been incorporated (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7. Website content: Site map section

Translation: Site map. What are you looking for? Get to know the project: The need for a new airport, Background, Get to know the project, Meet those responsible for the project: Airport Group, Who we are, vision, mission, organisational structure, documents.


Finally, there was a recommendation to insert a Search tool. This has been implemented, but only works well if the user inserts precise keywords. Otherwise, the site displays the message, “No results found” (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8. Website content: Search tool

Translation: Site map.


The website fails to provide a direct form of contact. As of November 2015, no e-mail, contact number, or link to Twitter, Facebook, or any other social network has been found on the website.

Perceptions of key stakeholders

For this section, the OECD conducted interviews with key stakeholders in the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and officials from local and federal governments. The OECD also conducted a thorough analysis of the media. The views expressed here candidly reflect what was said in those interviews, as well as the
expressions and content of media coverage, both positive and negative, with the aim of contributing to the improvement of the communications strategy.

**Private sector**

The private sector’s response to the NAICM project has been mostly positive, both in terms of business opportunities and long-term competitiveness for Mexico. For instance, a representative from a major construction company claimed that the country has the experience and capabilities to successfully build a project of this magnitude, and that it will also benefit from international experiences and technology.

The Mexican Chamber of the Construction Industry (CMIC) asserted that its affiliate companies had the disposition and capacities to “face the challenges a project of this magnitude implies”.

The president of IATA claimed that the new airport would allow Mexico to become the main hub between Asia and Latin America. IATA is optimistic about the new airport’s announcement and has proclaimed the association’s will to advise NAICM planning.

In public statements, the president of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) stated that the construction of the new airport is a “wonderful investment” that will allow Mexico to both improve its global position in tourism infrastructure and produce economic benefits. The director of Airports Council International (ACI) also recognised that NAICM would improve the region’s transit capacity for passengers.

One important concern mentioned in interviews with private sector representatives was the risk that public officials might not ensure fairness in bidding and contract processes.

**Pilot and Flight Attendant Union**

As of August 2015, the Government has not formally invited the Pilot and Flight Attendant Union (ASPA) to join the dialogue. Nevertheless, ASPA expects its input will be taken into account as the project progresses. ASPA leaders view the NAICM project very positively, as the current airport has reached its operational limits. They believe increasing transport capabilities from 34 to 50 and then 120 million people per year will boost the economy and generate revenue from tourism and business travellers. ASPA and the Colegio de Pilotos (a different pilot association) can provide technical opinions to improve the new airport’s efficiency, and both are willing to share their expertise.

ASPA leaders consider the NAICM a “national priority” and a “state project,” which means that its importance goes well beyond any given government administration. According to ASPA leadership, today only 0.5% of the Mexican population has access to air transportation, given its relatively higher costs compared to bus and car transportation. The NAICM will expand supply, making prices more affordable. ASPA considers that the NAICM project will benefit from an open dialogue between the Government and stakeholders.

**Mexico City government**

The Mexico City government officials interviewed for this report affirmed that there is a clear need for a new international airport. They openly support the project, as they recognise its benefits for the city and the nation as a whole.
The city government has, among others, two main concerns: how the NAICM will affect urban mobility and what is going to happen to the land where the current airport operates. With regards to the NAICM’s impact on urban mobility, the city’s authorities believe there is still a long way to go in terms of communication and dialogue with the Federal Government for the implementation of a shared mobility plan. City authorities believe mobility should be as high a priority as the construction of the airport itself.

As mentioned above, the second concern is how the lands of the soon-to-be vacated airport will be used. This is a unique opportunity, as this well-situated terrain amounts to about 1% of the city’s total area. This area, twice the size of New York’s Central Park, could become a development hub for the city’s housing, education, economic activity, public spaces, and environmental recovery. The local government maintains that once the old airport closes, the land will no longer be under federal jurisdiction. Thus, the Government has opened consultation and public debate to collectively determine the area’s future uses. SCT claims that, in any case, the old airport area would not be available for use until 2023, implying that any discussion on its use is premature. Political dialogue should continue to avoid these issues turning into political and legal controversies.

**NGOs and think tanks**

NGOs and think tanks are some of the stakeholders that have expressed the most scepticism regarding the Government’s communications strategy. According to most of the NGO leaders interviewed for this report, the complex political context surrounding the project has spurred these doubts.

Some of their main criticisms of the communications and outreach strategy are as follows:

- The Government is perceived as non-proactive in its communications and outreach efforts. Some NGO leaders recognise that they have established good communications channels with GACM senior staff, but they perceive that this is the result of good willingness rather than of a well-defined policy.
- NGOs believe making public documents and studies available would be the right way to make this project more open and transparent. In their opinion, public information about the construction of the New International Airport is insufficient for a project of this relevance.
- Details about how the Government awarded the design and construction of the main terminal and other key contracts were scarce.
- In this context of distrust, NGO leaders believe the Government should strive to make the procurement process highly competitive and transparent. Nevertheless, they claim many contracts awarded by direct invitation and details have not been made public, sometimes because of reasons related to national security.
- It should be noted that in August 2015, the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Data Protection (Instituto Nacional de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos, INAI) ordered GACM to disclose preliminary studies, executive plans, and contracts that had been classified due to national security. The INAI also shortened the generic construction plans’ classified period from 12 to 3 years. Information about the future military facilities in the new airport will remain classified.
• Some NGO leaders are confused as to why the Government chose to create GACM as an autonomous public enterprise, only to make it dependent of the SCT as if it were just another branch of the ministry. This has not been perceived as managerial good practice.

• Besides procurement and contracts, NGO leaders believe several other issues have not been properly assessed, such as land engineering, water and waste management, environmental impact, air security, energy management, urban mobility, and potential social conflicts (see Box 5.3).

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**Box 5.3. Top concerns expressed by NGOs**

1. **Transparency and trust.** Communications and outreach efforts have to be more systematic and proactive in order to create and reinforce trust.

2. **Mechanisms of access to public records.** More technical studies and financial projections need to be available for public scrutiny.

3. **Financial sustainability.** The fall in oil prices will inevitably lead to cuts in public budgets. There are concerns about the availability of government resources to pay for the project given the Government’s austerity measures.

4. **Timetable and execution capability.** The Government is seen as optimistic in its assertions that the airport will be ready by 2020.

5. **Urban mobility plans.** NGO leaders believe that the mobility plans are not in place, and they should have been ready before construction started.

6. **Surrounding communities.** Negotiations with local social leaders could foster distrust. Openness, consultation, and dialogue with local communities would better serve the Government’s efforts to prevent conflicts.

7. **Political conflict.** As the 2018 elections come closer, changes in the political landscape could evidently put additional pressure on the project. The future use of the current airport also looms as a potential disagreement between the city and federal authorities.

8. **Public security.** The authorities seemed to have overlooked the fact that the NAICM will be located in a high-crime area. Plans for regional security are needed.

9. **Air safety.** Some specialists consider that the area poses challenges that need to be fully addressed to ensure air safety. Birds are the top concern, and special measures will need to be taken.

10. **Inter-institutional co-ordination.** NGO leaders perceive that agencies such as CONAGUA, SEDATU, and SEMARNAT are not exactly on the same page as the SCT and GACM.

*Source: Interviews carried out by the OECD Secretariat with NAICM stakeholders.*

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**Political parties**

• **Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).** The PRI has not publicly supported the NAICM. PRI legislators have called the NAICM a federal project but have no defined position. It is therefore uncertain to assess whether it could be a form of tacit political support.
• **National Regeneration Movement, commonly known as Morena (Spanish acronym).** Morena is opposed to the construction of the new airport, as well as to many other initiatives coming from the current administration. It has pointed out that enormous investments in the current airport will go to waste (i.e. Terminal 2 was only built six years ago).

• **National Action Party (PAN).** The PAN called for the creation of a special commission to monitor the NAICM. Senators from this party, as well as those from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), requested that the Ministry of Communications and Transport provide a report on the financial projections, bidding process, and environmental impact of the NAICM’s construction. The head of the PAN in the Chamber of Deputies clarified that his party is not against the project but did want guarantees for transparency, technical support, and peace with the area’s residents. The legislative commission the PAN proposed would oversee the procurement processes, environmental care, and sustainability.

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**Front of Towns to Defend their Lands (Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra, FPDT)**

FPDT is a peasant organisation based in the municipality of Atenco, whose pressure halted the construction of the then new to be Mexico City airport back in 2001. They warn that the project will plunder the land, water, and natural resources that sustain their communities.

The organisation opposes the urbanisation that will stem from the new airport project. On 15 April 2015, the FPDT protested against the NAICM at a Senate-organised forum.

On 22 June 2015, the media reported that 78 FPDT-affiliated people living in the areas surrounding the NAICM’s location sued the Government before the Supreme Court to get an injunction to halt the project. So far, no court order has been issued, which has allowed the NAICM to move forward.

**Journalists**

Journalists and columnists agree that the NAICM is a very ambitious project that should have been undertaken a long time ago. They have highlighted several positive communication efforts, deeming information on the airport’s new location adequate.

The President’s initial announcement of the project was also viewed positively, although journalists did express concerns about the proposed timetable. In their opinion, the Government lost momentum after the official kick-off. “After the announcement ceremony, there were more questions than answers,” one interviewee said. Some journalists believe this is due to the lack of a more proactive strategy to keep the NAICM news feed updated.

Media professionals believe the GACM needs a communications team and a strategy. The SCT is sometimes seen as an entity that is busy handling a wide agenda of projects, even though the NAICM would deserve its own spotlight.

Credibility and trust are also challenges. The interviewed journalists consider that given the size of the project in financial terms, more proactive efforts from the Government are required. Some see the lack of regular press conferences and official communication channels as a possible sign of opacity. Others consider that the lack of proactive communication has excluded important opportunities to engage society in the...
project. One editor of a leading newspaper said, “the NAICM could generate an interesting, positive story almost every day, but this is not happening.”

Most journalists consider that it is time to analyse whether SCT is the ideal spokesperson for the NAICM project. Some think the head of GACM could be a trustworthy spokesperson, but know that this decision could bring about political discussions. Thus, some suggest that it would be wise to have a third person with knowledge and credibility in media circles to act as a spokesperson, provided that he or she has autonomy, staff, and an adequate working budget.

**Polls**

According to a poll published in *El Universal* newspaper (September, 2014), 88% of people in Mexico City have heard about the NAICM project. Among these, 64% approve of the project and 19% are against it. Those who approve the project do so because the current airport has surpassed its capacity (33%) or because of job creation (21%), better road infrastructure (11%), better public services (10%), or the NAICM’s positive effects on the city’s image (6%).

Those against the project reject it because of lacking transparency in the use of resources (29%), other priorities in the country (13%), the effect on farmers in the area (12%), the belief that this is an unnecessary expense (10%), or because the site is not a good place for the airport’s construction (10%). A total of 76% of respondents believe the NAICM will generate economic growth, while 18% is convinced that it will have no impact.

Many respondents believe the construction of the new airport will have a negative impact on the city’s groundwater recharge (46%) and that it will increase the probability of flooding (47%).

When asked what should be done with the site of the current airport, 17% think a reservoir or ecological zone should be created, while 16% favour a park, and 15% prefer a residential area. Finally, 88% said they would support the Government if it decided to transform the whole area into an ecological zone.

**Challenges ahead**

The NAICM is regarded with scepticism among specific stakeholders. This may have to do with the fact that the Government has limited its communications strategy to informing the public of its doings, with varying degrees of detail. However, a project of this importance should not take its audiences for granted; thus it is of the utmost importance that persuasion takes a central place in communications efforts.

To better understand the meaning of persuasion, the “Communications Hierarchy” can serve as a guide.

A basic communications strategy that answers the questions “who, what, when, where, and how” informs its audiences about the general purpose and direction of the organisation’s actions. This does not mean, however, that the public actually believes or supports what is being done. What it means is that an explanation or recount has been emitted and, hopefully, received. The NAICM communications are currently at this basic level.
The next step in the hierarchy is to create understanding. This requires the communications strategy to answer an additional key question: “Why?” For the NAICM, it means that spokespersons cannot just take for granted that every audience understands why it is necessary or urgent to build a new airport, why it will be built in a particular place, or why the project is positive for Mexico and its citizens in the long run. The benefits of the NAICM have to be constantly explained in a way that allows people to share a common meaning about the project in the belief that it will bring the country many benefits.

The next step in the hierarchy is to reinforce values, or to communicate in a way that appeals to those who already see the project in a positive light. In this case, the communications strategy needs to create messages for all those actors who are pro-NAICM (besides the Government), so they can disseminate said messages among the general public, acting as third-party, bona fide spokespersons.

The next step of an effective communications strategy would be to change attitudes. This requires conveying messages in a way that can actually change people’s perceptions. In this case, persuasion would make the case for the NAICM and the Government’s ability to carry out the project in an efficient and transparent manner. Even the most sceptical audiences can react differently if they perceive that the Government is committed to doing things right.

Finally, the goal of a successful communications strategy is to elicit action. This happens when audiences are effectively persuaded and respond by doing something that has been asked of them. To achieve this, communication has to be built around the audience’s interests and concerns rather than around the spokesperson’s agenda.

To achieve these steps, a persuasive communications strategy needs:

- to go beyond conveying facts, helping people understand their roles in the project
- to positively appeal to the audiences’ emotions
- credibility and trust as core elements
- clear, understandable language
- logical explanations supported by evidence
- storytelling that frames the project so people understand why the new airport is necessary.

With these elements in mind, the speeches issued by SCT, the project’s leading entity, were analysed, yielding the following results:

- Language is mostly abstract and technical: “connectivity”, “competitiveness”, “hub”, “architectural sustainability” and other terms that are unknown to wide audiences are frequently used.
- Logical explanations are the messages’ main content. However, the Government uses too much quantitative data. Figures are not used to reinforce the message: they are the message.
- There is no appeal to the audience’s emotions. Concepts that can elicit positive feelings towards the NAICM, such as “pride”, “modern”, “beauty”, “clean”, and “friendly” need to be used repeatedly.
There has been no compelling storytelling effort to create a sense of urgency and support for the NAICM. It is assumed that everybody shares the Government’s story: that an airport is badly needed, that the 2000-06 administration failed to build it, and that the current government is going to do it right, in record time, and with many benefits.

The message has not reached the communities around the NAICM site. There are mentions that “160 000 jobs” will be created and that “public parks, and health and education facilities” will be built. These vague statements do not create “shared meaning” for the NAICM as a project and fail to highlight that surrounding municipalities’ living conditions will change for the better.

The Government’s discourse uses a “trickle-down” approach: the Government assumes that if shops and office buildings are built, jobs for the locals will naturally follow, but local communities may not share this vision. It is important to create a shared vision of the future.

Assessment of the Internet site

Overall, the NAICM website (www.aeropuerto.gob.mx) is clearly structured and boasts an attractive design. Still, there is room for improvement in terms of content. This communication channel could be more proactive and ambitious, considering the magnitude of the project. An area that clearly needs improvement is the regularity of its updates: the website has not posted videos of the latest press conferences, or of the most recent SCT and GACM leaders’ interviews.

The website could also benefit from interactive features, such as e-mail and contact details to help interested people find more information or deepen public knowledge on the project. Some newspapers have used more attractive ways of providing information about the NAICM (videos, infographics, etc.), which could be used as models for the website.

The airport-dedicated website is static and needs to provide frequent real-time updates on the project’s status. The website could capitalise on interactive features and tailor information to attract younger audiences. It is quite positive that an English version has been developed, with information for foreign audiences.

Communications responsibilities and capabilities

Unlike most government agencies, GACM’s organisational structure does not yet include a communications office. Its organisation chart includes an administrative board, a directorate general, and four main corporate directorates, but at the present time, none of these directorates is officially tasked with conducting social communication.

The SCT has the power to exert political control over GACM and has de facto taken control over the project’s communications and outreach efforts. There is no specific, independent, and formal communications strategy for the NAICM. According to SCT sources, this is because GACM still lacks the human and financial resources to have its own communications office. Consequently, communications efforts are framed within the SCT’s communications policy.

According to interviews with sector officials, an ad hoc group has formed between the GACM, SCT, the project management firm, and its external communications and public relations agency. This group meets twice a month to review positive and negative
coverage of the NAICM and recommends future courses of action, mostly for the SCT and GACM. It has been said that the project management firm has a strong preference for communicating technical details, while the SCT and GACM are more concerned with the political and policy aspects of communication actions. One observer described this group as a “good orchestra with competent musicians, but no director”.

This group has created a good mechanism to track the NAICM’s news coverage and the PR agency has helped the project manager to improve its communications. There has been a proactive approach to give business journalists information on a regular basis so they can write pieces on the NAICM. However, these actions are not part of a wider communications strategy, limiting their scope and impact. The GACM needs more resources and more autonomy from the SCT in order to implement a good strategy.

Internal communications

One aspect that was constantly mentioned during the interviews with public officials was that different stakeholders inside the agencies involved had different views of the project. Thus, their communications placed emphasis on different messages. This is common in large projects. The way to address this issue is through an internal communications strategy.

In general, the three most important barriers for efficient internal communications are the following:

- **Time.** People working in a project usually have their schedules filled up with tasks that are essential to the completion of the project and devote less time to communicate what they are doing and why.

- **Hierarchy.** The top members of an organisation are usually the busiest, and it is difficult for them to regularly meet with all the members of the team to provide a clear understanding of where the project is at a certain point in time. People can also feel that they are not empowered to talk to their superiors if they lack formal channels to do so.

- **Agendas.** In complex projects involving inter-agency communications, different people can have a diverse vision of the project depending on their own interests. This could make communication more difficult.

These barriers need a conscious effort from the team leadership to be overcome. A good internal communications strategy can help to that end. Such a strategy needs, as a minimum:

- a clear message aimed to reach all members at all levels in all the teams involved in the project

- clear mission and vision statements that remind the organisation members what the ultimate purpose of the project is and how the future looks once the project is finished

- a policy ensuring that information flows efficiently across all members of the organisation and facilitates that any member can have his/her concerns and questions addressed.

Additionally, an internal communications strategy may use the following tools:
• **Regular meetings:** The team needs to be assembled regularly only with the purpose of understanding where exactly the project is at a certain point and what the next steps are. It is essential that during these meetings, people are encouraged by the project leaders to express their concerns and opinions.

• **Regular update emails:** All members of the organisation should receive a brief, electronic weekly/bi-weekly newsletter with the most important news about the project. This newsletter can serve not only to keep them abreast of facts and recent developments, but also to convey messages from the project leadership that can serve to motivate the team and recognise their work and effort.

• **A real and/or virtual mailbox.** Project team members should be able to ask questions and receive answers from their leaders in a regular fashion. Sometimes, distance and time do not allow for everybody to raise a concern or pose a question, so a mailbox can serve to encourage people to speak freely.

• **A catalogue of all project documentation available for reference.** The Intranet of the project can concentrate all the relevant documents that the members of the organisation may need at some point. This allows everyone to be on the same page and to have a common place of reference.

A key element in internal communications that any organisation needs to keep in mind is the fact that every member of the organisation is a potential spokesperson. When every member of the organisation knows the mission and vision, and has the necessary information and facts at hand, he or she can be an effective spokesperson in their social and professional circles. That is why internal communications not only need to keep people informed, but also motivated and engaged. That is why clear messages that help everyone understand how their work contributes to the project are essential.

### Internal communications at the GACM

During a round of interviews with the GACM staff, it was clear that decision-making in crucial areas as well as day-to-day interaction can enormously benefit from a well-planned internal communications strategy. Five main obstacles for internal communications were identified:

1. **Staff and time constraints.** Almost all areas agreed in that the GACM is understaffed, given the magnitude of the NAICM project. This results in work overload, which leaves little time for meetings. One of the areas even holds internal briefing meetings on Saturdays.

2. **Office location.** GACM uses half a floor in a large corporate building as its headquarters. However, there is not enough space to house all the staff. Consequently, offices of Administration and Infrastructure are both located in separate buildings. While Infrastructure has its offices near the airport construction site, Administration is located about one hour and a half from it. This reduces the opportunities for one-to-one communications. Distance and traffic reduce the incentives for the staff to meet more often.

3. **Lack of equal access to technology.** Only 11 members of GACM staff have regular positions as public officials. The rest of the staff has been hired through temporary contracts, illustrating the questions over GACM’s capacity discussed in the other chapters. This means, for instance, that only a few people have access to the...
“@gacm.mx” official email account that complies with the Federal Government’s transparency and security requirements. The rest of the staff uses their personal email accounts. This has consequences for internal communications, as they cannot be included in the same Intranet. There is also a need to increase access to ACONEX, a document-sharing electronic platform that has been used by some members of the staff. With regards to this platform, interviewees said that despite its usefulness, not every area inside GACM is willing to use it, due to “generational barriers” (older senior staff have found it difficult to use) or because they have not been properly trained in its use due to time constraints.

4. Language. Most of the staff from the project management firm does not speak Spanish. While some members of the GACM staff are fluent in English, others are not. This has been cited as another significant communications barrier.

5. Differences in organisational culture and agendas. GACM is a newly formed agency, and its staff comes from diverse backgrounds in the government, private sector, and academia. It is not strange that they have different views and management styles, which has created barriers to communication. In words of a senior member of the staff “GACM is a new, fresh corporatised agency, but given our diverse backgrounds we already have the internal communication problems of an old government one.”

Proposals for action

External communications

The main proposal is to establish a formal NAICM communications strategy with goals, means, actions, budget, and responsible actors. It is imperative for SCT, GACM, and the project manager to have clearly divided communications and information responsibilities. As part of that communications strategy, the following measures are necessary:

1. Empower GACM as the leader of day-to-day communications and outreach efforts, while the SCT could limit itself to taking the stage when key milestones are reached. This would put communications in the hands of the agency that is formally responsible for the project and prevent grey areas of responsibility.

2. Create a formal communications and crisis management committee to be led by GACM, with members from SCT, the Office of the Presidency, and the project manager. Crisis management manuals and plans should be developed.

3. Undertake media training and crisis-management workshops.

4. Appoint a project-dedicated spokesperson. Ideally, the spokesperson would have solid technical knowledge of the project as well as the interpersonal and communications skills necessary to create and maintain a highly positive relationship with all of the project’s stakeholders, both inside and outside the Government.
5. Change the language from technical and rational to persuasive and emotional. The NAICM has the potential to become a symbol of pride for Mexico. Everyone involved has to convey that pride in the project.

6. Conduct public-opinion studies and focus groups to understand stakeholders’ aspirations and concerns. Quantitative and qualitative studies would allow the GACM to understand which areas need outreach efforts the most.

7. Create tailored messages for different audiences according to their nature (NGOs, community leaders, the business sector, local governments) and attitude (those supporting the airport, those who are neutral, and those who are openly against it). Likewise, develop tailored messages for each stage of the project (see Box 5.4). Use different channels to convey those messages.

8. Strengthen the functions of outreach and community liaison of the Corporate Directorate for Planning, Evaluation, and Outreach. NGO leaders are a particularly important audience, as they have a constant demand for information and data. They expressed their need to have a formal contact inside the GACM.

9. Define a calendar for private meetings with key stakeholders to keep them abreast on the evolution of the project. A recurring perception among key stakeholders is that communications are very irregular, with big announcements followed by weeks and months of “silence”.

10. Steer clear of information voids. Define a calendar for press conferences. Use videos and social networks to provide weekly updates on the project. For instance, the spokesperson can have a Periscope account to show the public that work is being carried out according to plan. YouTube time-lapse videos are another great tool to show progress. The Facebook account can be used to tell positive stories about the people working on the project as well as about people living in the surrounding communities.

11. Do not underestimate the risk that radical groups may pose to the project. As the 2018 federal and local elections get closer, these groups will have incentives to seek support from political parties.

12. Strengthen efforts to reach out to the local communities surrounding the NAICM. People in the vicinity of the airport will be powerful spokespersons for or against the project, and therefore need to get all of the GACM’s communications and support.
Box 5.4. Key messages for each stage of the communications strategy

Stage 1: Preliminary works

Objective: Creating a sense of vision and pride for the new international airport.

Key message suggested:
- “Mexico is building its new doorway to the world”.

Narrative:
- Current airport is no longer functional / comfortable / convenient.
- Current airport is not a source of pride / good image of Mexico.
- We can do better than this.
- We are working to do better than this.
- We are building the nation’s new doorway to the world.

Stage 2: Construction

Key message suggested:
- “Mexico is building one of the top airports in the world”.

Narrative:
- We are changing the face of Mexico City to receive visitors from all over Mexico and the world.
- When people come and see the new airport they will see and feel the new face of Mexico.
- Mexicans can do great things when we work together.
- This airport will be a source of pride and welfare for Mexico City and the nation.

Stage 3: Operation

Key message suggested:
- “Mexico has a new symbol of progress: the NAICM”.

Narrative:
- Mexico has changed a lot in the last eight years.
- The new airport is the symbol of the new Mexico.
- The new airport is the face of a renewed nation.
- We want you to come, look, feel, and taste the new doorway of Mexico to the world.

Internal communications

1. Appoint a responsible person for internal communications. This can be a part of the functions of the external communications office, but the same person cannot be in charge of both. Internal communications needs its own strategy and implementation.

2. Define the communication tools and channels. Despite its relatively small size, the GACM staff faces the challenge of talking a common language. A leadership group can be appointed to ensure that information flows among areas that have expressed concern about organisational bottlenecks. This group can define better
practices to ensure that all concerns and views are taken into account in the selection of the communication tools and channels.

3. Invest in the creation of a document-sharing platform for all the staff. ACONEX is a platform brought by the project management firm, but opinions about its usefulness and user-friendliness are divided. It would probably be necessary to think about an alternative that suits the needs of all the areas inside GACM. The issue of credentials for access to the platform needs to be addressed, so every member of the staff has access according to his/her needs and seniority.

4. Define a calendar and format for internal communication meetings. Meetings have proven to be successful as the preferred communication tool inside some areas, but when it comes to interaction among different areas, they are not as successful as desired. There is a need to create criteria (templates and rules) for meetings among different teams, so they are not time-consuming and deemed ineffective by staff members.

Notes

1. The Bordo Poniente is a 500-hectare dump in the former lake of Texcoco area, which received rubble from thousands of buildings that were destroyed in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake. It soon became the main dump for the city’s solid waste and received more than 12 000 tons of trash per day until it reached its full capacity. It was officially closed in 2012. However, there are no effective plans to correctly manage the 70 million tonnes of accumulated waste. The Bordo is considered a serious environmental hazard, as the winds push trash particles to populated areas. Some of these trash particles are less than 2.5 microns large and can adhere to the lungs.

2. AVE is the amount in dollars a story would cost if it appeared as paid advertising. AVE is determined by multiplying the length of the story by the respective publication or station’s advertising rate, based on the Mexican Media Publicity (MPM) advertisement media guide.

References

