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AN INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FRAUD

On the basis of our current experience in the Spanish Taxation Agency¹, I would like to present some ideas providing an overview of all aspects of our communication strategy.

Organisations like the Spanish Taxation Agency whose task it is to monitor taxation and customs so as to ensure the collection of public revenue, or whose remit includes such tasks, must project an **image** to society that reflects efficiency and openness in the performance of their duties, so as permanently to boost citizens' confidence in the tax authorities.

To achieve this aim, the organisation's **communication strategy** must be based on three fundamental principles:

- Openness in its actions. The organisation must take responsibility vis-à-vis individual citizens and the general public for the results of its actions, even where these are negative.
- Combating fraud. Public organisations enhance their image by improving the results of the fight against fraud and the public's perception of these results.
- Assistance and service to the general public. The services which the agency provides to the public must be maintained and their accessibility improved, particularly via Internet, to make it easier for citizens to meet their tax obligations.

This communication strategy must take the following two essential aspects into account:

- **Staff** are one of the organisation's main channels of communication. The organisation's public image is based to a large extent on the image projected by its members. This explains why many organisations, both public and private, have now dropped the conventional distinction between external and in-house communication, which used to be the responsibility of two separate departments – marketing and human resources.
- Communication between the organisation and the public must be **two-way**. The communication strategy must include mechanisms for gathering information on the public's views, their expectations and what they want the agency to do.

¹ Agencia Tributaria

This is why the communication strategies of organisations like the Spanish Taxation Agency are designed as an **integrated whole**, including coordinated action involving both in-house and external communication tools:

1. In-house communication tools

As already stated, the image that professionals in the investigation and monitoring sector project to society is a key facet of the public image of the organisation they work for. The better the following aspects, the better that image will be.

- The motivation of the staff in the performance of their duties, their sense of belonging to the organisation and their identification with its goals
- The extent to which investigators are properly trained to carry out their duties
- The information that workers receive about the organisation as a whole and the service they provide or the task they perform in particular.

The communication strategy must therefore include mechanisms to facilitate staff participation and enable staff to communicate their ideas, needs, expectations and the level of satisfaction. To achieve these aims, the Spanish Taxation Agency uses the following in-house communication tools (the list is not exhaustive):

- A bi-monthly in-house magazine.
- A suggestions box for the use of staff.
- An intranet portal for staff use.
- An intranet designed as an information management tool to facilitate staff training and information.
- In-house surveys and opinion polls (such as the in-house survey on the atmosphere at work).

2. External communication tools

There are many channels of communication that organisations can use to convey to the public the image of an open, trustworthy organisation that is efficient in combating non-compliance – an organisation that reflects the society it serves.

The main external communication tools which the Spanish Taxation Agency bears in mind when designing its communication strategy are as follows:

- Visual symbols of corporate identity

- Institutional publicity campaigns (press, radio and television)
- Institutional publications (annual activity reports, leaflets, service charters or lists of services available to the public, etc.)
- Information and help services (in offices and by telephone and Internet)
- Studies and opinion polls
- Civic information about taxation in schools

There are also a variety of channels for conveying the organisation's image to the general public:

- Open offices that provide services to the general public
- Telephone
- Internet
- The media: press, radio and television
- Forums, conferences, exhibitions, seminars and other events in which the Taxation Agency can play a useful part.

In this context, **relations with the press** play a decisive role in developing the communication strategy. They involve anticipating the information required by the media, tailoring the message to the medium used to convey it, and ensuring the message is consistent with the rest of the communication strategy.

Every communication measure will use the most appropriate medium to convey the message aimed at the public or to gather relevant information from citizens.

An integrated communication strategy must combine the use of these tools in the best way to achieve the aim pursued – providing information, educating or providing services to the general public – bearing in mind that the ultimate goal is to convey the organisation's "**real image**" to the public, and that this real image must closely resemble the "**desired image**" that society wants to see: only then will the public develop a sound awareness of tax-related matters.

In conclusion, I believe the existence of a strategic communication document including an overview of all the objectives, principles, tools and channels of communication is a key factor in the success of organisations whose tasks include the investigation and monitoring of taxation and customs.