SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

Regional Media Centre

Suva Fiji

The Communication Process

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THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

To be effective, communication should be a continuing effort to transmit clear messages to a well-defined audience in order to accomplish explicit objectives.

Communication activities should be carefully planned implemented and should make full use of the professional expertise that has been developed through decades of experience in advertising, marketing, and private-sector, government and academic communication research.

Let us isolate and examine some of the elements involved in the communication process by which a message is transferred from a sender or 'source' to an audience or 'receiver'

THE SENDER

The sender or source can be a person or a group of people who want to communicate a message to an audience (receiver).

The sender nearly always has some responsibility for a failure in communication, perhaps through lack of care in planning and research (feed forward), miscalculation of resources available or lack of attention to the response of the audience (feed back).

The Idea

The sender must first have a clear idea, a plan, a concept, a scheme or design of the subject and content of what is to be communicated to an audience. The idea may not necessarily be the idea of the sender, but the sender who starts the communication process must be able to encode or translate the idea into a clear message.

THE MESSAGE

The message contains the information, instruction, news or new knowledge that is communicated. Its meaning can be expressed in different ways: language, written or printed words, pictures - even by movement, gestures or facial expressions.

All these are symbols - they represent the message or encoded idea that the sender wants to communicate.

The message may fail because the information is incorrect or it is inappropriate to the receiver.

THE CHANNEL

The channel of communication is the means or vehicle by which the message is communicated. Messages can travel from sender to receiver in many ways, for example:

a) by direct face-to-face exchange between source and audience (teacher - students).

b) by way of a medium - this might be something simple as a chalkboard or a handout sheet, or it might involve mass media channels, such as radio, television, newspapers or posters, which enable a single source to reach an audience of many people.

An important point about the means of communication is its credibility. This concerns the audience's opinion of the source and the channels used. The more credible the source and the channel, the more willing people are to listen to the message. Opinions of mass media are likely to be different from those of a personal face-to-face approach. For example the national radio station or newspaper carries weight as 'the voice of authority', most listeners and readers believe what is presented to them.

The choice of channel may be inappropriate if a medium is used which does not reach the intended audience for technical reasons or distribution problems. There may also be the use of the wrong language, unfamiliar words, difficult terminology or wrong pictures which are not correctly decoded by the audience.

The right presentation through the suitable channel should make it easy for the audience to understand and interpret the message and its meaning.

THE AUDIENCE

The audience (receiver), the people who receive the message, is the most important element in the communication process. The intended receiving group, or target audience, will hardly ever be 'the general public as a whole', and in fact it is much easier to communicate effectively if the audience is limited to one particular target group. It is essential for the sender to study the intended audience before making decisions about messages and the channel of communication (feed forward).

Information about the audience may be insufficient or inaccurate, so that the message is inappropriate or aimed at the wrong audience, as in these instances:

a) the message is for too general an audience, therefore information is not precise enough to meet actual needs.

b) the message runs counter to the audience's deep-rooted traditional beliefs and will be ignored.

c) not enough explanation is given to convince the audience to change present behaviour or attitude.

d) the audience cannot identify itself and its own problems in the information given, so will ignore it.

e) the audience is too concerned with quite a different problem to pay enough attention to the message.

The Effect

The effect is the impact of the message on the audience. A successful communication usually brings about change. Three main types of change can take place and usually in this order:

a) a change in the audience's knowledge (what people know)

b) a change in their attitudes (what people feel)

c) a change in their behaviour (what people do)

If the desired effects of the communication are not clearly defined, the source cannot tell if the transfer of the message has been effective.

THE FEEDBACK

The response to the message by the receiver, as observed and analysed by the sender is called the feedback.

Communication should be a two-way process.

The originator of the message can only be sure that the message has been both received and understood through the audience's response. This response should be used to modify further messages and revise materials as necessary.

Feedback can be grouped as follows:

a) immediate, people show if they have understood and if the message is relevant.

b) long-term, an ultimate change in people's behaviour.

c) positive, where communication is satisfactory:
the audience receive and understand the message and take the desired action.

d) negative, where communication is not satisfactory and adjustments are needed.

It is easier to see the feedback for some means of communication than for others. Conversation or discussion between individuals can provide direct, immediate feedback reasonably easy.

Using media (radio, video, print) may mean there is less fact-to-face contact between source and audience, and more formal arrangements may become necessary to collect feedback. When mass media channels are used, the source of the message is usually remote from the audience. It will therefore be difficult to collect feedback, this will need careful planning and organisation. In general, the more that feedback is taken into account, the more effective will be the communication.

THE FEEDFORWARD

First the sender must know who the intended audience is. People have their own distinctive qualities, as well as different knowledge, background, experience, beliefs, traditions, professions, social status, etc. giving rise to different interests, needs and priorities.

Information can best be discovered by a survey of the intended audience or specific target group. The information gathered during the survey (study of audience) will provide valuable guidelines for the preparation and packaging of the message as well as for the choice of the most suitable channel or channels to ensure an effective transmission to the audience.

THE NOISE

Noise refers here to anything that interferes with the message and stops it getting to the audience. This can happen in a number of ways and at any point in the communication process.

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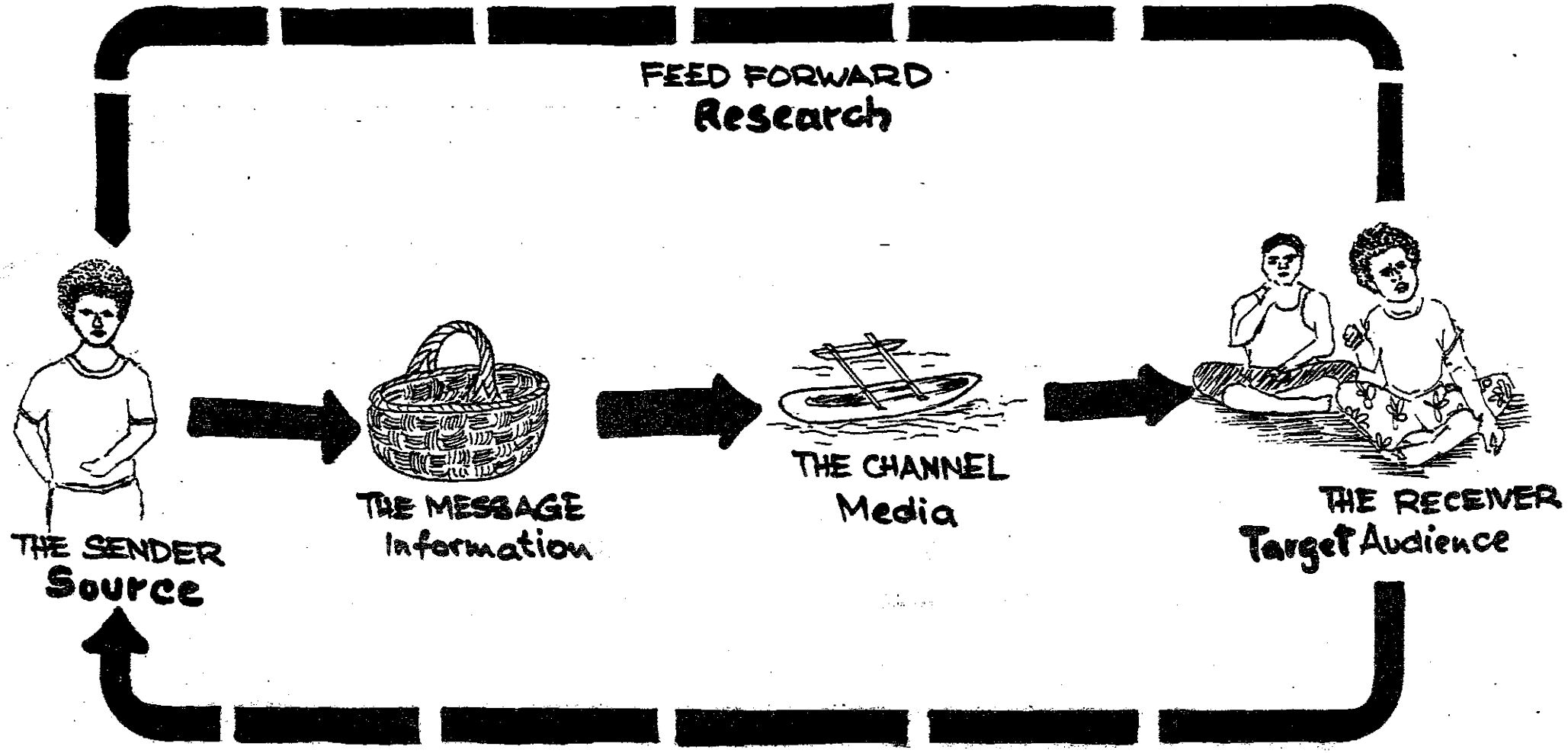
THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS



THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

SENDER

SOURCE

Person who wants to communicate a message

IDEA

concept, plan, scheme, Design

→ ENCODE

Organising, formating, packaging

→ **MESSAGE**

Information, Instruction, News, Knowledge given

→ **CHANNEL**

Media

- Audio (Radio)
- Audio-Visual (Video/TV)
- Visual (pictures & print)

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DECODE

- Will the people understand?
- Can the people interpret the meaning of the message?

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IDEA

AUDIENCE

- People who receive the communicated message
- The target group

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EFFECT

Impact of the message on the audience

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FEEDBACK

- Response of the audience
- Change of behaviour, attitude
- Adopt new ideas or knowledge, skills

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BASIC PROCESSES & PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNICATION PROJECTS

1. ANALYSIS

- Review target audiences
- Assess Existing Polices & programs
- Select sponsoring institutions
- Evaluate Communication Resources

2. DESIGN

- Decide on objectives
- Identify Audiences
- Develop messages
- Select media
- Draw up action plan

3. PRETESTING, REVISION

- Pretest materials with representative groups
- Revise materials in light of the test results.

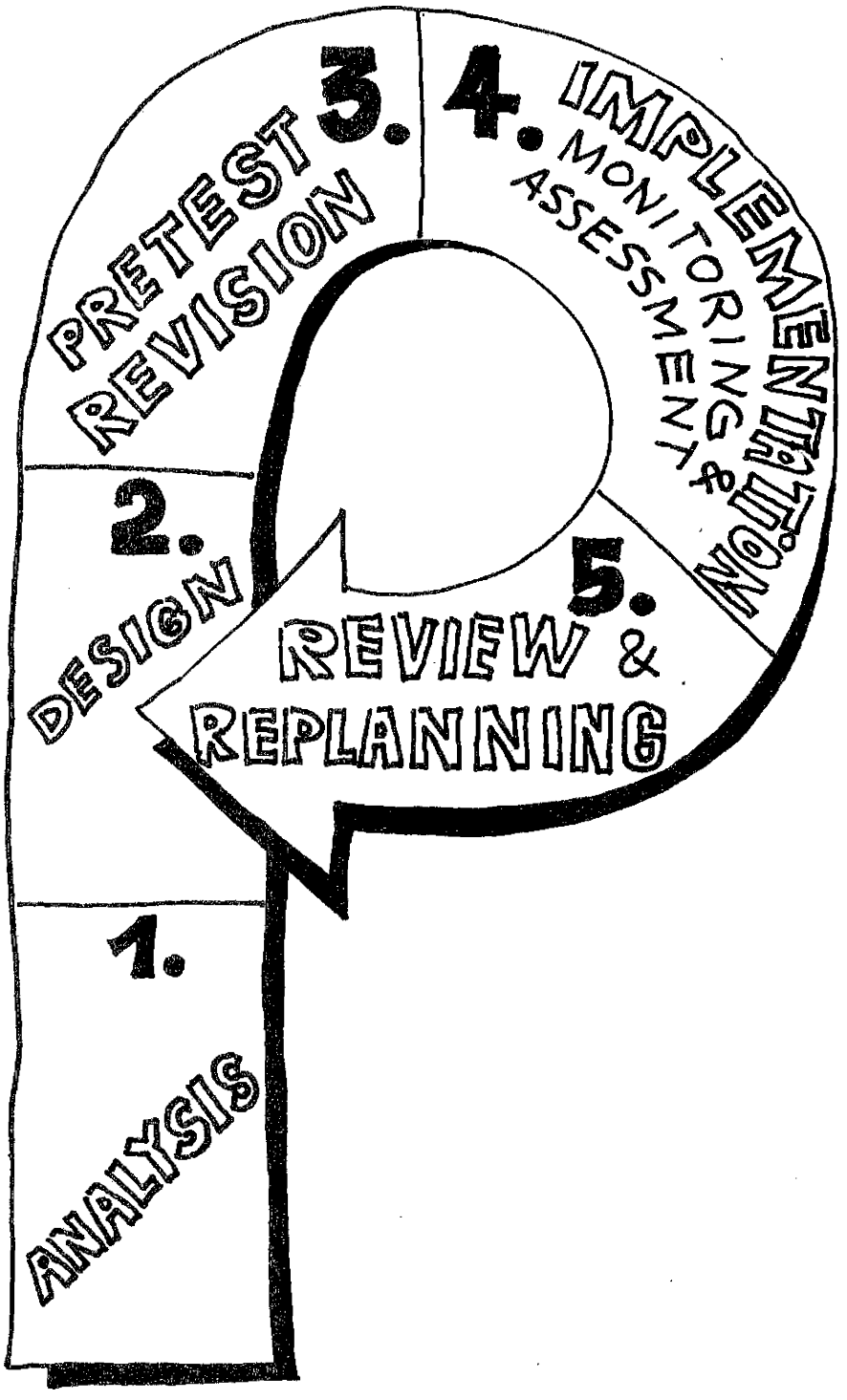
4. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & ASSESSMENT

- Implement action plan
- Schedule & integrate distribution of messages through appropriate channels
- Circulate implementation widely
- Monitor distribution in media
- Monitor work shedule & budget
- Monitor outputs and correct problems
- Measure audience response
- Analyze results in terms of objectives

5. REVIEW & REPLANNING

- Analyse Overall Impact
- Identify weaknesses
- Redesign communication activities
- Plan for continuity and repeated effort.
- Select channels for reinforcement of messages

THE COMMUNICATION PROJECT



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