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Lessons from Laos

SELECTING APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION MEDIA FOR CONTEXT

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Where are we going today?

1. **Motivation**

Why did I get interested in communication between different groups?

2. **Findings**

What did I find (and how did I find it)?

3. **Relevance**

What could it mean for you?

Why did I get interested in communication between groups?

A long journey with a growing frustration ...





Who has communicated with a group and thought afterwards, “Well. I thought I had it right, but did we both get the same message?”

Common communication challenges

Over nearly 40 years as a science communicator, I have seen many communication barriers between various groups of 'collaborators':

- Students / teachers
- Extension advisers / farmers
- Researchers from developed / developing countries
- Academics / everyone else!

These barriers arise through differences in:

- Personalities
- Cultures
- Organisational cultures
- Political support
- Economic development
- Physical support
- and others!

Insight: Context is key

What did I find (and how did I find it)?

A mid-life crisis and a call-to-action ...





This is what a midlife crisis can look like for white Australian males ...

Mine looked like this - a PhD with agricultural researchers in Australia and Lao PDR



The questions I sought to answer

1. What are the main communication barriers between Lao and Australian agricultural researchers working together in Lao PDR?
2. What are the best media for them to communicate with each other that account for these barriers?

Finding the barriers

The approach

- Did **face-to-face interviews** in Australia and Lao PDR with 30 agricultural researchers and others.
- Used **qualitative analysis** of transcripts to identify barriers.

Interview questions and details in reference (1).



which were:

1. **Relational:** face-to-face, trust, respect, equity, personal vs professional, 'bridges'.
2. **Language:** Speaking English, technical English.
3. **Cultural:** cultural intelligence, 'face', non-verbal differences, organisational hierarchies.
4. **Personal:** cultural empathy, friendliness, active listening.
5. **Structural environment:** economic, political, international, online bandwidth, perceptions of time.

Assessing common communication tools used by researchers

- **Face-to-face**
- Skype ← **Most problems**
- Email ← **Fewest problems**
- Websites (2) ← **Most problems**
- Mobile phone (audio)
- Mobile phone (SMS)
- Discussion groups
- Facebook
- Online conferencing (includes instant messaging)

Detailed results? See 'Extra Information' at end of slides

Assessing effectiveness of each tool

- Identified main tools used by the researchers in interviews.
- Converted barriers identified in interviews into eight sets of criteria to assess media - *details in reference (3)*.
- Incorporated criteria into a modified heuristic evaluation tool called I-CHET.
- Used I-CHET to assess how well each medium addressed barriers – *details in reference (4)*.

What could the findings mean for you?

A pause for reflection and consideration ...

Question

“Do I consider these barriers when setting up collaborations?”

Question

“Do I talk with my collaborators about their barriers?”

Question

“Could I use these assessment tools in my context?”

Question

“Could I build such tools for my context, or do I need help?”

Available resources

Tools to help identify barriers and media with the least problems are in the publications list below.

Insight
Communication
in context is
complex and
challenging

What now for me?

1. Identifying communication barriers between NRM organisations in regional Australia:
 - Between a research institute and a government agency
– *see details in reference (5)*
 - Between researchers and landholders / communities
2. Helping establish a community-led research centre in regional Australia, using concepts and findings from my PhD study, in collaboration with the community.
3. Building a media assessment tool for an Australian regional context.

References

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- (3) Ward, W. S., & Given, L. M. (2017). Assessing technologies for information sharing in international research teams: Developing an intercultural heuristic evaluation tool. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 54(1), 446-454. doi:10.1002/pr2.2017.14505401048
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- (5) Ward, W. S., & Vanderzee, M. (2019). *Can agencies of different feathers click together? Collaborating for NRM research in North East Victoria*. ILWS Report 125. Albury, NSW: Institute for Land, Water and Society. Retrieved from <https://www.csu.edu.au/research/ilws/publications/ilws-reports/2019/Ward-Vanvderzee-ILWS-Report-125.pdf>

Further reading

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Jirotko, M., Lee, C. P., & Olson, G. M. (2013). Supporting scientific collaboration: Methods, tools and concepts. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 22(4-6), 667-715. doi:10.1007/s10606-012-9184-0

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Sonnenwald, D. (2007). Scientific collaboration. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 41(1), 643-681. doi:10.1002/aris.2007.1440410121

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Extra information: I-CHET analysis 1

General Heuristics	Skype	Email	Website: ACIAR	Website: NAFRI	Mobile phone	SMS	Discussion group	Facebook	Online conference
HE01. Visibility of system status									
HE02. Match between system and real world									
HE03. User control and freedom									
HE04. Consistency and standards									
HE05. Error prevention									
HE06. Recognition rather than recall									
HE07. Flexibility and efficiency of use									
HE08. Aesthetic and minimalist design									
HE09. Help users recognise, diagnose and recover from errors									
HE10. Help and documentation									

Extra information: I-CHET analysis 2

Intercultural Heuristic	Skype	Email	Website: ACIAR	Website: NAFRI	Mobile phone	SMS	Discussion group	Facebook	Online conferencing
HE11. Language used									
HE12. Geographic/ temporal distance									
HE13. Interpersonal relations									
HE14. Specific cultural cues									
HE15. Conversation and group support									
HE16. Communication style									
HE17. Readiness to use									
HE18. Legal adaptability									