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 …
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.

Lessons from Laos: Selecting appropriate communication media
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)

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)*.

Detailed results? See ‘Extra Information’ at end of slides
What could the findings mean for you?

A pause for reflection and consideration …
Available resources
Tools to help identify barriers and media with the least problems are in the publications list below.

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?”

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.

References


Further reading


Contact

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### General Heuristics

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<tr>
<th>Heuristic</th>
<th>Skype</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Website: ACIAR</th>
<th>Website: NAFRI</th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
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## Intercultural Heuristic Analysis 2

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