

Communicating

The key issue here is that communication is integral to the project, not an “add on” when it is all over. Communication is integral to the whole process because:

- You want to build relationships that support trust, that will want to make things work even when you don't get the best outcomes and will ensure that stakeholders will be participants not opponents. The more we can involve people in decision-making and planning, the more effort they are likely to expend getting the decision or plan to work. One tries to make the best decision. Sometimes, however, people will successfully undermine the best decision if it does not accord with their beliefs;
- You may need information/support/commitment etc before you start (, if people are involved in the planning, they may have important information about the situation to contribute. Participative planning is often based on more complete information);
- Ongoing support etc during the project (especially if you need to modify the project as you learn from the outcomes);
- Clear understanding of the outcomes if you (or your client) are to implement what you have learnt.

If a project is to be effective it must be supported. If the new project creates a conflict, by implicitly (or explicitly) criticising the past actions without addressing why these actions were done, then those associated with the previous program may be resistant and not support the new program.

“Some resistance to change occurs because people believe they are being asked to deny what has been an important part of their history. However, if they can be given an opportunity to examine their past, and the relevance to the present, they may decide voluntarily that some of the past can now be left behind. Particularly if the past is appropriately honoured, it can then be appropriately buried.”

There are many ways of improving communication, both between participants in a study and stakeholders. Strategies include:

- Cause-effect diagrams
- Conceptual models
- Soft systems methodology

These are discussed in [Environmental and Adaptive Management](#)

Who:

- Are your stakeholders?
- Is the primary client?
- Else might be interested?

Why

- Are you communicating with each group?
- Will they be interested in hearing from you?
- Will you choose one method/approach over another?

What:

- Do you need/want to know from others?
- Will you “say” to your stakeholders/client(s)/etc? what are our messages?
- Do they want to know from you? (Are you giving [feedback](#) on a program or initiating a new one?)
- Are your objectives? (eg. What attitudes and behaviours are we trying to address?)

When:

- Is the best time to conduct education/communication activities?
- Will you start communicating with the relevant groups?
- Will you have done “enough” to move on to the next step?

How:

- Will you identify the groups/persons you need to communicate with?
- How will decide on appropriate methods and strategies?
- Much time to do you have?
- Will you determine if you have been [effective](#)?

There are many approaches to [community “consultation”](#) but a key concept is Arnstein’s [Ladder of Participation](#). She recognises a hierarchy from (broadly) non-participation to power. In my experience consultation is usually at the lower end of the scale, if only because to “empower” someone else means giving up power and most of us are reluctant to do that, especially if we are ultimately responsible for the outcome.

If time and resources are available the [Action Learning/Action Research](#) approach might be useful to explore the possibilities of communication as an integral part of management decision-making,