Chapter-7

The Information Communication Technology: The Approach, Outline and Methodology

Communication is fundamental to human life. It is as important to such weighty human activities as diplomacy, politics, organizations, leadership, management and team working, as it is to the more intimate ties that bind an old married couple sitting together on a park bench, or a parent soothing a child. In many ways it is what makes us human. Without it compassion, co-operation, understanding and society itself would not be possible. Yet of all the links that bind humans together, it is often the most poorly understood and it is frequently given the least priority in human affairs. In recent history, despite rhetoric to the contrary, much of the time it takes a poor second place to what has recently been called 'competitive advantage', that drive to win at all costs that characterises others simply as rivals to be beaten at all costs but not communicated with. This has created many of the problems that beset modern organisations both internally and externally as the scope of those to be beaten grows to include all others in the environment. But as Alan Watts (1974) notes: *It is both dangerous and absurd for our world to be a group of communions mutually excommunicate.* (Watts, 1974: 13).

When communication is absent, the inevitable result is suspicion, rivalry and lack of understanding. In a world where travel is easier

than it ever has been in the so-called global village, where trade and commerce operate across the traditional boundaries of the nation state, where public services are expected to be more accountable for their activities and results, and where the world's populations are more notable for their diversity than their homogeneity, communication is more important than ever. This short set of notes covers some of the basic aspects of human communication. It introduces some simple basic models which, while not covering all the important issues that communication involves, are sufficiently comprehensive for practical use.

Three elements of communication:-

Figure 1: A basic model of a communication system.

Practically all communications systems can be viewed abstractly as comprising three separable elements: sender; message; receiver or audience (figure 1). This model applies equally well to radios, televisions and computers as it does to purely human communication. The fundamental difference that distinguishes human communications, however, is that both the sender and receiver are sentient and therefore aware of their part in the process. Furthermore, because people are able to frame intention, they play a relatively *active* part in the communications process rather than the passive involvement of technological equipment. Nevertheless similar issues apply.

If communication is to take place, for example, it is important for both sender and receiver to be attuned to one another, or more generally to have some compatibility between them. It is also important for the message, both in form and content, to be suitable for the recipient to access it. Finally there needs to be a satisfactory

medium through which communication can take place, whether it is airwaves, light or wires. Thus it is important that the sender is able to code a message into a format suitable for transmission, receipt and decoding by the intended recipient.

Human communication, however, involves far more than the simple transmission of information from one location to another. There is an old joke about lectures in which it is said that a lecture is the process by which a lecturer transmits the contents of a textbook to a student's notebook, without passing through the mind of either. Clearly not an example of communication in a human sense, although it might be appropriate if only computers are involved. In contrast, for communication to take place between people there needs to be some level of understanding transferred between sender and receiver. For this to occur, there must be some minimal level of inter subjective understanding between the people involved, not only about the content of communication but also, more broadly, about its cultural, social and political significance. Computers can transfer information, but as far as we know they do not have sufficient self awareness to understand either what they're doing or to understand the information they convey. People can understand, although clearly not always successfully, accurately or efficiently. What makes the difference, for communication to be successful, there needs to be a minimal shared frame of reference between sender and receiver, and where this is absent communication in any meaningful sense is unlikely to be achieved.

Although clearly not very sophisticated the three fold model does nevertheless draw attention to important elements in communications systems, highlighting aspects which *must* be taken into account if successful communication is to take place. Professional communicators, such as journalists and designers, naturally consider each element of the model as part of their work. Amateurs, by which I mean those

who have not been trained in communication, often ignore one or more aspects. In general, while it is obvious that some attention must be given to aspects of the message, usually less attention is given to features of the sender, and even less to the receivers - the audience. Unfortunately this skews attention away from where it should be in effective communication. In effect it sets the priority as message-sender-receiver, or even sender-message-receiver. But both of these are in the wrong order. By far the most important factor in communications is the intended audience, and the correct priority is receiver-message-sender. That is, except insofar as perceptions of the sender by the receiver are important, the *least* important element is the sender.

Audience aspects:-

The audience - those who are expected to receive a communication - is the most important aspect of a communications system for those who wish to communicate. Therefore absolute priority must be given to who is to receive a message before the message is even framed. Clearly different target audiences will respond to different messages, different styles of presentation, and different kinds of appeal. It is difficult to generalize precisely about this because there is scope for a very wide variation of audience and circumstances, but it is fairly obvious, for example, that a group of Hell's Angels will respond to different kinds of appeal than a group of stockbrokers. Messages need to be tailored as specifically as possible to the intended audience. If they are not, they will fail - it is as simple as that. In some, perhaps most cases this might need some basic research into the intended audience before communications are even attempted. Obviously this will be constrained by the kind of message and its overall importance,

but in *extreme* cases it might require *extensive* sampling from a target audience in advance.

In general there are some simple questions that need to be asked, and answered. These are best summarised by what are called the five Ws - Who, What, Where, When, Why - plus a sixth honorary W – w How - (*see* below). For example, you might ask Who do you want to communicate with? Why? What do you want to say to them? Why? What can you *reasonably* assume that your intended audience already knows or understands? The questions you ask depend a lot on the context in which you intend to communicate. Those that are appropriate for preparing a lecture will almost certainly be different to the questions you need to ask about an interview panel for a new job. But the point is that these kinds of questions need to be considered at the outset communication, before any other preparation has been made. At least two things follow from this. First, when preparing communication for any potential audience there are important and necessary social and cultural factors to be considered (*see* below). Second, one message may need to be prepared in several different forms for different audiences.

Message aspects:-

There are several ways in which messages and message aspects can be categorized. In general the most basic and most important is the distinction between form and content. It is in the interaction between these two, and how they are interpreted by an audience, that meaning resides. Thus they need to be co-ordinate so that the form a message takes works with the content rather than conflicts with it. For example, the message 'The end of the world is nigh' is unlikely to have the same impact if it is presented in pretty colours with a floral border than in doom-laden bold letterforms with a background

of greys, blacks and reds. Perhaps this message wouldn't have much appeal anyway, but if presented in pinks and yellows it is likely to be interpreted as irony or as a joke. If we consider more important topics, such as AIDS awareness, and think about how such topics can and have been presented, and how they've been received, then the point becomes clearer. The early attempts by the British government to make people aware of AIDS, using the image of a slab of granite toppling over, were received with derision and scorn precisely because the form disrupted the message so potently that many people were more aware of the government's embarrassment about sexual matters than about the urgency of what it was trying to say. It is fairly obvious that people respond at different times and in different circumstances to different kinds of message and different styles of presentation. Some messages are more persuasive than others; some messages are more appealing, and so on. In general the content of any message can also be characterized into two kinds: those that have a broadly emotional appeal, and those that have a primarily informational intent. In practice the two cannot be so easily separated because human psychology works on both levels simultaneously, but the distinction is a useful one nevertheless. Clearly in a crude sense some messages are better framed as simple informational content, whereas others work much better by direct appeal to emotions. It is important to realize, however, that in describing something as emotional here there is no intention to imply that it is somehow trivial. On the contrary some of the most important aspects of human thought are essentially emotional in tone and content, including morals and ethics. Even questions of 'fact' often have emotional content; one has only to consider the debates around issues such as equal opportunities and diversity to understand this.

The important point here is, however, that if the balance between emotional and informational content is not right for the message to be conveyed communication will be impaired or rendered altogether impossible. An example will help here.

Animal experimentation for medical research is an important but highly controversial subject. On one side of the argument there are frank appeals to emotional response, and on the other primary a reliance on facts, figures and rational argument. Organizations such as the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) base their campaigns around potent images of animals suffering as part of the research process. The main response from the medical research community was to present the case for the necessity of using living systems for certain kinds of research, using logical argument and empirical evidence. Who got the best of the argument? The anti-vivisectionists. Until, that is, the research establishment realized that for all their logic and evidences their message was being ignored because the audience was more swayed by emotional appeal. More recently there has been a riposte better targeted at the general public from the medical researchers. One, for example, shows a child in a wheelchair looking out to sea, with the caption: 'When you've saved the whales, why not save the people who can appreciate them? Such examples also highlight the principle of one-sided and two-sided messages. Should one, for example, present only one side of an argument, or gives balanced approach which acknowledges an opponent's position? Which is mor word s to that effect, likely to sway an audience? The answer is not straightforward, and the evidence is mixed. To some extent it seems to depend on the audience's level of education. Educated people, those who have continued in full time formal education beyond secondary level, seem to prefer two-sided, balanced presentations, and to be suspicious of

anything that appears unrealistically biased. Those who have progressed less far in the educational system are often more persuaded by the simplicity of a single-sided message. It does, however, depend also on the content of the message, the values of the audience, and several other factors to do with the importance of the issues and how the audience responds to the sender.

Sender aspects:-

The most important thing about who sends any particular message is how the audience reacts to them. How the sender is perceived and regarded by the audience can have a disproportionate effect on how the message is received, often regardless of content. Crudely speaking the primary characteristics can be grouped into credibility, trustworthiness and likeability. This is about key social psychological processes between people, and takes us into areas such as social categorization, stereotyping, presuppositions, character, personality and politics.

It is perhaps unfortunate, but what can be called the 'global' characteristics of a person can and will have an immediate impact on their perceived credibility, trustworthiness and likeability. These include physical characteristics, such as height and weight, but also gender, ethnicity and sexuality. In addition, how a person speaks, their accent, how they are dressed, and how they behave, will also have an important impact. Much depends on the content of the message, and what are assumed to be the motives of the sender in giving that particular message, but also none of the physical characteristics, considered as social categories, is neutral.

People make value attributions about others based on what is *assumed* about them, and these are based on assumptions about what any particular characteristic *means*. For example, a speaker addressing a panel of politicians about the dangers of drugs is unlikely to have

much impact if he or she is dressed shabbily, talks colloquially, and is suspected of using drugs. On the other hand, a speaker addressing a group of clients at a drugs rehabilitation unit on the same subject is less likely to have an impact if dressed in a conventional business suit, talking with a received accent and is suspected of never having used drugs. The context and audience make a difference to impact, and in this example the impact goes to credibility, as well as assumptions about motivation. At the heart of this is trustworthiness, which in many ways is the most important of the three attributions mentioned earlier.

If a speaker, or more generally the sender of a message, is not trusted communications will be disrupted, the message may be ignored altogether, and communication will not take place. Although there are few rules or scientific 'laws' about this, one thing stands clear from the research evidence: when the source of a communication is thought to have a vested interest in the impact of that communication, then trust is undermined. Thus a chemical company arguing in favor of a new chemical plant will be assumed to have profit as a motive rather than the welfare of the citizens living where the plant is to be built. Similarly, a local authority arguing in favor of an increase in the council tax will not be believed if it tries to persuade citizens that they are the ones who will benefit from the increase. More likely people will want to know why their money has not been well spent in the past and assume that it is greed and inefficiency that necessitates the increase.

One aspect of this that is important is that individuals and organizations often *assume* that their credibility and trustworthiness is automatically established because of who or what they are. In management, for example, many managers assume that their position alone gives them these things, and in addition automatic respect. In

reality the opposite is more likely to be the case. Organizations often make a similar mistake. Again local authorities seem to assume that simply putting their logo or other device on a document or other communication will act as an assurance of credibility and trustworthiness. Newsletters telling local people about the latest initiatives of the local authority, for instance, one can imagine the editor assuming a populace sitting in their homes eager to hear the latest, deeply impressed by the authority logo, and believing everything they read. In reality the newsletter is as likely to be thrown straight into the bin or used to line the cat's litter tray, not despite but *because of* the logo and the indication of where the newsletter has come from. Not all of the three attributes are equally important all of the time. It depends on the context - what is being said, why it's being said, who it's being said to, and, crucially, how important the message is. For example, when a celebrity tries to persuade us to buy a particular yoghurt, likeability is probably going to be more important that credibility and trustworthiness. We like to please people we like, so we may be persuaded to buy the yogurt even knowing that the celebrity is being paid to send the message - that is, has a vested interest. We are not necessarily going to feel too upset if it turns out that the yogurt is awful. The celebrity's standing is unlikely to be undermined, although we may conclude that their taste in yogurt is a bit suspect. And that's because the subject of the communication is relatively unimportant. It's a trivial issue, and whether we buy and like, or don't buy, or dislike the yogurt has few if any important implications for our lives. On the other hand, a message about something we feel passionately about will not be listened to on the basis of likeability alone. The same celebrity trying to persuade us to vote for a political party or doctrine that we disagree strongly with will not have the same impact as in the case

of yogurt. In fact they may find that their own standing is damaged. This happened dramatically to the comedian Kenny Everett when he went onto a Tory Party platform early in Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister. His reputation never recovered fully. Oddly enough, people did not react as strongly to the news that Ken Dodd and Bob Monk house, two other comedians, were supporters of Margaret Thatcher. It seems that Kenny Everett's mistake was in cultivating an image of anarchic subversion that was undermined by his open declaration of Tory sympathies; Ken Dodd and Bob Monk house, on the other hand, were known as establishment figures, middle of the road comedians without any pronounced social commentary in their repertoires.

Of the three attributes trust, as noted earlier, is probably most fundamental and therefore most important. Trust is about the possibility of deception. It is difficult to be deceived about yogurt, even if it's not very nice yogurt. But once someone feels deceived about things that are more than simply a matter of personal taste, once they are deceived, or think they've been deceived, about something that matters to them, then trust is immediately subverted. This is why politicians have such a poor reputation. Gaining trust is less easy than *losing* it, and therefore it needs very careful consideration in any communications. What is likely to generate trust, and, more important, what is likely to undermine it? The Roman poet Catullus put it succinctly: Trust, like the soul, once gone is gone forever.

Codes, culture and noise

The three aspects of the sender, credibility, trustworthiness and likeability, are more clearly attributions *of* the sender *by the audience* and less attributes of the sender *per se*. This emphasises the

importance of the claim made earlier that it is the audience that is the most important aspect of communications. It also emphasizes the importance of a *shared frame of reference*, also mentioned earlier. To appreciate how and why a shared frame of reference is important, the basic three-stage model can be expanded to illustrate the stages through which a message goes from conception to reception (figure 2). This shows communication as a dynamic series of interrelated processes that are part of a system set within a social context. So, although the three elements, sender- message-receiver, can be considered separately, it is also important to consider some more of the interactions between them. Speaking broadly, the process of communication begins when the sender, as source, frames an intention, say, to explain the essentials of super-string theory or share with a friend impressions about the delightful mould growing inside a coffee cup that has been left on the windowsill for a month. The intention precedes the message, and begins the process of choosing what elements make up the core of the message and, indirectly, the medium by which the message is to be conveyed. Put simply, any communication begins as an idea or set of ideas in someone's mind. This itself can be a source of frustration because ideas often have a fluid quality in their early stages which sometimes makes it difficult to pin down the idea sufficiently for communication. The message will be rooted in a speaker's knowledge base, whether extensive or not, and also in her or his cultural and social presuppositions. Certain fundamental aspects of these will be taken for granted, and assumed to be shared with the audience. Indeed a speaker may be so familiar with some of the more fundamental aspects of this knowledge base and cultural location that he or she may regard them as self evident and not worth explaining at all. This could be a fundamental error; the original intention of the communication may be subverted right at

the outset by what a speaker does or does not consider to be worth including and how the message is coded for transmission. Ideas, in and of themselves, cannot be communicated directly to another person. Therefore any idea needs to be coded - translated into an appropriate set of symbols such as words or images. This translation process introduces a certain amount of degradation into the original message, much as a photocopier will degrade any image it copies. The reason for the degradation is simple. Ideas are not only relatively fluid, but each part of an idea can often be linked to the other parts simultaneously in the mind.
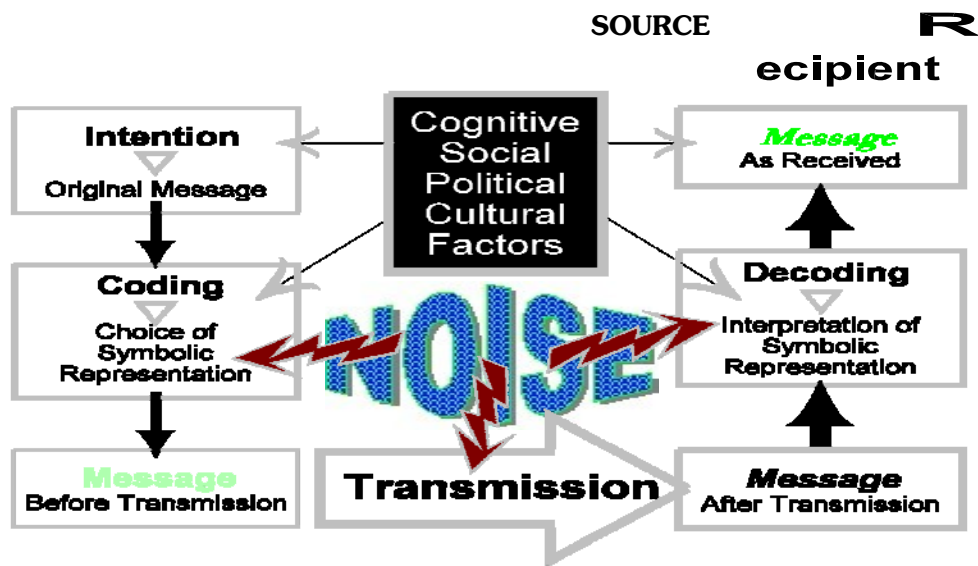
Figure 2: Basic model of communication expanded to include social and cultural factors and noise in the system.

To communicate it, however, means that its fluid structure has to be constrained into some kind of linear sequence. In the process something is inevitably lost. Coding involves choice of words or images that are intended to encapsulate the original message that the speaker wants to convey; choosing both for nuance, emphasis, and,

depending on the speaker, clarity. For our purposes the important aspect of this translation is that it implicates values and assumptions rooted in cognitive, social, political and cultural symbol systems. Neither visual nor auditory information can convey a message unless coded in broadly cultural terms, because it is the *shared* basis of symbolic codes that allows communication to take place at all. Thus, a source of what is called 'noise in the system' (that which interferes with communication) may be the way a message is composed. In any case the original message, as conceived by its originator, the source, *will* be degraded to a significant extent by the symbolic translation before it has even been passed forward to the audience. Thus it is worth bearing in mind that the content of a message - what is included and excluded - and the medium, by which it is conveyed, can both hinder as well as facilitate communication.

Translating any idea calls into play symbolic process that are culturally and socially mediated. Even the process of translating a simple idea into a string of words involves cultural factors because, obviously, language itself is a cultural artifact with social connotations. The words 'I want a drink of water', for example, would mean little if anything to a non-English speaker. The gesture in which one lifts a hand to the mouth, however, accesses social experiences not so directly linked to specific cultural settings, and would at least indicate the desire to drink something. Complex ideas require more complex translation procedures, some of them inevitably inadequate for the job. Consider, for instance, the difficulty of translating a concept such as love, or hate, into words. The words not only constrain the message into a linear sequence, but in the process they actually *alter* the original idea.

The process of coding, of translation into meaningful symbols, must be rooted in a shared culture if it is to be successful. Culture in this

sense acts as a collective lens through which a collection of people are enabled to perceive the world, and thus are able to share experience. However, no such lens is *absolutely* shared between individuals of the same culture, and people from different cultures are likely to perceive important aspects of the world in significantly different ways, especially in matters of values. Moreover, any particular way of seeing the world is simultaneously a way of *not* seeing as well, and in this sense the lens of culture is inevitably a distorting lens. Thus, even at these early stages of the communications process, the original message is likely to have been altered from the original intention, even if only slightly. Factors have intervened to degrade the message. Such factors are examples of what are called 'noise in the system'.

Noise in the system

'Noise' is any intervening factor that interrupts communication. The cultural and social factors already mentioned are only one example. The term can be literal, as in physical noise in the environment that competes with a sound based message, but it can be almost anything that interferes with communication. Several examples of noise have already been identified, such as our tendency to make judgments about people regardless of the content of any message, and thus the ways in which we may be predisposed to accept or reject the message simply because of the messenger. Form and content, if inconsistent with one another, can generate noise. A message conveyed as simple facts when an appeal to emotions might have been more appropriate, or vice versa, is an example of noise interfering with a message. Similarly the physical form in which a message is presented can generate noise. An important document produced on a typewriter and duplicated using an old spirit duplication

method is much less likely to attract attention than if it had been produced on a decent word processor and copied using good printing processes. Design is clearly a part of this because poor or inappropriate design can and does alienate potential audiences.

Decoding

Once the message has been transmitted, there occurs a process which is almost the reverse of the original coding stage, almost, because there are other factors as well. All people, all of *us*, have problems with concentration and attention. Gaining the attention of an audience is one thing; keeping it is quite another. And in this all communicators are up against human psychology. Our ability to maintain attention is severely limited, and this is an important factor in communication, whether our audience is reading something written, watching something or listening. First, we can only cope with between 5 and 9 new items of information at any one time. This has become known as 'the magical number 7 ± 2'. If we are exposed to more than that, we experience what is known as cognitive overload as our capacity is breached, and information simply becomes lost. We forget it and lose track of what is going on.

Second, our attention is time bounded. The time period varies according to circumstances, but essentially after a very short interval, as little as a few minutes in some cases, our attention wanders. Instead of attending to whatever we want to attend to, whether listening, watching or reading, we spend some time in micro-sleeps. The problem is we don't notice that we've gone to sleep until we wake up and wonder what has just happened. Or we may become distracted by our surroundings, and find ourselves fascinated by the wallpaper of a room, or the carpet, or even the back of somebody's head. The important thing to realize here is that *we can't help it*; it happens despite our intentions.

Third, we often have the impression that we are under standing or paying attention when in fact we are doing nothing of the kind. The written word is a good example here. When we read we assume that the information we read is somehow 'going in', that we are processing what is before us. But often we don't. Frequently all we are doing is *recognizing words* without actually accessing what the words are saying in any way. We recognize the form, but not the content. All these are further examples of noise in the system. But they are also part of the decoding process. Lack of attention means, that substantial portions of any message are likely to be missed, and therefore lost to the recipient even before what is received is subjected to decoding.

So, finally the decoding itself is the subject to similar processes to coding in the first place, it will be interpreted through cultural and social filters, some of which may differ substantially to the filters used by the sender. The audience, on receipt of a message must go through the reverse procedure to the source of the message. That is, having received the message in its symbolic form, it has then to be decoded, or translated into a form that the recipient can understand. This involves the same kind of symbolic processes as those used to form the message into a conveyable form - knowledge base, and cognitive, social, political and cultural symbol systems. Clearly there is scope for some disparity here, especially in the extent of prior knowledge, but also in terms of how symbols are used and understood by senders and receivers. This is a particularly acute problem if senders and receivers are from very different cultural backgrounds. That is, *what the message is* may be entirely different for the recipient and the source, depending on how fully the symbols of communication are shared. Equally clearly, if the symbols used to convey the message are not familiar to the recipient, then

communication may be severely distorted, or absent altogether, as for example if a speaker uses Cantonese to talk to someone who doesn't understand Cantonese. Thus finally we have a message that has travelled through several stages, each of which degrades the original message, until in the end the message that gets through may well differ completely from what the sender intended. The lesson here is to pay special attention to the core message and work on it to try and make sure it is not going to be easily distorted in the process of transmission. There are no infallible rules for how to do this, and certainly no guarantees of success, but there are two useful models that can help. These are called the five Ws and the inverted triangle.

The (5) five Ws

The five Ws are: Who; What; Where; When; and Why. There is also an additional honorary W: How. This is not particularly profound, not, as one might say, rocket science, but as a simple model it is exceptionally useful. Also, although simple it is difficult to exhaust its applicability. In principle the five Ws are used at the stage at which a communication is being framed to check that all important aspects are included.

WHO generally refers to the audience? Who is your audience, and is it homogeneous or heterogeneous - will one message cover everyone or will you need to tailor different parts to suit different people in the audience? For example, if you are giving a technical presentation to a specialist audience, is it safe to assume that everyone will know or remember all the necessary basics to understand your message? The chances are no. Even highly experienced specialists forget things, even things fundamental to their own specialism, so it is useful and important to make allowance for lack of shared knowledge. Skilled speakers often do this by using stock phrases such as 'For those of you who might have forgotten …' or 'For those of you who may not

be familiar with …' such phrases accomplish at least two beneficial things. First, it allows those in the audience who *do* know what you're talking about to feel smug about it, because of the implication that there are others who don't know. Second, and much more important, it allows those who don't know to keep up with you without strain. This really is very important. Few people will be insulted by having things explained that they may know, whereas the easiest way to alienate an audience is to talk above its head. WHAT may be your message? What, precisely, do you want to say to the audience? What is the point of what you are saying? What is relevant to the message and, more important, what isn't. WHERE is generally used when an *event* is being staged, as is WHEN. And WHY, might include why your audience should pay attention; why should they listen to you; why you have chosen to convey your message to them; why you are including particular points or details, and so on. HOW is often important for helping people access a service or information or whatever. From research, for example, we know that people with very low self-esteem will often be frightened by health-related messages and attempt to avoid them. One way of overcoming the fear, and therefore the deflection, is to give precise details of how something might be accomplished. This information helps reduce anxiety, and gives a focus outside the thing that frightens. Much more could be said about these questions. The five Ws expand rapidly into different sets and subsets of questions when they are applied in different circumstances. But it would not be very useful even to attempt all the possible questions here. The value of the five Ws is in their use, and the more practiced one becomes in their use the more useful they become. Obvious though the five Ws is, it is surprising how many people overlook them, with the result that often their messages do not get through as they would like.

Beginning

Most important

Least important

End
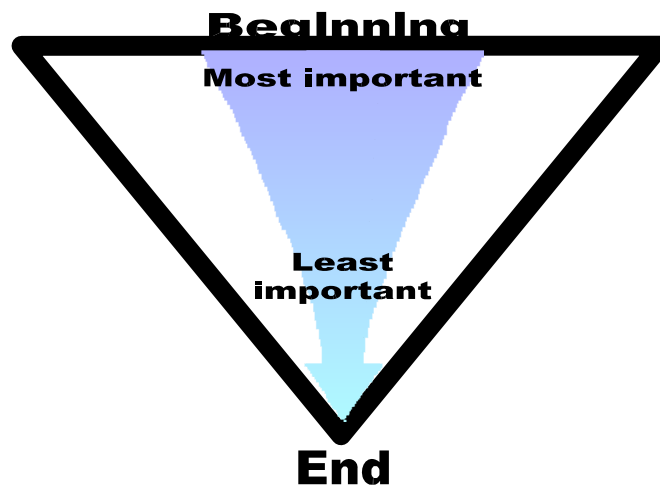
Figure 3: The inverted triangle illustrating the placing of important material in any communication.

The inverted triangle

The inverted triangle is another very simple but very useful model (figure 3). It is drawn from the world of journalism. In the world of newspapers and magazines there is a kind of demon known as the sub-editor. Once upon a time they roamed about wielding their main weapon - a blue (not red) pencil. Nowadays their weapon of choice is the delete button. Their job is to make text fit available space. If a journalist submits an article and it is too long, the sub-editor will unceremoniously chop off the end. It is not returned to the author for reworking, so that the end can be made elegant, but put in as it is, truncated. The result of this is that journalists have developed a way of writing that is both elegant and efficient. If you look at an article in any one of the good newspapers, you will notice that *all the important details appear in the first paragraph.* The rest of the article simply elaborates what is in the first paragraph. This has several advantages. Not only does it avoid the possibility of the

demonic sub-editor leaving important details on the copy room floor, it also connects with the way we actually read a newspaper article.

When we access a newspaper article, we may be attracted by the headline. From there we may scan the first paragraph. If that appeals we may either continue to read, or skip to the final paragraph and check that out. If all of these grab our attention we may read the entire article. But in any case, as soon as we access *any* of the text, we learn what is important very rapidly.

This is good communication.

The inverted triangle can be modified for use with all kinds of communication. It requires that we think carefully about what we want to say and identify the most important aspects of it. This then should be communicated quickly to the audience - in the first paragraph; in the opening seconds of a presentation, and so on. Don't do what many do and save the best bit to the end, because the chances are you will have lost your audience long before you get to the end, largely because their attention will have wandered off.

Last comments

These notes have presented a brief overview of some aspects of communication. Because they have treated communication in general, rather than focusing on specific areas such as live presentation or writing, they have inevitable fudged some important issues of similarity and difference. However, they have attempted to draw out principles which are sufficiently general to apply to most kinds of communication. In this final paragraph I would just like to add a couple of observations. Apart from the audience, the most important thing about communication is what counselors and psychotherapists call authenticity. What this amounts to is 'be yourself'. Audiences are quick to spot when someone is playing a role, or worse trying to

manipulate image. It seldom works, and if an audience suspects a lack of authenticity, suspicion and loss of trust is the inevitable result. The second most important thing is to know what you want to say and why. This does not mean that you have to be absolutely all-knowing about all details, but it does mean that what you say you must know - it increases confidence in you, and therefore increases the audience's confidence both in you and your credibility. Where your ignorance is exposed, remember that we are *all* ignorant about *most* things. It is not a crime not to know something. It is, however, extremely bad to pretend to know something simply to cover up Ignorance. A simple 'I don't know ...' or 'I'll have to find out ...' will give you far more credit than you realize. If you are found out while dissembling it will lose you far more credit than you realize too. Third, remember that it is *people* you are communicating with. You might not like them very much, they may not like you, but if you remember that they are, after all, human, then you will be able to make some shrewd guesses as to what will and will not work. Use your own experience as a member of an audience to guide you.

Finally, there are two primary virtues in communication, and if you remember these then you can be a successful communicator. These are the virtues of clarity and simplicity, both of which work magically whenever they are deployed. However, that is easy to say, perhaps not so easy to achieve without effort, as you will note from reading these notes. But it is important to remember that what appears to be easy communication is likely to be the product of considerable effort. It is the poor communication which is easy to put together.

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