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Communications (by Pete Versteegen)

Communications is clearly an issue with everyone, from young to old, from man to woman, from business to business, from person to business, from government to governments, from government to person, from person to government, etc. It is not just an issue associated with the workshop¹ participants. Problems with communications are experienced every day.

In the fall of 2011 I taught a class at Garret College called "Introduction to Engineering Design." It was the first time this class was made available.

I had lobbied for a course called "Introduction to Engineering" with a past president (about 5 years ago) whom I played occasional racquetball with. I felt there was a need for a class that would introduce local students to the variety of forms of engineering. The thought was that the student could then choose, for further studies, the discipline that he/she was the most aligned and comfortable with. So, three weeks before the semester started, I was asked to teach the class. Thinking it was the latter title, I agreed.

Miscommunication #1. The word "design" that is in the title of the current offering, at least as far as engineering is concerned, puts a very different context on what that class is all about. The syllabus was clear enough about the design, but the students weren't ready for this as a first semester freshman class. I was a bit naive in that I could change this, but "regulations" got in the way. I had to do the design part.

I did get a design component in for the second half of the semester, and told the students, who I had divided into teams, that they should communicate via email. Miscommunication #2. I should have said **MUST** communicate. I found out just two week before their reports were due that one of the groups had decided not to communicate via email, but instead communicate via texting! As a result they had virtually made no progress on the project. It amazed me that they could think that conducting an engineering project could be done with texting. I discussed this issue with other instructors and student advisors and it turn out that, with the current generation of incoming students, emailing is **NOT** cool. It's old fashioned. Wow!

¹ This was an issued identified at both the 1st and 2nd workshops on the "Future Well-Being of Deep Creek Lake," sponsored by the POA and held on Dec 4, 2010 and Dec 3, 2011 respectively.

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This revelation, the workshops, an experience with ASCI (Adventure Sports International, Inc) and my association with Ridgeview Valley have finally gotten me to a notion that's perhaps obvious, but that nobody seems to explicate.

Everybody has a preferred way of communicating, perhaps even a few ways. I guess it has to do with being comfortable with yourself, for whatever reason(s).

Hence, it struck me that for a group to interact with one another efficiently, and have the greatest chance of a response, the message needs to be sent to each person in the group in their preferred way(s) of communicating.

This is probably not new, but it was a new thought to me.

With the current technology, I can see now a partial solution to possibly significantly improve communications. But first, let's ask the question: "What is communication?"

According to various dictionaries and websites, communication means:

1. "The imparting or exchanging of information or news."
2. "A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior."
3. "Any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge, or affective states. Communication may be intentional or unintentional, may involve conventional or unconventional signals, may take linguistic or nonlinguistic forms, and may occur through spoken or other modes."
4. "Communication is the activity of conveying meaningful information."
5. "A two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information but also create and share meaning."
6. "Communication is giving, receiving or exchanging ideas, information, signals or messages through appropriate media, enabling individuals or groups to persuade, to seek information, to give information or to express emotions."
7. "The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium."
8. "The exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing, or behavior."

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Wow... Lots of ways to say the same thing. Communications! For me, there is no favorite definition, and I'm not trying come up with one. For more detailed discussions on the topic of communications check out [here](#) and [here](#). Suffice it to say that somehow we must find a way to exchange desired information more effectively.

Next is the topic: "What are we trying to communicate?" I see this as follows:

- a) Crisis issues
For example, when an issue appears that directly affects people's use of the lake. This should be communicated to all that are impacted by it, and that means everyone, as soon as possible, particularly to those that can do something about it.
- b) Regular happenings
People often need reminders of things happening that affects their use of the lake.
- c) Explanations
Maintaining the lake in a state desired by its stakeholders requires scientific work. Often, people do not understand the results of that work or the consequences because they don't have the background or training. Presenting the information in a form that everyone can understand is an important communication issue. Education is therefore required on certain issues.
- d) Needs
The three categories above are described as communications from the source(s), the people that have the information, that can affect the lake directly. The 'needs' category is communications from the opposite side, the people that "desire" the information.

Before exploring the 'how' of communications, lets see what are all of the different ways that we can communicate:

- I. People to People
 - a) Face-to-face
 - b) One-on-one telephone
 - c) Lecture format
 - d) Public statements
 - e) Workshops (different formats)
 - f) Conferences (different formats; aural, video)

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2. Printed media
 - a) Newspapers
 - b) Newsletters
 - c) Letters
 - d) Flyers
 - e) Magazines
 - f) Booklets
 - g) Grocery bag stuffers
3. Internet
 1. Website
 2. Blog
 3. Vlogs
 4. Facebook
 5. Twitter
 6. Google+
 7. Webinars
 8. Emails
 9. Chat rooms
 10. USENET (threaded conference)
 11. Bulletin boards
 12. Online forums
 13. Message boards
 14. Article writing
 15. Gaming
 16. Streaming broadcasts
 17. RSS
 18. Skype
 19. Video
 20. Audio
 21. Animation
 22. Newsletters
 23. Downloads (pdfs)
4. Other Electronic Means
 1. Telephone (land-line)
 2. Mobile phone (smart-phone)
 3. Radio
 4. TV
 5. PA system
 6. Fax

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5. Unconventional Means
 1. Bullhorn
 2. Smoke signals

This list is probably incomplete. However, it can be seen that the greatest flexibility is via the Internet. The first two categories have been around for hundreds of years, perhaps from the beginning of mankind.

Applying all of this to “The Future Well-Being of Deep Creek Lake” cause, I can see that communication issues being handled in the following way:

1. A clearinghouse of information
 1. Data
 2. Reports
 3. Links
 4. Names
 5. Phone numbers
 6. Email addresses
 7. Information recipients data
 8. Forms
 9. Templates
2. A set of incoming communication channels
 1. Website
 2. Phone number(s)
 3. Email addresses
 4. Real people
3. A set of outgoing communication channels
 1. From the long list above

Implementing all of these can probably only be done under some kind of organizational or business umbrella.

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