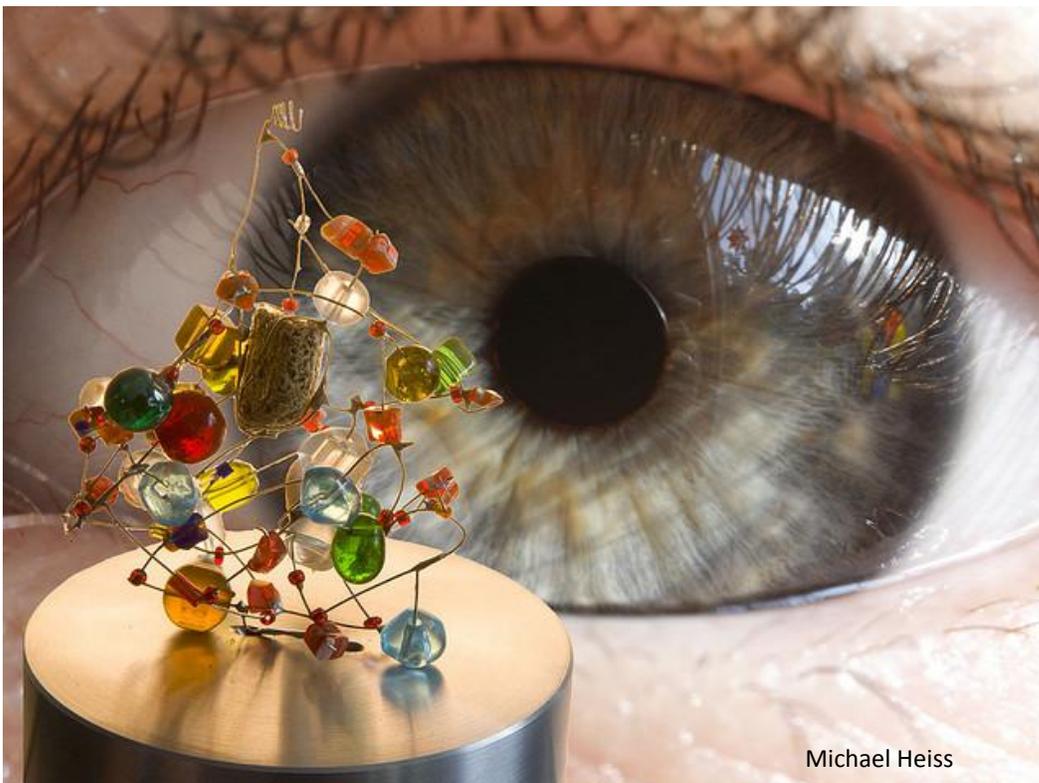


A Matter of Perspective



A systems approach to communication and complexity

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Introduction

There are times when trying to explain something complicated and hard to understand that we simply label it as “complex” and move on. But it is a mistake to reduce as important a concept as complexity to a throwaway line. A complex system is anything made up of many different parts which interact in often unpredictable and unplanned ways. By that measure just about every social, cultural, political and economic institution is complex; as is our entire natural environment. Nowhere, perhaps, is this more evident these days than in the realm of communications.

Google searches for the term “cloud computing” have increased about 150% since 2010; but have grown more than 200% for “social media,” and nearly 300% for “big data.”

Communication has become the epitome of complexity, especially those mechanisms that have caught our attention of late. Social media bring together countless individuals whose unending conversations can beget unexpected results. To capitalize on “big data” analysts must examine and extract value from the trillions upon trillions of bits of information generated by people and machines. And much of this now occurs in the “cloud,” the universal term for distributed systems that are made possible by the collaboration of vast numbers of computers.

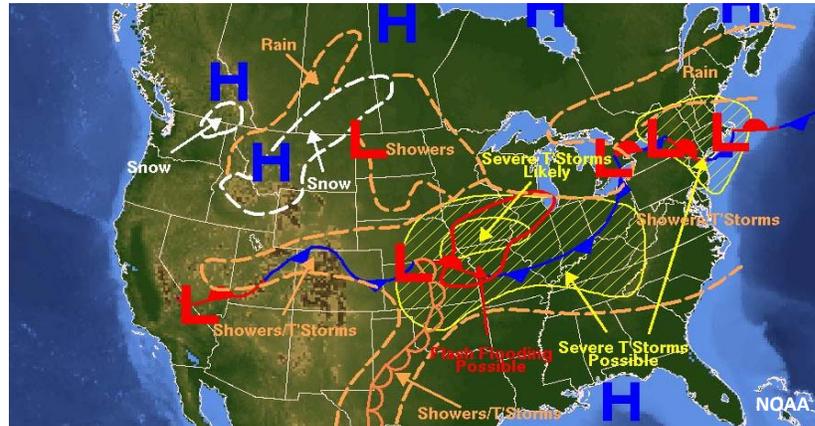
For communication professionals this presents two formidable challenges. The first is to explain ever more complex ideas and issues to broadly diverse audiences. The second is to do so through processes that are, themselves, becoming more complex. In the past we may have handled such matters by dealing with them one at a time. But just as we can’t recognize the workings of an ant colony by scrutinizing just one ant, we won’t uncover solutions to intricate communication problems by zeroing in on a single message, medium or outcome. Instead, we must move in the opposite direction and explore how all elements come together under continually changing circumstances.

This is a systems approach to communication, and it involves understanding situations in terms of their relationships, connections and context. The following report provides an introduction to communication in complex systems and the value of systems thinking. It is the first in a series of articles, blog posts and white papers on the subject.

Yet systems thinking is neither a discipline like public relations or marketing communications, nor a new technique such as social media, big data analytics or cloud computing. Rather, it is a distinct way to consider things with a more open mind. That is essentially a matter of perspective: being able to appreciate information and audiences from various points-of-view; and in the process, practicing all of the above more effectively.

A change in the weather

In an increasingly complex world communication matters more than ever



Complexity is everywhere. It permeates our existence from the outer reaches of space to the inner workings of our bodies. Our brains, in particular, are highly complex organisms. Not only do they manage the billions of electrical connections that keep us alive, but they store the myriad facts, experiences, impressions and memories that variably combine to form ideas. Our ideas, in turn, coincide with those of others to create equally elaborate social, political and economic systems.

Emergence is the relatively simple interaction of components which create complex systems that are different from their constituent parts. For example, water (H₂O) is the result of the merger of two gases, hydrogen and oxygen.

Despite their intricacies, most complex systems exhibit common characteristics. Take the weather. Its simple elements – gases, solids and liquids – perpetually collide to produce powerful atmospheric disturbances. Scientists call this “emergence,” whereby the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and cannot be predicated based on individual components. Likewise, cold fronts and warm fronts are systems within systems, each the result of its own combination of meteorological ingredients. And anyone who has witnessed a tornado or hurricane knows they rarely move along straight lines. Such unpredictability is a hallmark of complexity.

As for complex man-made systems, they often exist in the form of networks; the most familiar probably being the Internet, which is actually a network of networks. Every point on a network is known as a node. A web site such as Facebook is a node. So too is every user on Facebook. But what defines these systems is not so much the nodes themselves as how they interact.

Most interactions across networks are based on the flow of information. So understanding how information is produced, shared and perceived – in other words, communication – is vital to operating in complex systems. As systems grow more complex, communication becomes more essential. But it too gets more complicated as audiences fragment, the means to reach them expand and the amount of available data continues to swell.

Organizations, for example, must now produce content in multiple formats – and share it across a wide array media – to connect with increasingly global stakeholders. These target audiences are dividing and subdividing themselves along geographic, economic, social, cultural, political, gender, age, ethnic and religious distinctions. Such disparities affect what kinds of content they access, how they access it, and how they interpret it.

Consumers are also finding divergent ways to handle information overload. They are abridging their sources of news through tactics like aggregation and personalization, while conversely multitasking their way across more and more media platforms.

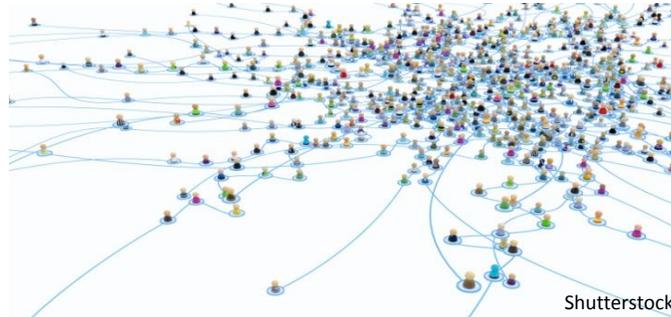
Of course none of this happens in a vacuum. Communication is part of larger systems which constantly entangle it in issues and events that wreck havoc on even the most deliberate strategies.

We are, however, developing means to not only become more aware of complexity, but to cope with it as well. The spread of social media, improvements in data analytics and advances in the cognitive sciences are introducing more accurate tools and techniques. We are still learning to use them and, if history is any guide, hype will exceed reality. Nonetheless, they will ultimately prove their worth.

At the same time, we continue to enhance the capacity of traditional media by finding better ways to use text, video, audio and graphic design. Yet simply developing new skill sets will not suffice. Taking full advantage of both contemporary and conventional methods also demands adopting new mind sets. We have to think differently about every part of the communication process.

Countless conversations

These days communication professionals must be able to see both the forest and the trees



Communication is a complex system even in its most basic form: conversation. Like all systems, conversations are mutual interactions. A says something to B. B responds. And so begins a dialogue. If they know each other well and the parameters are clearly marked their discourse will go as expected. If not, then it is apt to be unpredictable; possibly uncontrollable; and almost always self-adjusting.

Now multiply that infinitely. What with the growing dominance of social media and the share of data it throws off, the notion of a conversation is becoming ever more complicated. To be sure, no single person nor organization can adequately converse with hundreds of friends or millions of followers. But those friends and followers are also nodes on assorted networks. Currently, more than 60 percent of the world's online population connect through social networks, while 85 percent regularly send and receive emails.¹ Thus, the ability to engage in these innumerable exchanges largely defines today's communication.

Successfully managing such conversations, or any other form of communication, means being able to step back and scan all of the critical components – ideas, issues, audiences and technologies, among others. They will vary depending on the situation. Not everything will be apparent; certainly not right away. And some are bound to change throughout the process. The challenge is to recognize how, when and why the elements intersect, and with that knowledge continually build appropriate strategies and content.

Doing so requires a systems approach. This involves dealing with issues holistically rather than concentrating on their separate parts. By viewing problems in broad context – and observing how the different pieces interact and influence each other – we can look beyond what is immediately obvious to pinpoint all possible causes of a problem, and to anticipate all potential consequences.

Furthermore, thinking systemically entails seeing audiences the way they see themselves so as to identify what kinds of content are important to them. What do they need or want? How much do they already know and understand? What will they do with information once they have it?

Lastly, it means accepting the fact that as circumstances change so do outcomes; and both can be extremely uncertain. Swift and seemingly endless changes make it impractical, if not impossible, to codify communication in hard-bound rules or templates. There are too many variables and too much volatility to effectively keep reapplying even the best practices.

Still, it is quite possible to diagnose problems and determine solutions by understanding them in terms of the systems they create. Only then can we really know how best to communicate.

Model behavior

One way to better understand a complex system is to make it appear less complex



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It was Albert Einstein who advised that “everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.” Since then we have learned to build models of complex systems that simulate the conditions, operations and interactions among various independent components, or agents. Such “agent-based” models are primarily used in computational research, but simple versions can be developed manually; and while barely as intricate as the actual systems they embody, they can produce blueprints from which to construct practical strategies.

In the case of disciplines like public relations or marketing communications, a workable prototype [Figure 1] can be built around four key agents: the organization, which is often the original source of information; the audience, who access, interpret and act on resulting content; the environment, where issues and events provide requisite context; and the multiple channels of communication.

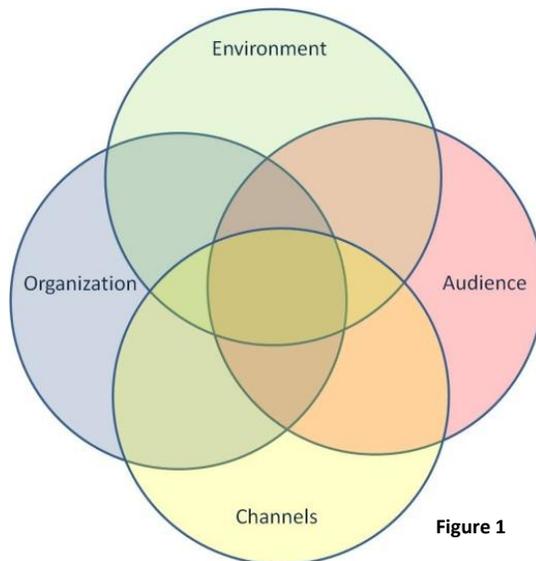


Figure 1

As noted previously, the details may change from situation to situation, and just about every new strategy will rely on putting them together in unique combinations. But the model itself offers a manageable framework.

Organization: Open vs. closed

Communication in organizations is influenced by the way organizations are designed



In business, most communication originates from within organizations, which generally exist in two forms – closed or open. To some degree every organization is closed, in that much of its information remains behind its walls. Though sometimes necessary, it can lead to what psychologist and Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman terms the “inside view,” wherein decisions and forecasts are based entirely on specific circumstances and supported only by a company’s own experiences.²

In his seminal 1945 work *The Use of Knowledge in Society*, Nobel prize-winning economist Friedrich Hayek was the first to argue that information at the center of organizations is neither as accurate nor as timely as information on the fringes

Case in point: the decision by the Susan G. Komen Foundation to defund Planned Parenthood. Motives aside, the resolution by Komen’s board of directors was apparently derived from a narrow perspective. According to Laura Otten, Director of The Nonprofit Center at La Salle University’s School of Business, the board was filled with family and friends. “When we build a board of people who are alike in terms of background and thinking,” she told the *Nonprofit Business Advisor*³ newsletter, “[it] tends to be more about affirming what someone else wants, not about asking the serious questions or having a thorough discussion.” In fact, the board came to its decision despite recommendations to the opposite by the foundation’s professional staff.

Nearly every big – and lots of smaller – enterprises are also still hierarchical, so a good deal of their knowledge is further imprisoned within silos. Albeit, information confined to individual departments or operations is easier to coordinate – and therefore more cost-effective – real innovation seldom occurs there. Rather, it emerges at points where separate ideas intersect.

According to research⁴ at the University of California, Berkeley, exposure to unfamiliar perspectives fosters creativity. Moreover, debate and criticism do not inhibit imagination but actually stimulate it. Studies⁵ of more than 200 public firms in the United Kingdom found that those most able to radically change their entrenched ways of doing business frequently promote creative tension. That is why many resourceful companies encourage employees to expose themselves to a diversity of information, including ideas from the outside. Which makes them open organizations.

Granted, this concept of openness is hardly novel. But when businesses do venture beyond their walls for additional insights they may not go far enough. In a study⁶ of the relationship among 43,000 global corporations, systems scientists at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology identified a network of about 1,300 blue chip companies with interlocking ownership. These include a core group of 147 tightly knit firms, all of whose ownership is held by other corporate members. Most are financial institutions, which may account for why several major American banks made the same ill-fated decision in 2011 to charge customers added debit card fees.

Conformity may be comforting, but it can also be a drawback. Three decades ago Arie de Geus, then Corporate Planning Director at Royal Dutch Shell, sought to answer the question: “What distinguishes long-lived companies?” At the time the average lifespan of Standard & Poor’s 500 firms was about 40 years, and de Geus discovered that long-lived companies (those that survived for as much as a century or more) were sensitive to their environments. Despite changes that surged and ebbed, he later wrote in his book *The Living Company*⁷, “they always seemed to excel at keeping their feelers out, tuned to whatever was going on around them.” In addition, “these companies were particularly tolerant of activities on the margin: outliers, experiments, and eccentricities within the boundaries of the cohesive firm, which kept stretching their understanding of possibilities.”

For de Geus, the fundamentals of corporate longevity are as valid today as they were back when he wrote those words. Meanwhile, the average S&P 500 lifespan has since plummeted to just 15 years.

This speaks to the mounting reliance on social media as a means to access greater amounts of information; and on the capacity of data analytics to collect and process it. So far the jury is still out on whether social networks are a viable marketing medium. Yet there is a growing body of evidence to indicate that communing with consumers can play a role in enhancing innovation.

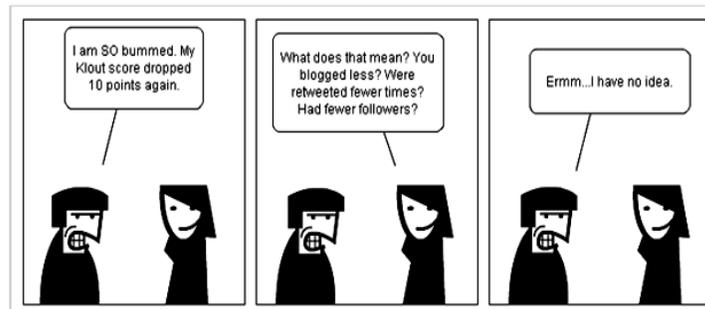
A series of related studies⁸ in the United States, United Kingdom and Japan found that consumers in these countries come up with untold numbers of ideas that can be used to improve products. This has led researchers to suggest that in lieu of viewing customers only as passive recipients of merchandise, companies should also collaborate with them as significant sources of innovation.

Capturing and capitalizing on those ideas, though, can be problematic. According to a report⁹ from the New York American Marketing Association and Columbia Business School's Center on Global Brand Leadership, the number one obstacle to taking advantage of consumer data is the lack of sharing between departments.

Indeed, internal barriers to communication have long been a complication for most organizations. But should they overcome the problem they must still be able to recognize which ideas – whether from inside or outside – are really valuable. That starts with becoming more sensitive to their audiences.

Audience: Making an impression

Much of what drives successful diffusion lies outside of our control



Sean R. Nicholson

For as long as anyone can probably remember the statistical standard for defining societies has been demographics. These generic attributes, ranging from age, gender and race to education, employment and even home ownership, have been used to characterize what social scientists refer to as “representative agents:” factitious persons or groups who typify the behavior of broad swaths of the population. For marketers they may be women 18 to 49; for economists, the one percent; and for politicians, “the American people.”

The problem is, as populations atomize into ever smaller, self-defined segments whose needs and concerns overlap, demography is losing its appeal. In its place some practitioners have turned to psychographics to interpret consumers’ beliefs, personalities and lifestyles. Others though are captivated by the aura of affinity groups that coalesce around shared interests or objectives; and for which they have anointed a new version of the representative agent – the influencer.

In brief, the lore of the influencer goes something like this: certain individuals who are especially authoritative or passionate about a subject garner substantial numbers of friends, followers or connections who value their opinions. Organizations then promote and market themselves through these virtual persuaders to induce desired behaviors on the part of target audiences. Not surprisingly, however, the reality is more complex.

Among the first to challenge this conventional wisdom was Columbia University psychology professor Duncan Watts, who is also a principal research scientist at Yahoo. As early as 2001, he began questioning the notion that one person or a small group can drive collective behaviors online.¹⁰ Subsequent findings¹¹ by social platforms BuzzFeed and StumbleUpon assert that when influential people do reach a wide audience their impact is short-lived. Moreover, in every instance the analyses concluded that content is more likely to spread when large numbers of ordinary people share it with small groups of other ordinary people, instead of when it comes from someone “special.”

But Watts has taken it a step further. He maintains that regardless who the sender is, the flood of ideas will only flow if the receivers comprise a critical mass of easily influenced people, who then pass the information on to other easy-to-influence people. Without them, he notes in his book *Everything is Obvious*,¹² “not even the most influential individual could trigger any more than a small cascade.” By that reckoning the task before communicators is to identify who is truly impressionable.

A zettabyte is equivalent to the information contained in 100 million Libraries of Congress. A yottabyte is one thousand times larger than a zettabyte.

There is certainly no shortage of material to sort through. To the contrary, website traffic, online searches, banner advertising, social media and smartphone use leave behind vast trails of personal information. It is estimated, for example, that 34,000 tweets are sent every minute. That comes to about one billion tweets per month;¹³ still far less than the 30 billion pieces of content posted on Facebook. Add to this the endless data churned out by the so-called “Internet of Things” – millions of objects embedded with readable sensors – and it has engendered a new lexicon to calculate it all with terms like gigabyte, petabyte, zettabyte, and most recently yottabyte, which is designated by the number 1 followed by 24 zeroes.

But data is just data without the right tools to analyze it; ergo the current allure of big data analytics. By examining massive amounts of digital information simultaneously across hundreds or thousands of parallel servers, organizations can discover once-shrouded paradigms among consumer behaviors; then try to respond to, and predict, outcomes in real time. As part of this process, companies are also attempting to translate much of this data in ways that will allow them to appreciate consumers in more subjective terms. Beyond simply counting likes, follows or retweets, they hope to uncover and exploit genuine attitudes, emotions and intent.

This sentiment analysis represents a major step forward for social metrics. Nonetheless, it has its limits. For one thing, it has a hard time handling sarcasm or cynicism. For another, persons of various ages, ethnicities, genders and geographies can use the same words differently, which further flusters machines unable to pick up on nuances. Most importantly, people filter their judgments and beliefs through a host of perceptions and cognitive biases that computers alone cannot infiltrate.

Enter new methods like neuroscience which melds the study of the brain with fields as varied as computer science, engineering, math, chemistry, physics, psychology and philosophy. But the impact of neuroscience in terms of inferring consumer attitudes and behaviors remains open to debate. In the meantime, the ability to understand how humans process information is still mainly the domain of other humans.

Environment: It's chaotic out there

What we don't know *can* hurt us



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The classic science fiction film *Alien* was originally promoted with the tag line “in space no one can hear you scream.” Not so in cyberspace where just about everything is audible. Which makes it possible for organizations to constantly monitor their environments for any signs of opportunity or misfortune. Scores of communication managers thus believe that thanks to social media all they have to do is sit back and passively listen to the conversations of target audiences. With any luck everything they need to know will eventually cross their paths.

In chaos theory, there is the phenomenon known as the “butterfly effect,” whereby a butterfly flapping its wings in China might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that can ultimately alter the weather in New York.

Complex systems, however, aren't nearly so accommodating. For every situation that arises, there can be multiple causes; some so minute they are, at first, imperceptible. To further confound matters, equally small and barely visible changes can produce an erratic chain of events that ultimately results in problems that are too big to ignore. This is the basis of chaos theory, a mathematical principle that was highlighted in another science fiction classic, *Jurassic Park*.

On those occasions when organizations accurately source their problems they still may not be able to correctly gauge the outcome, since cause and effect are not always closely related in time or space. It may take awhile before actual consequences are identified; sometimes only after reaching several false conclusions. Under these conditions successful communication is a process of trial and error.

Even when an organization's observations are spot on, its reading of a situation may not square with that of its audience. Sundry studies have shown that two or more people can experience the same event and come away with very different impressions. This is a variation of a phenomenon known as “selective perception,” which can sometimes pit companies against consumers.

Consider Netflix's hapless attempt during the summer of 2011 to raise its prices. While there is probably never a good time to jack up customers' subscription fees by as much as 60 percent, doing so in the midst of a national debate over the debt ceiling and government default was especially untimely. The political ruckus subjected constituents to a heightened sense of economic uncertainty; and when people are uncertain they are much more resistant to change. So the increase was deemed unacceptable by a great many subscribers.

Meanwhile, Netflix was focused on a separate economic dilemma. Forecasts revealed that its content costs were slated to increase a billion dollars by the end of the year, making it obvious, at least to the company, that the \$8 a month it was charging subscribers could no longer support the ongoing delivery of high-quality streaming videos. Hence, the new fees probably seemed quite reasonable to Netflix. But in a series of bewildering explanations, CEO Reed Hastings failed to make the case and was unable to sync customers' concerns with the company's financial jam.

Hastings may have had more success had both he and his subscribers perceived the big picture and grasped each other's predicaments. But truth is there are a great many things going on in the world locally, nationally and globally; some quite discernible, the rest initially taking place mostly out of earshot. Simply listening to conversations may not be enough. For example, before the Arab Spring erupted, Middle Eastern governments regularly tracked citizens' communications. Yet no one foresaw that the death of a vegetable vendor in a Tunisian town would start toppling regional dominoes, some of which are still teetering.

In complex systems, context matters. Just as in journalism, the who, what, when, where, why and how must all be taken into account. Individually they send very different messages than the stories they tell as a whole.

Channels: Old vs. new

It's not an either/or proposition



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Versatility is paramount in complex systems because the rules of engagement keep changing. More communication channels are competing for the public's time and attention than ever before; but it is clearly not a zero sum game. According to Riepl's Law (coined by German newspaperman Wolfgang Riepl back in 1913), existing media do not disappear when something newer, and possibly better, comes along. Instead, they survive by adopting different formats. Early television was filled with the kinds of situation comedies, variety entertainment and game shows that had previously been staples on radio. As a result, radio became home to talk and a new sensation dubbed "rock-and-roll." For its part, the Internet has not extinguished any of its predecessors.

The world is home to seven billion people, one third of whom use Internet. Forty-five percent of Internet users are under 25-years old.

ITU
ICT Facts and Figures 2011

What a new medium can gain at the expense of its older competitors is notoriety. Organizations around the world are presently agog over social media, ascribing to it practically every desirable communication function. Is the adulation deserved? True, more than 60 percent of online users are on social networks. Still, at the end of 2011, some 65 percent of the planet's population did not yet have regular access to the Internet. On the flip side, nearly 75 percent of global citizens have at least one television set in their homes.¹⁴ In the United States, many households now have more TVs than breathing occupants.¹⁵

Globally, one in ten Internet users is a Muslim living in a populous Muslim community.

Prof. Philip Howard
University of Washington

Credit has also been given to social media that may, in part, belong elsewhere. There is little doubt Facebook and Twitter were crucial in helping to organize efforts that led to the Arab Spring. Yet, as Marc Lynch, the director of the Institute for Middle East Studies at George Washington University, has observed, it was the videos aired on independent television network Al Jazeera that mobilized the masses into the streets. That said, Lynch advises us to "not think about the effects of the new media as an either/or proposition ('Twitter vs. Al Jazeera'), but instead think about new media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, SMS, etc) and satellite television as collectively transforming a complex and potent evolving media space."¹⁶

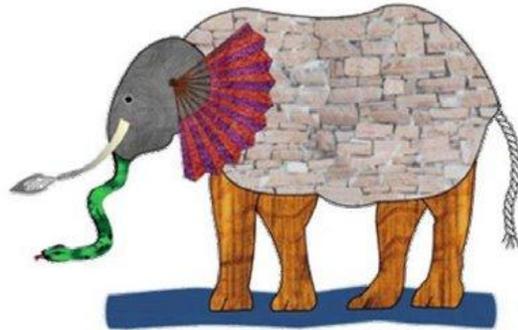
That is good advice even for those not engaged in regional insurgencies. But while many organizations are still learning to deliver and measure content across multiple technologies, audiences have come up with a simple solution – they choose the most appropriate medium at any given time. According to market research company Nielsen, (for which this writer was formerly Senior Director of Global Communications) consumers base their decisions on several factors, including convenience, availability and relevance of content, and the quality of the experience.¹⁷

Recognizing these attributes can benefit communicators considerably. For instance, television's rich and compelling content enable it to capture attention and create awareness even in a cluttered environment. Information online may not be as compelling, but the Internet's interactive capabilities make it ideal for impelling users to take action. And mobile's ubiquity and portability, enhanced by an array of applications, make it the most popular media platform on Earth.

Although the passage of time generally favors digital devices, they are unlikely to break Riepl's Law. Old, new and not yet imagined media will probably continue to co-exist and compete into the foreseeable future. Individuals and organizations must adjust communication strategies accordingly.

Embracing the elephant

People generally accept information which confirms their beliefs and dismiss ideas that don't



Wordfocus.com

A timeless testament to the puzzle of complexity is the tale of the blind men and the elephant. In this enduring Indian parable, several sightless wanderers come upon an elephant for the first time; and in trying to determine what it is, each touches a different part of the animal. To one fellow who grabs the trunk, it is like a squirming snake. To another who holds the tail, it is the same as a rope. For a third who falls against its side, it is akin to a wall; and so on with every contact. But not only do their various perceptions lead them to quarrel, they fail to accurately identify the beast.

Over centuries the allegory has transcended multiple theologies, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Sufism, and has even made its way into modern psychology. In his best-selling book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*,¹⁸ Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman says that individuals and organizations similarly jump to conclusions on the basis of limited evidence. His acronym for this condition is WYSIATI – what you see is all there is – and it represents the fact that we base our judgments on our experiences, and on the stories we make up to explain them. Unlike like the men in the fable, cautions Kahneman, we are not merely blind. “We're blind to our blindness. We have very little idea of how little we know.”

Nowadays, elephants reside in places like politics and the economy, and the blind include elected officials and the sorts of pundits who populate cable television news. It would be naïve to suggest that everyone is equally right and equally wrong. Life is rarely so finely balanced. But it would be fair to say that we all share common causes for our lack of (in)sight.

Of all the technologies we encounter, few may be more hardwired than the brain, which was initially programmed when our ancestors still dwelled in caves. Consequently, many of the ways we process information are inherently ingrained. When presented with new input, we instinctively decide what to admit and what to dismiss. When someone challenges our most cherished convictions, we double down on our beliefs. This “backfire effect” is the cognitive equivalent of Newton’s third law of motion, to wit “for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”

This where systems thinking comes into play. It is a more comprehensive means of seeing things. With regard to the communication model, it involves being able to discern the interactions of all four agents. [Figure 2] That is the sweet spot where we can correctly identify the elephant and act accordingly. But getting to that point requires changes in both attitude and approach.

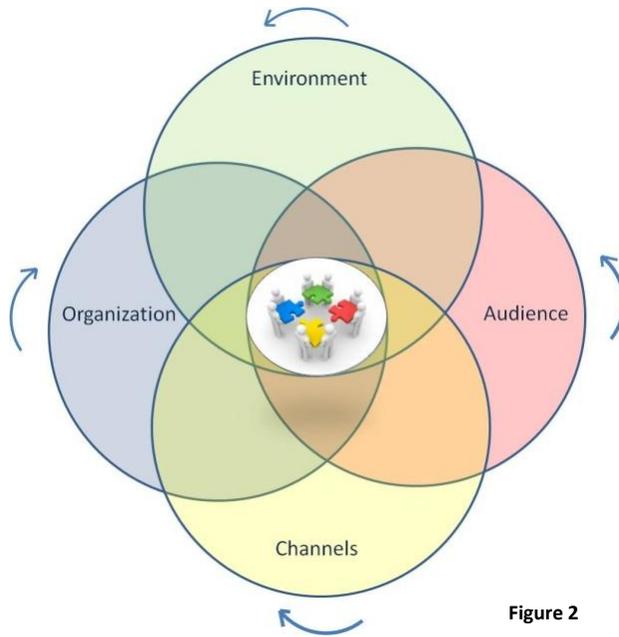


Figure 2

For starters, it is important to remember that complex systems encompass smaller systems, each with their own elements, interactions and emergent properties. For instance, organizations are composed of departments; audiences are becoming more diverse; external events like the global economic meltdown involve so many different agents as to seem almost incomprehensible; and the Internet is an amalgam of practically every medium that has preceded it.

Rather than set of static, interlocking circles, the communication model is more like four wheels of fortune spinning in separate directions and at different speeds; so that the point of mutual convergence can change from moment to moment. The outcome may not always be an elephant but a different creature all together, as elegant as a cat or as motley as a platypus.

Imperative too, is the realization that complexity is nonlinear. As much as we prefer to present ideas in logical sequence – as is the style of this report – complex systems subsist in the form of feedback loops. Every decision we make, or action we take, produces new information that may either substantiate or undermine our original assumptions. This makes it difficult to definitively measure outcomes since every effect can loop back and possibly alter strategies. [Figure 3]

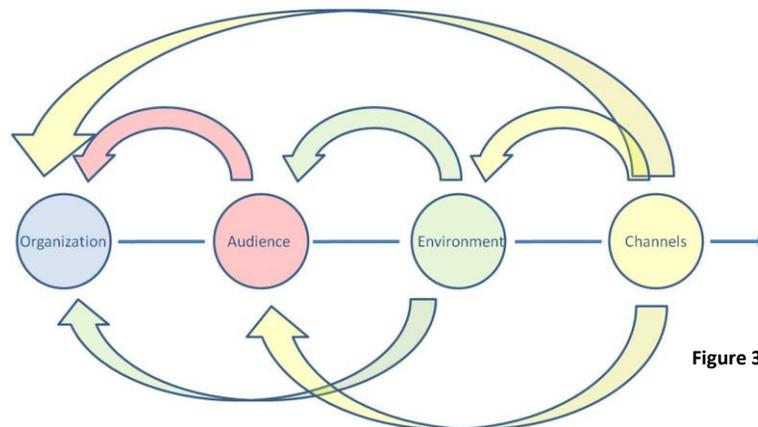


Figure 3

Worse yet, it can lead to what is known as “wicked problems:” situations about which our knowledge is incomplete, contradictory or constantly changing. They are the ultimate elephants that have as many different interpretations as interpreters. What is more, they are so tightly interconnected with other issues that, like a game of whack-a-mole, no sooner do we resolve one than another emerges.

Dealing with problems in a mechanized way is known as the Einstellung Effect (translated from the German word for attitude), and arises when relying on solutions that worked before instead of handling each new problem on its own terms.

As a result, numerous conventional models of communication no longer measure up to the circumstances they are meant to address; though many practitioners continue to rely on fixed and familiar routines. Why else, for example, would public relations professionals mechanically resort to vintage tools like talking points and Q&As when they have a diminishing impact on an equally dwindling and overworked corps of journalists?

An alternative is a systems approach which requires that we confront each quandary from a unique perspective. It is a combination of small steps and big leaps, and some are liable to fail along the way. Still, it can serve as a starting point for new and possibly better means to deal with the accruing complexity of communication. At the very least it is way of thinking differently. After all, as Einstein once said, “you can’t solve a problem with the same mind that created it.”

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