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Will teachers read the newsletter: A design problem

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Will teachers read the newsletter: A design problem

Abstract

This paper is concerned with communications between Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and teachers. To be more specific, this paper will address the problem of the Area Education Agency newsletter used to provide information about media procedures, products, and services.

WILL TEACHERS READ THE NEWSLETTER:
A DESIGN PROBLEM

A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

David Booth
University of Northern Iowa
June, 1987

This Research Paper by: David Booth

Entitled: Will Teachers Read the Newsletter:

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has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with communications between Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and teachers. To be more specific, this paper will address the problem of the Area Education Agency newsletter used to provide information about media procedures, products, and services.

The media division produces the media newsletter during the first week of every month from September through May, with some irregularity in scheduling because of changes in Agency or school calendars or because of production problems. The effectiveness of the newsletter is demonstrated when teachers order products advertised or when teachers call for more information about services described.

However, the newsletter is shown to be only partially effective when teachers appear to be unaware of media services and when procedures for preparing orders or requesting services are not followed. In particular, many teachers seem to prefer getting the same information by telephone, which can cause interruptions and inefficiency at the agency.

As the media staff would like more teachers to order products and follow procedures published in the

newsletter, they have considered different approaches to style and design. Their problem has narrowed to a discussion of different approaches to content, format, style, and design and to a concern over which of these will result in more teachers reading and following written directions.

The central issues in this problem are the ways in which communication processes and individual attitudes influence each other and how these interactions affect the final behavior of the receiver. As there are many theories which apply to this situation, it should be possible to select an approach capable of bringing about the desired change.

This study will use communication theory as it combines the receiver's reaction to the source, the receiver's relation to the source, the receiver's reaction to the communication process, and the receiver's relation to the communication process. This paper will survey literature relevant to these aspects of communication with the hope of helping the AEA staff communicate to teachers.

In particular, sources from the literature of public relations and organizational communication will be applied to the problems of simple and complex writing and design styles in an attempt to suggest an

appropriate pattern for the AEA newsletter. Analysis of these sources should also provide information as to whether the newsletter can be made more effective by duplicating its message in other media.

Since a newsletter is a one-way communication process, it is imperative that the receiver be aware of the communication attempt in the first place. At the simplest level, the attention-grabbing devices of advertising can be used to make the reader look at a publication long enough to identify its basic content and purpose. Such things as typography, layout, color, photography, special papers, and intricate folds are all well-researched and are often used by advertising agencies and graphic designers. These techniques are mentioned here in order to make it clear that their importance is not being overlooked. In the following discussion, the receiver's reaction to different communication approaches will be discussed in terms of general principles rather than in terms of specific graphic techniques. Certain techniques will be described as examples or illustrations where appropriate.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A newsletter author is concerned that a newsletter attract enough attention so that the readers are aware of it and read it for the information it provides. The AEA strives to make teachers aware of the newsletter's existence by publishing it regularly and by using a standard and recognizable format. Thus, the AEA's primary concern is whether or not teachers take the time to read the newsletter and act according to what it says.

This issue revolves around the receiver's perception of the newsletter in both its appearance and its content. Stated another way, the concern is that the newsletter process should be able to overcome whatever biases the teacher may have toward the newsletter or the AEA.

Communication Theory

Communication theorists have used the term "selective perception" to describe how receivers interpret messages and how they fit these messages in with their previous experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Fleming & Levie, 1978, pp. 7-9; Rogers, 1983, p. 166). So, communicators must seek to overcome this selective perception by strengthening ties of familiarity to receivers. As was mentioned above, this is done when a

standard format and a regular publication schedule are preserved.

However, to overcome selective perception should also mean that the newsletter be designed so that the receiver can identify himself with familiar materials and ideas. It would seem that an AEA providing information to teachers would want to have teachers identify with teacher-like individuals within the agency and would want to use language that teachers use. For example, "It is common practice to argue against the use of technical terms or jargon.... Yet so-called jargon can facilitate understanding and a sense of mutual identity among those who come from the same technical background...." (Miner, 1985, pp. 284-285). Charles K. West summarizes the importance of this identification process by stating "...the credibility of information decreases as the deviation from the listener's frame of reference increases" (1981, p. 61).

Although it is reasonable to suppose that receiver identification with the source of the communication will result in more messages accepted than without this identification, it is also essential to consider the added benefits of credibility. In general, the reader of a newsletter should find some aspects of credibility

in the publisher, the author, and in the newsletter itself (Vardaman, 1970, p. 130). For a regular and established communication like the AEA's newsletter, it is particularly important to maintain credibility by writing sincerely, since "Even the slightest hint of inauthenticity will cause a lack of credibility, trust, and willingness to listen and understand" (Abrell, 1984, p. 98).

Diffusion Theory

By discussing these, and other more specific attributes of successful communication, it is possible to conclude that the acceptance or rejection of a communication depends on whether or not the receiver concludes that the message is relevant to herself. It is therefore possible to make the conclusion that the eventual acceptance or rejection of a product, process, or behavior depends on how it is relevant, or how it fits the receiver's situation. Since the purpose of developing a communication plan for AEA newsletters is expected to result in a change in teachers' behavior, it is important that this study investigate these aspects of communication as they are related to subsequent behavior.

This direction can be taken through the study of diffusion research, most of which has been applied to

the study of ways in which new ideas or new products have been communicated to specific populations before and during the adoption of these new ideas or products. The concepts and terms which are used have been developed through this research, but they come principally from Everett M. Rogers.

Diffusion research typically deals with the processes that operate among social systems from the introduction of an innovation until its widespread use. The term "diffusion" describes the pattern of decisions to adopt an innovation throughout the social system under study. Diffusion theories can describe how different communication approaches influence individual or group decisions to make changes.

Generalizations developed through diffusion of innovations research fit many communication situations where the outcome is expected to be a change in the receiver's behavior. Known characteristics of individuals who innovate early can be used to design messages that suggest change, while characteristics of individuals who innovate later can be used to design messages that use a persuasive approach. It is also possible to compare the attributes of successful innovations to determine how these characteristics can

be described in ways that will be accepted by the largest audiences.

Diffusion research has also focused on the characteristics of people and organizations who desire to have innovations adopted and on those who are most successful at actually promoting adoption. The fact that these are not often the same individuals or organizations has many ramifications for communication design.

Several aspects of the problem of communicating to teachers can be compared to similar situations in diffusion studies and diffusion terms can be applied to parallel situations in education. In the newsletter problem, the innovations are the changes that occur as more teachers read the newsletter and fewer of them make telephone calls requesting the same information.

Diffusion researchers have subdivided and analyzed the characteristics of individuals who adopt innovations several ways (Rogers, pp. 241-251). For the purposes of this discussion it is simpler to refer to the receivers of the intended communication who are most likely to change their behavior as innovators or adopters. After all, it is the goal of this paper to have as many teachers as possible adopt the new behavior of getting information about media services from the newsletter.

Innovators have been described as being more able to accept and to cope with the risks of trying out new ways of doing things (Havelock & Havelock, 1973, p. 33). However, it also appears that the uncertainty and associated risks in a new procedure may repel some individuals, preventing them from receiving further information. Clearly, using a communication approach stressing the novelty and uncertainty of a new process would appeal to innovators but would not appeal to later adopters. It appears that simply describing the physical characteristics, intellectual ability or personality traits of a typical member of the audience will not lead to the best message design.

Diffusion research recognizes this discrepancy and approaches the communication process in terms of the ways innovators relate to each other and others in social systems. In general, research has found that innovators belong to social networks which allow them to trade information and support each other during the process of change. Research also shows innovators actively seek information about whatever is new and generally know more about innovations much earlier than others (Rogers, pp. 258-259).

Innovations may be adopted or rejected on the basis of their relative advantage, as seen by potential

adopters (Rogers, pp. 213-223). The new must be seen as enough better than the old to make the effort of change worthwhile. In the newsletter situation, the publication must be worth reading and the information presented about procedures and products must be specific.

In an innovation situation, it would seem that the innovator would have to keep learning more about the new idea as he or she moves from awareness to adoption. In fact, diffusion research has incorporated this idea of increasing-need-for-knowledge into the concept of the innovation-decision process. "Each piece of information which a person receives about the innovation increases his involvement in it as well as his knowledge about it..." (Havelock, 1969, p. 10-4). From the communicator's point of view, the two critical points in this process are the very early and early-adoption stages. The communicator may have to plan carefully and work much harder to overcome social and perceptual blocks.

At the early-adoption stages, the innovator will need information and support in order to work through problems with the change. The communicator will have to provide this information and support so that the

innovation is still perceived as more desirable than whatever existed before.

The central issue at this point is that no individual should feel totally alone. The communication in question should be analyzed with the understanding that each person is also a member of formal organizations and informal social networks.

In innovation situations, organizational participants face uncertainty, and strategies for dealing with these situations usually have not been covered by pre-established rules and procedures. Here greater reliance must be placed on the informal network of relationships....

Dealing with interpersonal issues also seems to be important, because of the effects of good interpersonal skills on openness, risk taking, and trust, which are important components of the innovation process.

(Zaltman, 1973, pp. 146-147)

Since personal contacts are so important, most diffusion-based recommendations have emphasized the importance of people, in the roles of change agents and opinion leaders, to provide information at the persuasion stage (Rogers, p. 198). Diffusion studies have also confirmed the corresponding generalization that awareness

knowledge provided by mass-media channels aids the establishment of these interpersonal channels (Rogers, p. 199).

Newsletter Research

If it is accepted that the predominate function of a newsletter is to provide awareness and basic information, then it appears that using simple design and straightforward writing would be the desirable approach. This seems to be supported by the literature of business and organizational communications.

Unless a communication is clear, it will lack influence. Readers who must painstakingly dig out ideas from a pile of verbal debris can hardly be blamed for berating both the writer and the communication. Or when, as is typical, misunderstandings are generated from a lack of document clarity, reactions to the communications will be hostile. Conflict and reduced performance are direct consequences of muddy symbolization. (Vardaman, 1970, pp. 126-127)

When our purpose is instructive and we want to teach people about our problems, we need to ask ourselves how much we can tell them without losing them. Too often we tell them more than they want to know and the publication

has few readers who get beyond the first paragraphs or pages. (Weir, p. 7)

Robert E. Harmon echoes the same thoughts when he discusses administrative manuals: "...write mandatory procedures in the imperative mood. Add human interest without sounding cute or flippant, which entails more than merely dropping in a few 'you's' here and there. Avoid vague words, such as establish, implement, and administer..." (1983, pp. 69-70). The Association for Research Libraries, in its internal communication policies (1979), recommends consolidating information and reducing the volume of information presented through newsletters alone.

These suggestions and strategies seem to set up a formula that would guarantee a newsletter providing just the right amount of awareness knowledge at the first stages of communication. It must be remembered, however, that the AEA wishes to make the most of the newsletter to persuade teachers to use the printed guidelines rather than relying on personal contacts with agency personnel.

In effect, the Agency's strategy is to incorporate "how-to knowledge" and "innovation-evaluation knowledge" that would ordinarily come from interpersonal contacts into the mass-media newsletter format. The current approach has been to add "personal touches" to the

newsletter with the idea that these additions would have each receiver see the newsletter as part of the interpersonal network linking him or her to the agency.

This concept seems to make sense, and it has been recommended in the past. Mark P. McElreath wrote an article for designers of employee publications in which he suggested "...deemphasizing the social comings and goings of the employees and emphasizing company operations and events, editors and sponsors of these publications may be talking around--not at--the employees" (1970, p. 50). In a survey of employee newspapers in 1968, most included "the personal touch" (Brown, 1968, p. 44).

Although it is desirable to have receivers identify with the message and the source, personalization may not be as effective as it would appear. Such techniques as frequent uses of real-life examples may present a favorable image but may not result in as much behavior change as expected. Graham and Valentine (1973, p. 967) suggest that trying to get everyone to identify with the communicator and trying to avoid offending anyone will not work for a long time. They suggest establishing a common ground on which to base discussion, and then they suggest communicating clearly and definitely. This idea is repeated by others; for example: "Both senders and receivers must watch carefully to determine if there

is a common universe of discourse being established and maintained" (Abrell, p. 103).

In fact, one of the overlooked problems within educational and organizational communications is the inability to clearly link different subgroups within organizations. Robert D. Gratz and Philip J. Salem discussed the problems of overlapping and ineffective communications in colleges and universities.

...but the day-to-day decision-making processes of many college and university groups are characterized by weak information bases, a wide range of communication links, and very flexible boundaries. (1981, p. 2)

Medium-differentiated institutions are particularly susceptible to conflicts between academic departments and the central administrative subsystems over the issue of whether the administrative or the professional subsystem will have primary authority. (pp. 1-2)

These authors go on to make the point that careful planning of communication will result in the most change. For the AEA, the reasonable approach would seem to be to use the newsletter to provide basic awareness information, and then to work toward using interpersonal contacts to facilitate change.

If the newsletter is seen primarily as a mass-media device to introduce the idea that changes will be required, it appears that the newsletter's design should be kept simple, using basic lists and straightforward descriptions. Complexity can deter adoption (Rogers, p. 231), so it is important that neither the newsletter nor its content be seen as complex. On the other hand, sufficient information should be provided to avoid ambiguity. Gratz and Salem warn that "...members of the organization will supplement incomplete information with some of their own hunches. The incomplete is made complete, often in an unintended way." (p. 17).

In the cases where the newsletter can not present positive information, it is still important to provide data the reader can use in determining the amount of risk to himself. Zaltman (pp. 54-55) suggests that decisions are hard to make in the face of uncertainty, but possible when the amount of risk can be judged. In other words, it may be better that some people decide not to change, as the fact of their non-change will identify them as individuals needing help to change. A clear pattern of non-change would also indicate that the innovation or the communication plan might need modification. Obviously, observable responses are more useful than a large number of undecided responses.

Needless to say, the information must be made to appear compatible with the adopters' values, beliefs, and needs as long as this can be done within the framework of simple and direct writing. In communicating from AEAs to schools, it should be fairly easy to do this as AEA staff members are familiar with teacher characteristics and classroom needs.

As described above, the communication plan in this situation should follow a two-step model: The newsletter (step one) makes information available and helps provide awareness of the changes to come. Step two occurs as informal social networks operate to spread the word further and help the change occur.

It must be emphasized that the effect of the newsletter is not diminished by the existence of step two, since the innovators and opinion leaders who will be reached by the newsletter can greatly influence the other members of the groups to which they belong. Rogers describes how these individuals are highly connected in both formal and informal networks and that they actively communicate with and support each other during the innovation process (p. 259).

On first appearance, it seems that these social relationships of innovators could be exploited in a newsletter by writing articles that play on the social

and human-nature needs of potential innovators. It would seem that communication could be enhanced by attempting to identify network members and then describing those members' experiences (or using their names) so that other network members would associate the newsletter with the network.

Innovators' high levels of communication seem to also demonstrate that they have a high need for communication; which seems to indicate that fleshing out the newsletter to provide lots of subject-identification and network-related information would be effective. This line of reasoning also suggests that mentioning specific people or cases could expand and interconnect social networks as information is provided to innovators that were formerly unaware of other people or other networks having similar interests and goals.

However, the reason for the social networks outside the formal agency-to-school and newsletter-communication situation may be more related to social needs than information needs. If the primary needs of the network members are related to person-to-person contact, then trying to enhance the newsletter by working to associate it with the network may backfire. The newsletter in this situation might generate more network ties and enhance network communication, but it

might also generate a need for more information that would have to come from direct person-to-person contact with agency members. In short, trying to use written communication to eliminate telephone calls might end up causing more telephone calls and personal visits to agency offices.

Even though it would be helpful to identify the opinion leaders and innovators and communicate directly to them first, the job is complicated by the fact that the identification of these individuals is not clear-cut. Gratz and Salem, for example, describe several ways informal networks differ from formal networks and offer the general advice that communication in such situations should be well planned (pp. 32-33). Pavlik, et al. (1980) surveyed 320 employees of Honeywell, Inc. in an attempt to link company-newspaper readership with membership in different formal and informal networks and found (among other things) that readership of social news was not strongly linked to high integration in sociability networks.

As there appears to be no easy way to identify the key members of social networks in order to target articles toward them, it appears that the best usable approach at this time is to try to enhance the informal networks through the use of other media in addition to

the newsletter. In the AEA's situation, the most obvious approach would be to continue to encourage some telephone calls.

These calls can enhance Agency credibility and facilitate two-way communication. Their major benefit, though, is the opportunity they provide for human contact. Since school personnel may be more likely to be "people people," it is not out of the question to consider that they may react more positively to communications from other people than from print or other one-way media. And of course, telephone calls may provide the best communication in cases where unusual requests or special modifications of products fall outside regular guidelines and require special attention.

Another desirable approach would be for Agency staff members to talk to teachers directly whenever possible. "Face-to-face communication will provide the most information since it communicates both verbally and nonverbally and both vocally and nonvocally" (Gratz & Salem, p. 19). Of course, it will still be important for staff members to be available at the Agency office for those who wish to visit in person, but if this behavior is to be changed it appears that agency members will have to visit the schools in order to set up face-to-face contacts where they are in charge.

An aggressive campaign of personal contacts could include not only one-to-one contacts, but also demonstrations, group discussions, conferences, workshops, and training events (Havelock, 1973, pp. 126-128). Some of these activities are being used at the present time, but it is clear that specific attempts to develop personal contacts should go hand-in-hand with changes published in the newsletter. In the interest of economy, it would seem that related subjects could be combined, both to reduce the total number of campaigns and to take advantage of the fact that separate innovations are often seen as more compatible if they are introduced in combination (Rogers, pp. 226-227).

In any case, providing many chances for different types of interpersonal contacts should facilitate change, particularly if these opportunities are provided at the time when the innovators need extra technical help or are losing enthusiasm (Zaltman, p. 73; Rogers, p. 170; Havelock, 1973, Part Two, Stage V). For the AEA, these opportunities are provided by encouraging telephone calls and personal visits: More successful contacts might be provided by briefing staff members and preparing to respond to teacher questions whenever new information is provided through the newsletter. It would not be out of the question to consider that as

the newsletter deviates further from normal, even more personal contact will be required.

At this point, it might be mentioned in passing that incentives have been discussed as a means of calling attention to and getting greater compliance with procedures. On the surface, it appears that incentives could help some teachers to change: Positive incentives could be provided in the form of some reward for using the correct guidelines (a discount in price or a faster turn-around time, for example). Negative incentives might be threats to refuse certain orders or longer turn-around times.

Although these incentives do increase the perceived relative advantage of an innovation and can actually lead to a change in behavior, there are some cases where using a temporary incentive to encourage one behavior works only as long as the incentive is provided: There have been some cases where innovations were discontinued as soon as the incentives were eliminated. It appears that incentives might be helpful, but only above and beyond efforts to use interpersonal contacts to facilitate the transfer of information communicated through a concise newsletter. In short, the best results should come about from a well-designed communication plan rather than from selective use of gimmicks.

Summary of Review of Literature

From the preceding literature, it is apparent that a good communication plan would depend on working to overcome the receiver's tendency toward selective perception by working toward making the physical message and its source familiar to the receiver. This would mean that the format and design should be made familiar to the teachers by regular publication and through the use of repeated, recognizable layout and design elements. This would also mean that the message content should be seen as familiar because of its origination from AEA staff members who understand and can communicate with teachers.

The originator of a message should strive to be seen as credible, which means that the authors and publisher must not appear to offer too many opinions that are extremely deviant from those offered by other credible sources. (For example, the AEA would probably lose credibility if it were to continuously publish articles criticizing a reading series used by one third of the schools it serves.) This striving for credibility also means that the publication itself must provide instructions which do not contradict previous instructions, and which carefully explain and give plausible reasons for changes when they are required.

An appearance of credibility also requires that the writing itself be sincere and believable, which suggests that straightforward and honest explanation should be used, even if this style might appear too succinct when stating limitations.

In addition to appearing credible, the source and the message must be seen as relevant by the receiver. The communication must be perceived as compatible with her daily experience and future expectations. The message itself, in both content and appearance, must also offer something that is applicable to the receiver's situation in one way or another.

Where change is the desired result of communication, diffusion of innovations research suggests that the analysis and design of a communication plan should be based on what is known about the characteristics of individuals who decide to change at different times. In particular, the characteristics of those who change earlier than others and the characteristics of innovations which adopters find desirable can be evaluated to determine comparable traits which work in the newsletter approach to causing change.

Research has found that innovators are better able to deal with the risks and uncertainties of new ideas than are later adopters, which suggests that publishing

information about changes will appeal to innovators and discourage later adopters at the same time. Research has also found innovators linked to each other and to multiple sources of information through social networks, which suggests a newsletter by itself will only provide part of the information required by those who are changing. By combining these two trains of thought with the finding that information needs increase substantially during the innovation process, it is possible to determine a strategy where the newsletter can be used to make customers aware of changes to come and interpersonal networks can be used for persuasion.

If the primary purpose of the newsletter is to make people aware of what is to come, then it should be simple and straightforward. Its format should be well-organized so that information can be easily found. The writing should be direct and should clearly describe or explain. Examples should only be used if necessary, and then only if they clearly simplify the explanation of a complex topic. Layout and typography should be easy to read and illustrations should be carefully chosen to clarify the written descriptions.

Since persuasion is better accomplished through interpersonal channels, it follows that trying to add persuasive elements to the newsletter or trying to seek

individual identification by using case examples or by listing individual client names may not be as effective as true interpersonal contacts. Such personal touches may only serve to make the newsletter more complex than necessary (and thus not read as a source of awareness-knowledge). In addition, it is possible that trying to make the newsletter part of social networks by encouraging personal contacts might have the people who should be changing on their own trying to maintain personal contacts in order to avoid having to change.

As it appears that a two step plan is the desired approach to communicating where change is desired, it would seem that this plan could be enhanced by identifying the innovators and opinion leaders more specifically and by then writing the newsletter to reach them. Unfortunately, these individuals are not easily recognized, and this approach becomes impractical.

However, the two step approach can be modified by following the awareness-message of the newsletter with additional information and persuasion delivered through other media. Telephone calls, personal visits, workshops, and other interpersonal contacts can all be used to facilitate the communication of new ideas and accompanying changes. It is worthwhile to consider that

more extreme changes will probably require even more interpersonal effort. It is also reasonable to expect that effort devoted to interpersonal contact will be more effective than a series of newsletter articles which repeat the same basic information.

CHAPTER III

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

For the audience of teachers under discussion, the AEA can overcome selective perception by continuing to use an identifiable format and design for the newsletter. The same masthead and a recognizable cover design, for instance, will make sure that teachers know the newsletter as a source for basic information about new products and procedures and as a source of additional information about existing products and programs. Of course, this familiarity will be even stronger if a regular publication schedule is maintained.

In this situation, it is also desirable that teachers identify with the AEA staff members by seeing them as former teachers and fellow education professionals. This goal can be met by making sure that the products and processes being described are applicable to school situations and by suggesting appropriate classroom uses as often as possible (West, p. 61).

The AEA authors must maintain a reputation for credibility, which they can do by making sure they provide consistent directives. They must attempt to provide up-to-date information, as either an overly premature announcement or an obsolete guideline

could result in disappointment and an accompanying lack of faith in the agency (Abrell, p. 98).

Whenever change is required, the AEA should carefully balance the need for the change, the need to communicate the change, and the form of communication to be used so that the Agency's credibility and consistency is maintained (Vardaman, p. 130). It almost goes without saying that arbitrary changes should be avoided because of the loss of credibility that could result from a multitude of minor changes. When a change is necessary, the reasons should be honestly and plausibly explained, as a sincere approach will help preserve credibility. As discussed in the review of literature, the sincere approach can also aid credibility by providing an idea of the risk involved in the change (Zaltman, pp. 54-55), and can also provide feedback to the AEA as to the degree of help that will be required during the process of changing.

The AEA must provide information that teachers find relevant, which will be accomplished to a certain extent if the products and processes and their written descriptions are oriented toward classroom uses. In addition, the directions from the AEA should not be perceived as greatly deviant or seen as contradicting information provided by other professional sources

within the field of education. Information included in the AEA newsletter must be seen as applicable to school situations in order for the newsletter to be seen as relevant and credible by teachers and administrators.

In cases where teachers recognize the newsletter physically, but do not always see the content as credible or relevant, it will be particularly important for AEA staff members to consistently provide information in an honest and straightforward approach (Vardaman, pp. 126-127). It would not be out of the question to suppose that teachers seeing the newsletter as less credible would be more easily lost as readers after the publication of irrelevant or easily misread information.

Diffusion of innovations research suggests that bringing about change should be based on a two step communication plan (Rogers, pp. 198-199). The AEA should use the newsletter for providing basic awareness of the expected change and then seek to use interpersonal channels and other media to provide additional information and to persuade the more cautious teachers to change.

An AEA newsletter produced for the purpose of providing basic information as required by this plan should be simply designed and produced in a standard format. The authors should write plainly and directly

to teachers, avoiding elaborate descriptions and perhaps using lists where appropriate (Vardaman, pp. 126-127; Weir, p. 7; Harmon, pp. 69-70). Numbers should be used to indicate sequences of steps and articles should not be "jumped" to other pages too often. Examples should be used where they can simplify explanations, but testimonials should be avoided (Author, supported by Gratz & Salem, pp. 32-33). Type should be large enough to be read easily, and illustrations should be used to clarify written descriptions.

As the two step approach relies on interpersonal networks to provide additional information and to help bring about change, the AEA should plan to develop certain types of personal contacts as part of the overall communication plan. In particular, more effort should be put into developing interpersonal approaches when changes are expected to be more extreme.

Since the entire problem of designing a newsletter communication plan developed from a need to make efficient use of staff time, it may seem contradictory to return to personal contacts after discussing ways to reduce them. However, the preceding discussion makes it clear that effective communication may be facilitated if certain types of contacts are made part of the communication plan in order to take advantage of the

persuasive power and communicative effect of social networks (Gratz & Salem, pp. 1-2).

For the AEA, interpersonal contacts can be included in the plan by encouraging telephone calls and visits to staff members. Under the two step plan, it is clear that the newsletter should provide somewhat comprehensive information that can be used by the teachers who are comfortable with change. This information will also encourage innovators to experiment with new ideas and will begin to introduce these ideas to others through the informal networks. At the same time, the accessibility of Agency staff should be stressed, so that those requiring additional help will be encouraged to make contact. It is expected that as these individuals are helped by personal contact, they will also communicate the changes to others and describe the ways they were able to receive help. Clearly, successful experiences with changes provided by this approach will be communicated throughout the social system and will thus accelerate the diffusion of change (Havelock, 1969, p. 10-4).

Following this example, it is possible to visualize similar effects for other interpersonal contacts incorporated into the AEA's communication plan. In cases where the required change is substantial,

complicated, or desired quickly; workshops and training sessions should be planned to make personal contacts with more teachers in a shorter period of time (Havelock, 1973, pp. 126-128). Such sessions also would integrate the change into the social networks more quickly than repeated one-to-one personal contacts.

It appears that the most reasonable communication approach for the AEA does not substantially differ from present practice. The newsletter is the foundation for an effective communication plan as it provides announcements of new products and processes as well as explanations and suggestions for making better uses of existing AEA media services. The preceding discussion suggests that this newsletter will be more effective if it is simply designed to be easily recognized and quickly read, and if it is regularly published.

The discussion above also suggests that the AEA can be more effective in communicating to teachers if the newsletter is backed up by other media and by opportunities for interpersonal contact between the Agency and teachers who are members of interpersonal networks. The use of these networks implies that the Agency should continue to allow teachers to contact staff members by telephone and in person. These plans also suggest that the Agency should make efforts to explain

more complicated or difficult changes to teachers by continuing to hold workshops and by making visits to teachers in the schools.

Even though the original idea for this paper was to attempt a detailed description of current uses of the elements of graphic design in this specific situation, it appears that the original questions regarding effective newsletters are more properly answered in the total context of communication and resulting change. When seen in this light, the questions of appropriate design remain important, but must be analyzed in terms of how they serve their purpose as only the first part of a larger communication plan.

In terms of the newsletter itself, this paper can not directly prescribe best page format, recommended type styles, number and composition of photographs, etc. If the AEA is interested in investigating these aspects of simple and complex designs, an experiment could be designed to compare the two approaches. It would only be necessary to publish two versions of the same newsletter one month and to make an offer to readers that would require a return coupon or other recordable response.

In conclusion, it must be stated that simple and concise newsletters probably will be more effective than

more elaborate publications, but the importance of planning the entire communication process must not be reduced. It is important to remember that considering the audience in designing this type of communication plan includes considering the subaudiences of innovators and non-innovators and considering how other strategies might be used to attain the final result of change. In short, the communicator should remember that change, rather than message reception, is the ultimate goal.

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