

## WHEN SPREAD SLOWS DOWN

A key winter driving skill is the ability to maintain momentum in deep snow. If you slow down too much, the snow will pile up in front of the car quicker than you can drive through it. You end up stopped. By this stage pressing on the accelerator won't do any good, no matter how hard and often you try. You could sit it out and wait for the snow to melt, but that could take a long time. To resume your journey you need to find other ways to solve the problem: reversing away from the heap of snow; getting out the car and shovelling it away yourself; or drafting in the help of others to clear it for you.

In a similar way, spreading good practice can also come up against factors that slow the process down until there is no further adoption of the new ideas.

The spread of good practice is closely linked to how communication functions within a social system. A useful starting point, therefore, is to consider the communications process and to identify its effectiveness. The multi-step communication model suggests a view of communication that provides some steps for analysis:

*A useful technique for planning a spread activity is to ask the following questions:*

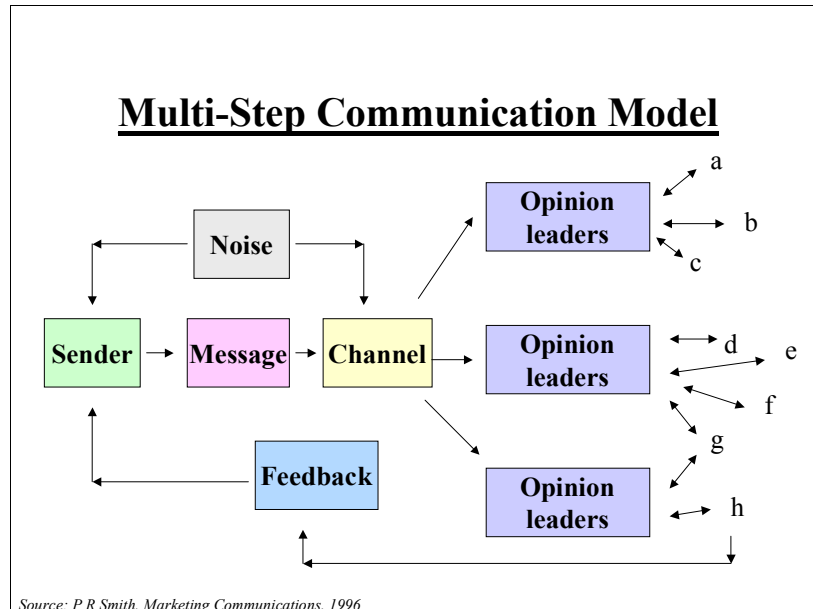
**WHAT** are the new ideas and practices that I would like others to adopt?

**WHY** would I like this to happen?

**WHO** are the potential adopters? **WHY** would they need to adopt these new ideas?

**HOW** can I best...

- package the message
- send the message
- enable opinion leaders
- get feedback on progress



If you do not already have feedback systems in place to measure progress, then that is the essential first action. How else will you know whether your spread activities and efforts are working?

To diagnose why spread appears to have slowed down or stopped and to find ways to encourage it to start again, you can analyse each part of the communication model above.

## **Questions to check for points of leverage to renew or progress adoption of new ideas**

### **Sender**

- Check the facts; has progress really stopped or slowed down? Are you relying on factual information or rumour?
- Has a better solution emerged than the one you are measuring? What does this mean for your spread activities?
- Are your measures of progress useful? Do they fit with your aims?
- What are opinion leaders talking about?

### **Message**

- What is being implemented? All or part of the solution? What can you learn from this?
- Are the original concepts still holding value?
- Is the message being communicated clearly? Is there evidence of it being distorted?
- Can the message be chunked into smaller pieces to make it more manageable?
- Can uncertainty be reduced by encouraging more pilots and testing of the new ideas by adopters?

### **Channel**

- What is the level of awareness amongst adopters?
- Which methods of communication worked well in the past? Are there any extensions of what worked well that you can apply?
- Has communication tailed off? Do you need more of the same type and method of communication or something new?
- If awareness is high, what could help the decision making process?
- Is there a difference in awareness between leaders/ managers and adopters directly affected by the changes? What can you learn from this?

### **Noise**

- What else is attracting the attention of potential adopters?
- Can the new idea or practice be communicated and explained as part of any other existing activity or priority?
- What communication methods will break through the existing noise in the system?
- Are perceptions and attitudes acting against the spread of new ideas? How might you work with the perceptions rather than against them?

### **Opinion leaders**

- Do you know who are the opinion leaders for this specific set of new ideas? Have you asked adopters whose opinions they respect and value?
- Are the opinion leaders supporting the spread process?
- Are the opinion leaders you've identified the right ones for this topic? Can you find more and different opinion leaders?

*If you have any comments about this bulletin, any experiences you would like to share on this topic, then please email Sarah Fraser on [sfraser881@aol.com](mailto:sfraser881@aol.com)*