An Investment in Trust: Communication in the Commercial Fishing and Fisheries Management Communities

Jennifer Gilden
OSU Dept. of Anthropology

Flaxen D.L. Conway
Oregon Sea Grant Extension

Funded by Oregon Sea Grant and Oregon Sea Grant Extension, with additional support from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service.
What We Did

- Semi-structured ethnographic interviews
- We interviewed members of two communities:
  - Commercial Fishing Community
  - Fisheries Management Community
- 4 regions
  - North Coast
  - Mid Coast
  - South Coast
  - Urban Centers
What We Did

- We looked at several communication strategies
  - Face to face communication
  - Written communication
  - Communication via electronic media
- And various tools within each strategy
  - Within face to face, tools like
    - word of mouth
    - liaisons
    - meetings
  - Within written...
    - newsletters, etc.
  - Within electronic...
    - the Internet and WWWeb
What We Did

We learned a lot from participants
  - about what is working
  - what is not working
  - and what could work better by **small but important** adjustments
    • for example, the Internet works fairly well but only with people who have access or use it!

People you know, work with, or constituents taught us a lot...and this is captured in the publication.
What We Learned From Participants

- We learned about both communities.
- We learned about the issues that influence communication.
- We learned about how these things ultimately affect the relationship between both communities.
Fishing community: competition and distrust

- “Fishing industry” actually comprises many different and often conflicting interest groups based on gear types, fisheries, geographic locations, and other factors.
- Most communication in the fishing community takes place within, and not across, these interest groups.
- Processors and gear suppliers have unique communication needs and concerns.
- Reach the entire community (crew, on-shore partners).
Fisheries management community: overworked and under-funded

- Sincere interest to communicate
- The lack of time and funding, overwork, lawsuits, and bureaucracy are major constraints
- There is a lack of communication and understanding about what agencies are and do
  - public views NMFS and the Council as the same
We Learned About the Issues that Influence Communication... and how they affect the relationship between these communities.

- Information needs are directly related to the receiver’s (listener/reader) priorities
- Trust and power
- Communication skills
  - language differences
  - listening
  - willingness to change
- Cultural differences and Stereotyping
- Representation
- Data
Why Invest in Communication... and Ultimately Trust?

- Communication is not the “sliver bullet” but...
- Research participants shared over 50 “actions to improve...” (page 64-67) that could be put into use
  - on an individual level
  - on a community level

- Plus other helpful suggestions scattered throughout the publication:
  - listening skills (p. 13)
  - working with liaisons (p. 44)
  - holding effective meetings (p. 46)
  - using the Internet (p. 56)
Why Invest?

n Pay now or pay later
  – hot topics deserve adequate, effective communication
  – invest time now (build trust) to save time later

n Improvements in communication and trust can
  – improve understanding and confidence
  – improve how meetings function
  – get more buy-in
  – save time because you don’t have to fix things later

n This is not extra work. Rather, improvements in strategies and tools used that can make a difference in the
  – work we do,
  – the products we produce,
  – and the relationships we have (or will have later)