

The role of scientists in public policy decisions: The case of drought planning

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Cultural Divide

- Does a cultural divide separate scientists from the broader community in which they live?
- Proposition tested in the area of state drought policy
- Interviews conducted with scientists and state officials engaged in developing state plans

Study Design

- Three groups interviewed:
 - Research scientists
 - Intermediary organizations (NDMC, NCDC, NCEP, JAWF...)
 - State officials in 10 states with new or updated plans since 2000
- Telephone interviews conducted between Summer 2004 and Spring 2005
- 51 individuals interviewed

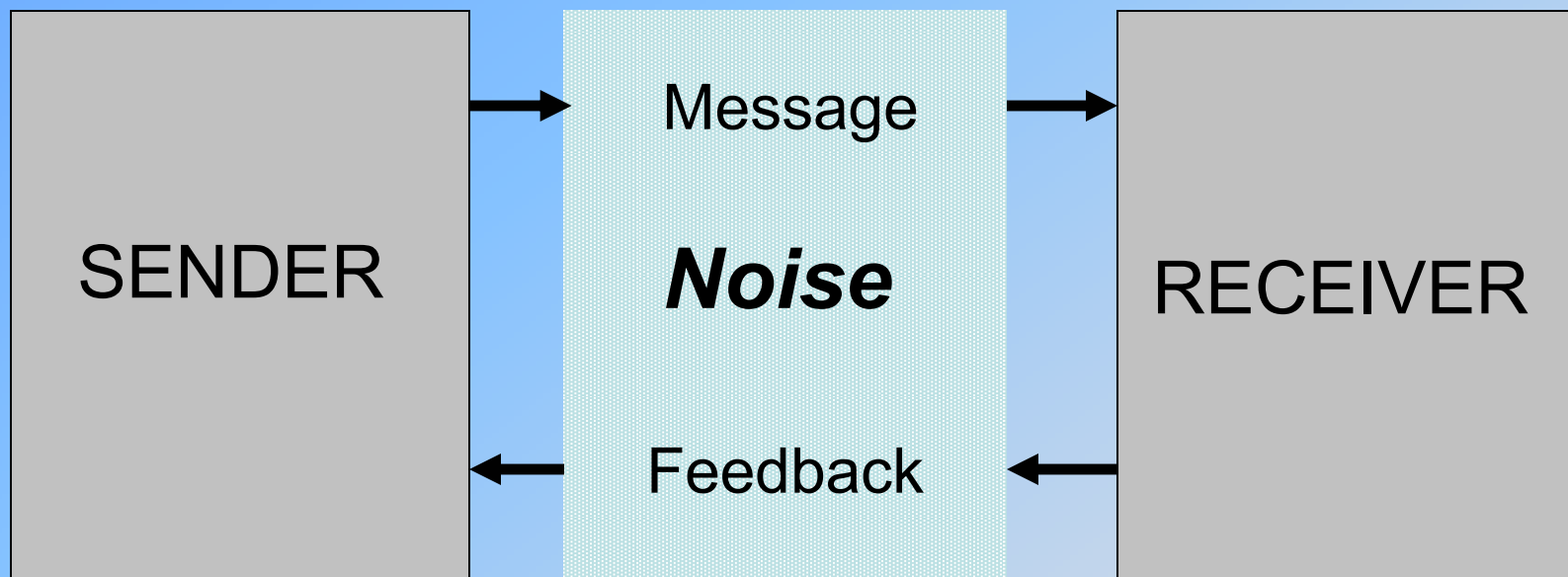
Methods of Communication

- **Direct Contact**
 - Most effective
- **Meetings**
 - Scientific, public presentations
- **Collaborative Activities**
 - Boards, planning activities
- **Written Communication**
 - Journals, reports, books
- **Indirect Communication**
 - Websites, media, e-mail

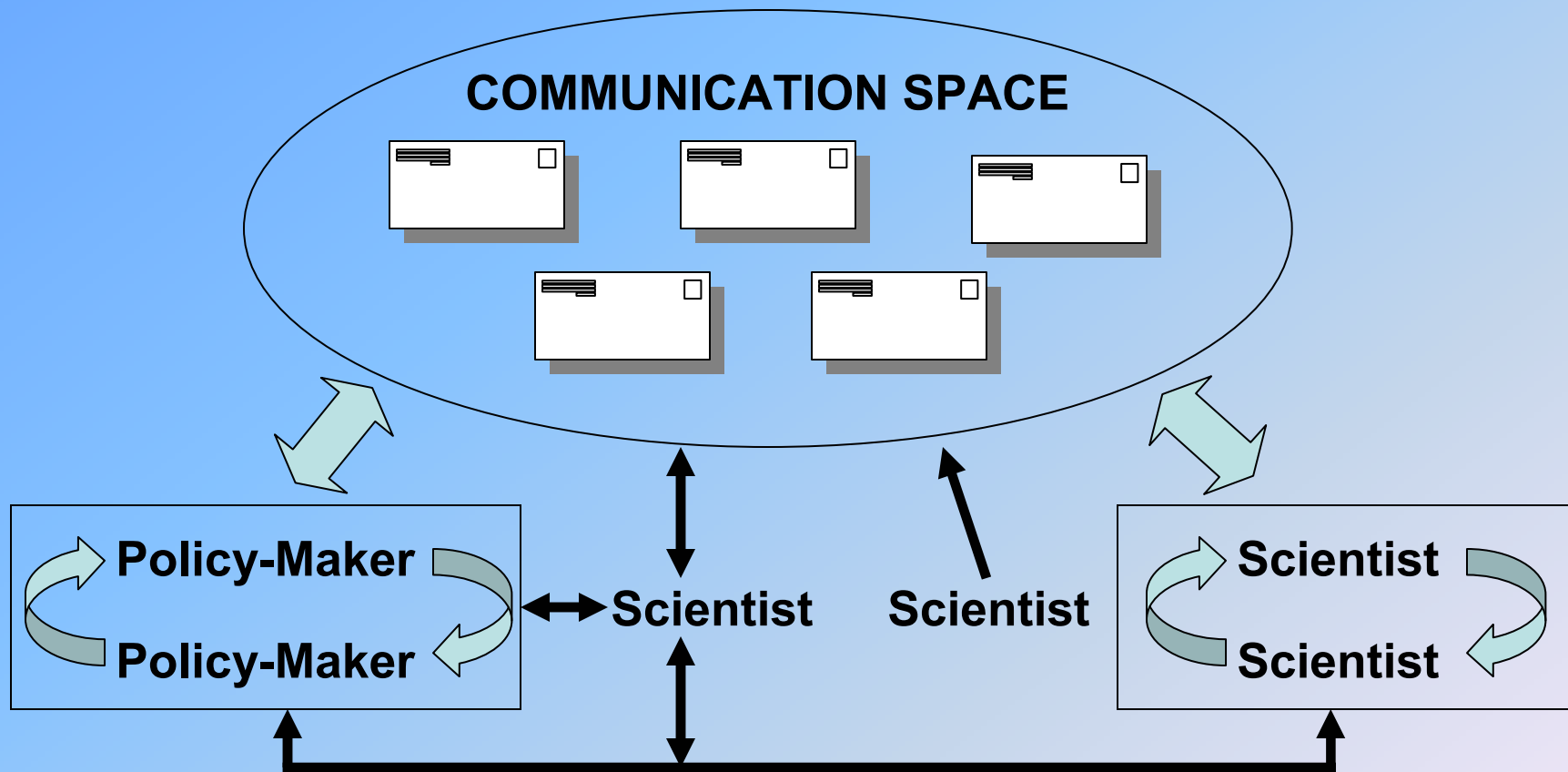
Forms of Interaction

Expectations	Style of Engagement	
	Active	Passive
Information Used / Interpreted Correctly	Collaborators	Consultants
Information Misused / Misinterpreted	Educators	Critics

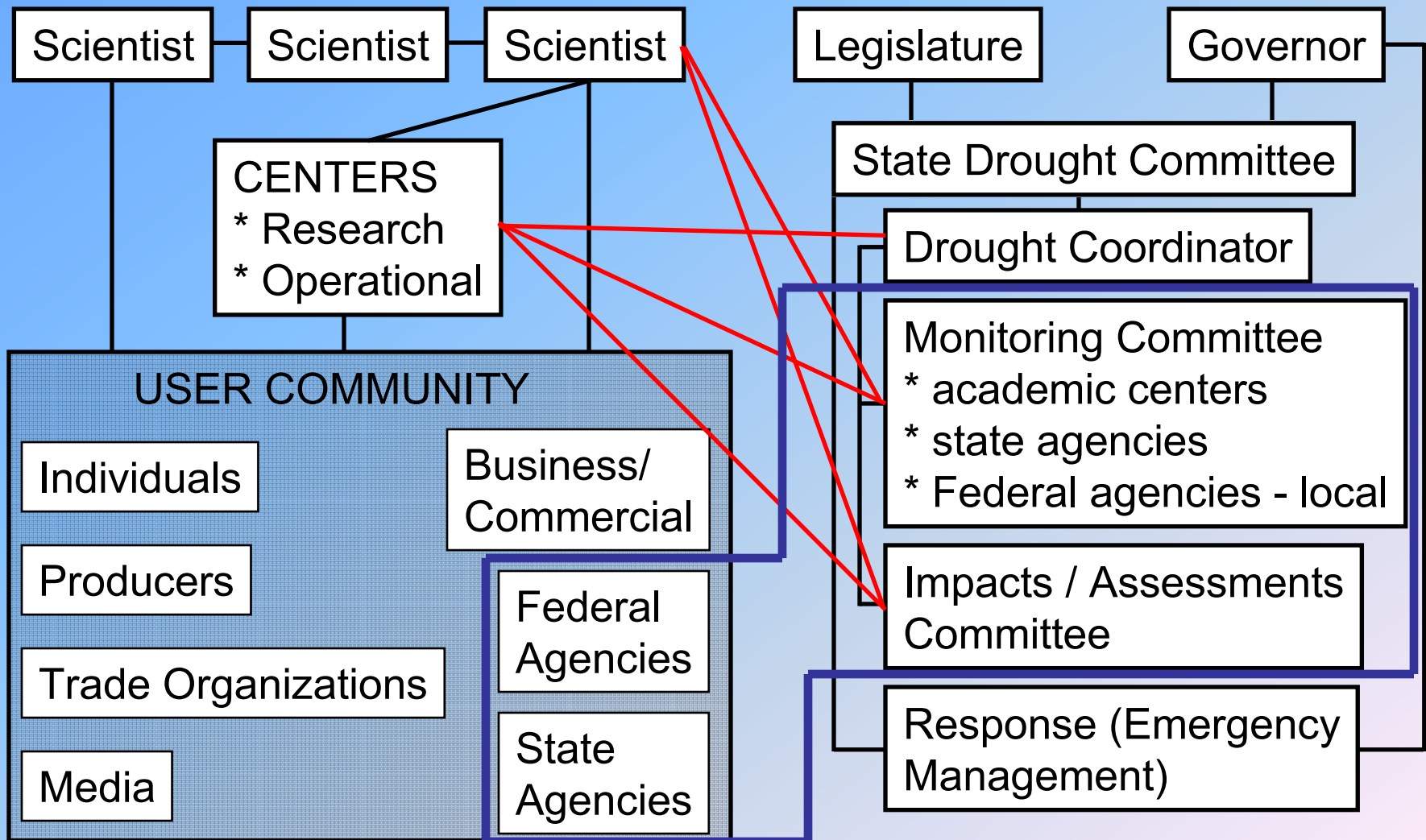
Classical Communications Model



Post-Modern Communication



Communication Between Scientists and Policy-Makers



Key Findings

(1) There is no substantial Cultural Gap.

- Those involved in state drought policies had little difficulty utilizing scientific information and advice

Key Findings

(2) Policy-Makers have little difficulty accessing, understanding, and utilizing scientific and technical information.

- First drafts created by individuals at lower levels of state organizations
- Scientific or technical background not necessary

Key Findings

(3) Intermediaries are more likely to be engaged in federal initiatives, and earlier in the process, than research scientists.

- Federal organizations, national centers
- Working groups
- Active collaboration with policy-makers
- Framework for broader participation

Key Findings

(4) Research scientists are as likely to engage decision-makers as are intermediaries, but in more local arenas.

- Close collaboration with local decision-makers
- Not necessarily policy-making context
- Oriented toward operational concerns

Key Findings

(5) Both research scientists and intermediaries tend to be passive.

- Most often initiated by a request
- Time constraints

Key Findings

(6) The organizational structure posed more of a barrier to communication than did the technical nature of the material.

- Restrictions on communications limited direct contact
- Academic rewards systems emphasize scientific communication over service and outreach activities
- Inconsistent funding for extension and outreach programs

Key Findings

(7) Internet communication is a key feature of a drought knowledge community.



- Both within and external to the community
- E-mail discussion list (weekly Drought Monitor) excellent forum
- Develops some degree of consensus / shared knowledge
- Summarizes information for external audiences
- Regular publications draw attention

Key Findings

(8) Implementation issues are more important than communication issues.

- Partitioning problems focuses on scientific or technical components
- Resulting policies fail to address competing values or stakeholder issues
- Lack of political support for controversial or expensive elements

A Climate Knowledge Community?

- **A group of experts** 
 - RISAs, State & Regional Climate Centers, National Centers, Extension
- **A group of stakeholders with identifiable needs** 
 - Water Managers, Agricultural Producers, Environmental Concerns, Planning & Development
- **A means of communication** 
 - E-mail discussion group, web blog, message board
 - We do annual meetings
- **Something that draws experts and stakeholders together on a regular basis (cool product)** 
 - Lots of products, dispersed

Final Thoughts

- It's the process, not the content
- Established Connections provides conduit for transfer of information
- Plenty of interaction among experts and stakeholders, but lacks coordination
- Need an effective means of communication and something to bring people to the community

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