

Scientist-Journalist Conflict : A Barrier to Science Communication



Welcome to a Presentation

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Understanding Conflict

- Conflict is not just war or armed conflict, although war and such acts are the extreme stages of conflict. Conflict between scientists and journalists leads to inadequate public communication of science and technology. Conflict is not a passive but an active concept that involves many concepts and perceptions leading to general regression in a particular area. Conflict causes disturbance to peace, hindrance to development and resistance to communication. So let's resolve conflict.



Scientist-Journalist Communication

- √ Scientist and journalist form the core of several tasks of science communication.
- √ A growing number of instances of scientist-journalist conflict have been seen across the world in recent years and so as in India.
- √ Since, both are the major players in science communication and their role in science communication is crucial, it is important to help resolve this emerging problem for ensuring better and effective science communication among various target audiences.



Scientists' Perspective

- v A scientist is the creator of scientific knowledge
- v He is the custodian of knowledge
- v He is the first user of that knowledge for creating new knowledge, technology
- v Likes freedom, recognition
- v Dislikes criticism, questioning
- v Generally lacks language of public communication



Journalists' Perspective

- ✓ Generally lacks scientific knowledge
- ✓ Knows language of public communication
- ✓ Looks at news value, media worthiness
- ✓ Has to work within a given timeframe to achieve deadlines
- ✓ To follow newspaper policy



What Causes Conflict

- √ There is a great apathy of each others profession;
- √ Almost no efforts for building trust;
- √ Lack of training;
- √ Attitudinal differences;
- √ Professional compulsions; and
- √ Over-expectations from each other.



Some Observations

- v Some journalist members of a Science Journalists' Association in Europe have objected entry of Press Officers and scientist-writers with R&D organizations as members
- v The organizers of a conference in China had to arrange separate sessions for scientists and journalists instead of a combined session
- v "No journalist" attended a workshop for "journalists" on Bio-safety in India
- v Nobel prize winner says science communication is not his cup of tea
- v Kaling prize winner says he communicates science as he did not require promotion



Journalists Complain Scientists

- √ They over claim the research outcomes; publicity
- √ Fearful for official permission, accuracy
- √ Do not understand time compulsion
- √ Insist on verification of final script/ copy
- √ A very sophisticated being, displays over sensitivity, even simple questions can hurt them
- √ Are not media savvy; happy in comfort zone
- √ Do not understand as how does media work
- √ Tend to offer heavy information with technical jargon and terminology; no daily breakthroughs
- √ Press releases are not media worthy
- √ Papers in foreign journals not available to report



Scientists Complain Journalists

- v They glorify the research outcomes
- v Do not understand scientists' limitations
- v Misleading reporting; distortion in translation
- v Are not science savvy; fundamentals lacking
- v Commit mistakes to report first, exclusive, break the news; no follow-up news
- v A few trained in science, science journalism
- v Hawker turned journalist; cover-age
- v Tend to report pitfalls, juicy,spicy, sensational
- v Want spoon feeding, reproduce press release
- v Tend to file story without contacting scientist



Analysis: Sample 100S+100J

- √ 98% J learnt scientist unable to communicate
- √ 93% S opined that J distort information
- √ 87% J feel that S did not cooperate
- √ 78% press releases not media worthy
- √ 62% J say that S are not accessible
- √ 51% S<>J enter into argument/ conflict
- √ 58% S found story sensationalized
- √ 46% S<>J willing to interact
- √ 23% S<>J communicate by e-mail
- √ 07% S provided reference material to J



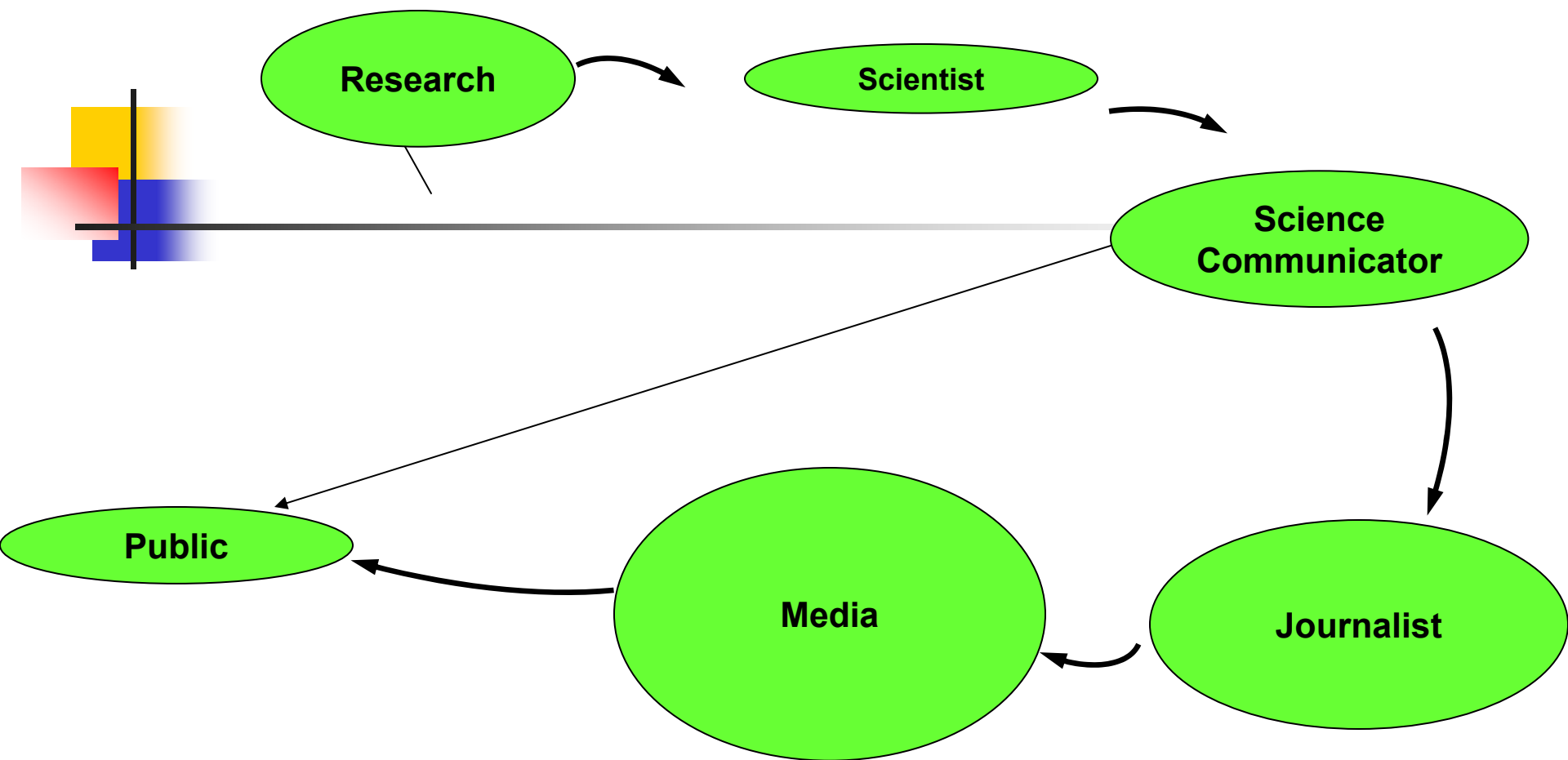
Possible Solutions

- ✓ Training and motivating scientists/ journalists
- ✓ Short Term Fellowships – scientists working in media, journalists working in laboratories
- ✓ Common platform for periodical interaction
- ✓ Media to have science desk/ journalists with science background
- ✓ Scientific organizations to have press officers with science and media background
- ✓ Scientists to be aware of concerning rules; Right to Information can be useful
- ✓ Journalists associations, science academies



A Common Thread

- ✓ Method of Science : A Common Thread
- ✓ A scientist begins with a 'problem' or 'hypothesis', collects data, analyses the data, verifies it through experimentation, then reaches to conclusion.
- ✓ Similarly a journalist also begins with a 'problem' or 'news item', gathers information from different sources, analyses the information from different angles, verifies it through various channels, then files report/ story based on certain facts/ conclusions.
- ✓ Therefore, by and large the method, process, and way of working are similar; both are applying method of science.
- ✓ But probably time factor makes a big difference; scientific research as a slow and steady process, whereas journalism is comparatively a hurried and uneven process.



**Building Bridges
Scientist-Science Communicator-Journalist**



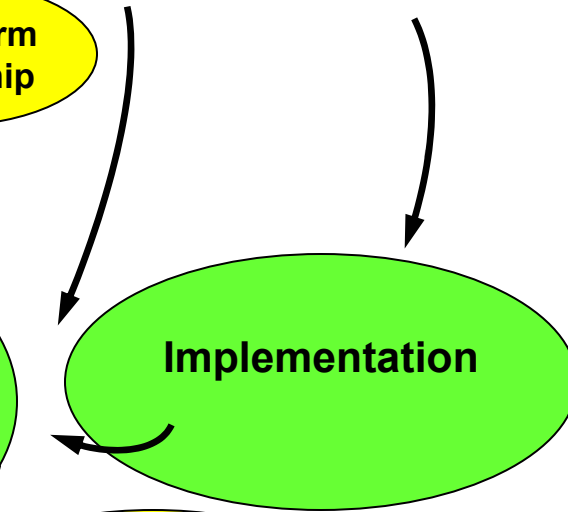
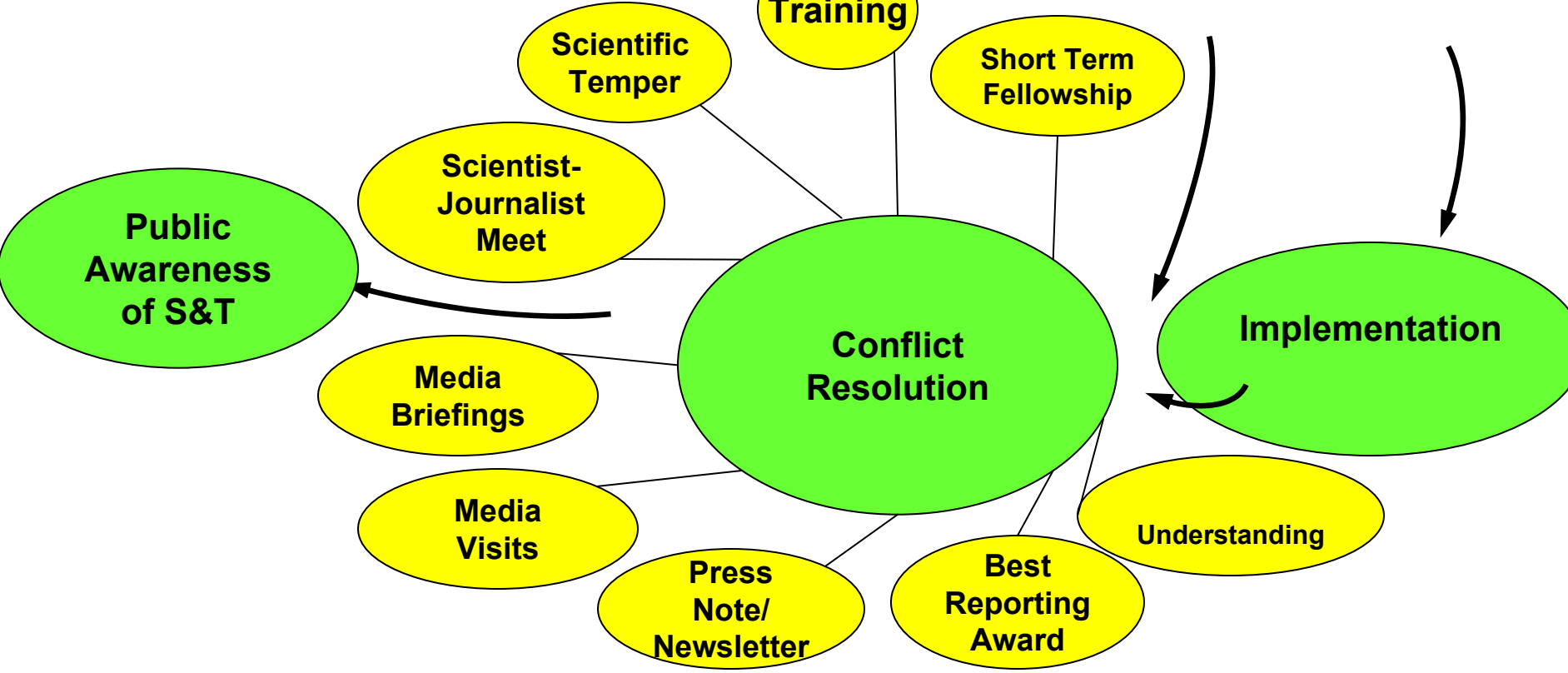
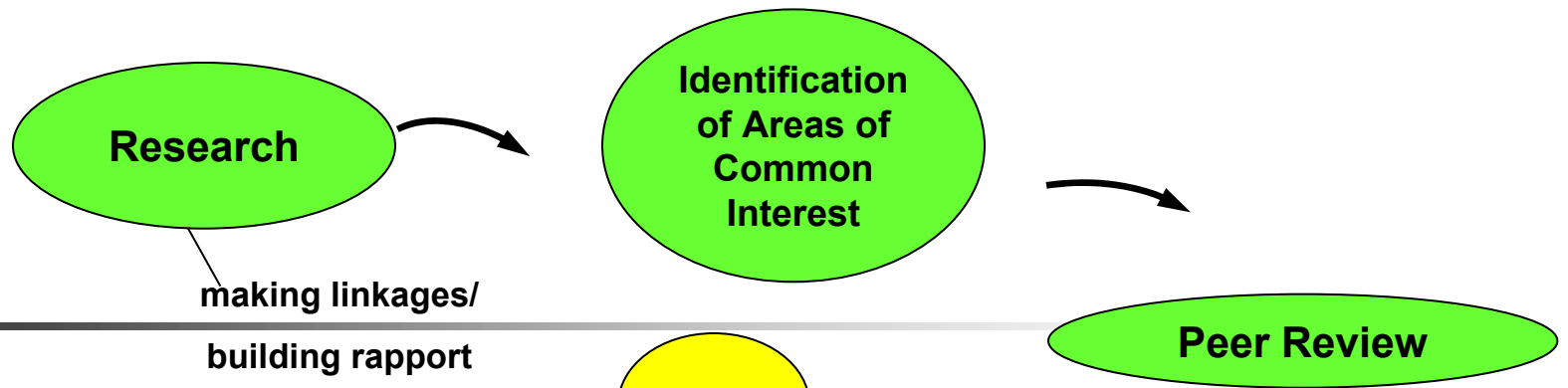
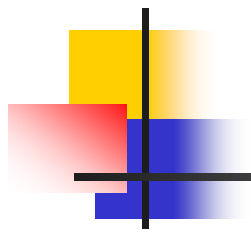
Key to Resolving Conflicts

- ✓ The best combination of scientific knowledge and scientific temper holds the key
- ✓ A variety of conflicts originate as a result of faulty, irrational, partial, illogical and less-informed, ill-informed or misinformed or even delayed decisions
- ✓ Scientific temper as a tool empowers us to take appropriate decisions & resolve conflict
- ✓ Scientific temper brings the excellence in the overall behavior and conduct, while technological temper brings excellence in the human outputs



Conclusions

- v In a scale of 1-10, the scientific contents at 2-3 are enough for common man
- v The ingredients for common public could be: scientific contents 20%, lucidity of language 20%, how and why 20%, analysis 20%, and humour 20%
- v With enhanced scientist-journalist interaction, the science coverage in media can be enhanced from present 3% to 10%
- v Emphasizing role of a science communicator
- v Inculcating scientific & technological temper



The Essence of Scientific Temper

“...Do not believe on whatever you are told or you yourself have imagined it, unless you testify it. Do not believe whatever your teacher says just because you respect him, but believe only after your own examination and analysis; it would be your guiding factor that will never let you down. Even do not believe on whatever I say, unless you have tested it with due experimentation as a goldsmith does for testing of gold by putting it in fire!...”

- Gautama Buddha





Thanks

Thank you very much
for your attention and patience

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