Radio Programming Roles

Chapter 2 - The Gray Matrix
by Frank Gray

Introduction

This booklet contains the second chapter of Radio Programming Roles (2nd edition). The other chapters of the book are also published as stand-alone chapters in their own right.

The other chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1 – Part 1: Roles Summarised
Chapter 1 – Part 2: Appealing to a Wide Audience
Chapter 1 – Part 3: Appealing to Middle Distance Listeners
Chapter 1 – Part 4: Other Useful Roles
Chapter 1 - All Fourteen Roles (Parts 2-4 above)
Chapter 3 – Dimensions of the Message
Chapter 4 – Incarnational Radio
Chapter 5 – Finding Answers
Chapter 6 – Using New Technology

The entire book is not yet available in printed form but the whole contents can be found on the Web at http://radioroles.com.

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2 The Gray Matrix

How do the various roles fit together? Are they to be seen as each comprising part of a whole? Let's use a familiar analogy to see how the various roles inter-relate in the context of the audiences we are trying to reach — the jigsaw puzzle.

How does it all fit? Are some roles more important than others? If so, which? The answer to these lies in our understanding of the audience. To be "close to the listener" implies that we know them quite well. We want to talk their language and make radio programs for them. We certainly don't want to be found saying the wrong things - or saying the right things in the wrong way. This could even cause them to tune away from our station and never come back. FEBC encourages program producers and presenters to produce programs for people of their own culture and context, people that they understand and can relate to.

The next few pages present a framework to help work through these issues, and identify how the various roles may be applied in various contexts. The framework has come to be known as The Gray Matrix[1]. First conceived in 1976 this tool has proved useful over many years to those who develop media (and other) strategies for evangelism and church-planting.

It is offered here as a tool to help our understanding and planning processes. The Matrix is about finding appropriate ways of communicating – appropriate language, appropriate context, appropriate interest level, appropriate medium. It is to do with building trust and relationships, dispelling suspicion or fear and removing unnecessary obstacles to understanding.

The reader should also note what the Matrix is not about. It is not about developing manipulative methods for bringing people into the Kingdom of God. Looking at our communication strategically does not deny the sovereign work of God in bringing people to faith through the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit. It solidly upholds the evangelical position that we come to faith as an act of God's grace – and not through any human efforts, manipulation or marketing techniques.

Nevertheless, as Christian communicators, we believe that Scripture firmly teaches that we need to adapt our methods and our language according to the audience. The apostle Paul eloquently discusses this when he tells of the need to be a Jew to the Jews, as under the Law to those who are under the Law, to the weak he became weak,

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[1] See http://thegraymatrix.info

etc. He summed it up in the familiar phrase "all things to all men"[2] so that he might be effective in bringing people to faith in Christ, no matter where they are…

The Matrix

The Matrix has its origins in Søgaard's Spiritual Segmentation linear model[3] which later was developed by Dr. James Engel and evolved into The Spiritual Decision Process[4] or the *Engel Scale* as it has become commonly known. This scale usefully identified stages of understanding and Gospel awareness that a person goes through in coming to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Those with minimal understanding would begin at the bottom of the scale and progress upwards as their knowledge and understanding increased. The linear scale and its various stages of understanding is outlined below, the person with minimal understanding starting at -8..

+5 Stewardship

+4 Communion with God

+3 Conceptual and behavioural growth

+2 Incorporation into Body

+1 Post-decision evaluation

New birth

-1 Repentance and faith in Christ

-2 Decision to act

-3 Personal problem recognition

-4 Positive attitude towards Gospel

-5 Grasp implications of Gospel

-6 Awareness of fundamentals of Gospel

-7 Initial awareness of Gospel

-8 Awareness of supreme being, no knowledge of Gospel

Figure 1

Exposure to Engel's Spiritual Decision Process (Engel Scale) made a great impact on this writer and his own understanding of the mission context in which he operated in Laos. Lights came on as he wrestled with the implications of communicating the Christian message to a largely Buddhist and animistic society. He began to see why so much Christian communication was missing the mark – because it was not

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[2] I Corinthians 9:22

[3] First published in *Everything You Need to Know for a Cassette Ministry*, Viggo Søgaard, 1975, Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, p.28

[4] *Contemporary Christian Communications,* James F. Engel 1979, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, p.83

communicating using words and images the listener could relate to or fully understand.

Meanwhile, his own experience was teaching him that the transmittal of knowledge alone was not sufficient. Effective communication does not only impart knowledge. It also communicates attitudes and contributes to the changing and reinforcing of attitudes among listeners while breaking down barriers towards the Gospel. As such attitude change operates independently of any knowledge that may be communicated. Because of this it is misleading to include attitude change (at -4) as a component of the vertical axis.
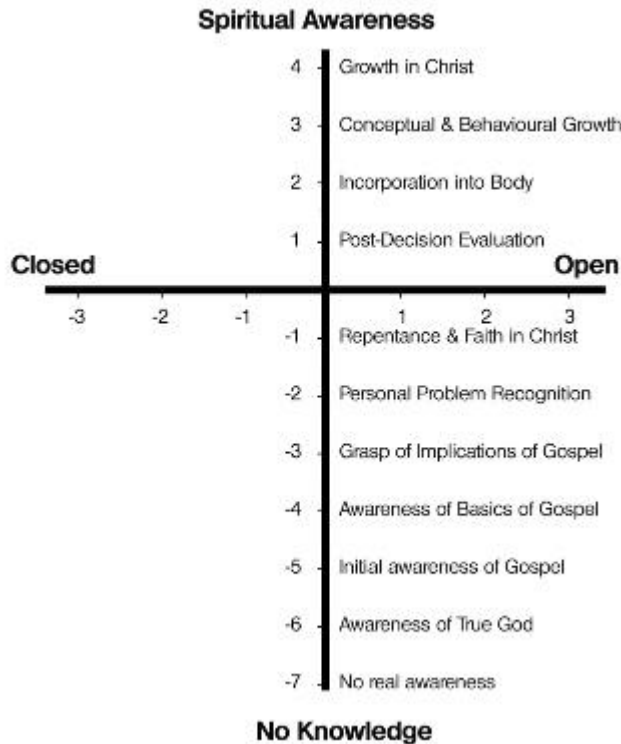
With this in mind he proposed the two-dimensional model. Its usefulness might be compared to the differences between and colour and a black-and-white photo.

The Matrix more completely expands our perception of the process through this full, two-dimensional model. It separates out the cognitive elements into the vertical y-axis (if we use mathematical terminology) while affective dimensions – attitudinal /volitional /relational - belong to the horizontal (x-axis).

As has been already noted spiritual conversion consists of more than simply acquiring knowledge (or developing a positive attitude towards Christian belief). The effective communication of persuasive information depends both on the impartation of knowledge and a favourable attitude toward that information and its sender. This is especially true in the context of the Christian message. Here the Holy Spirit, though unseen, is also actìvely engaged in the process of revealing truth. He facilitates both the understanding of the knowledge and the positive affirmation of its validity.

Sadly zealous Christians have sometimes turned people away from the Gospel by their insensitive approaches and disregard for them as individuals. Is it possible that the Holy Spirit might even have done better without our "help"?

The Matrix is offered as a useful tool to help us understand our role as communicators of this very precious Gospel which has been entrusted to us – in jars of clay! It addresses the crucial issue of finding the appropriate level of Gospel communication for our audience – wherever they may be. In reality it is no different from finding suitable things to talk about with our neighbours compared with what we might talk about with close family members.

Spiritual Awareness

4	Growth in Christ
3	Conceptual & Behavioural Growth
2	Incorporation into Body
1	Post-Decision Evaluation

Closed ... **Open**

-3 -2 -1 1 2 3

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-1	Repentance & Faith in Christ
-2	Personal Problem Recognition
-3	Grasp of Implications of Gospel
-4	Awareness of Basics of Gospel
-5	Initial awareness of Gospel
-6	Awareness of True God
-7	No real awareness

No Knowledge

Figure 2

The levels of -7 to +4 (vertically) and -3 to +3 (horizontally) merely illustrate possible stages or phases, and do not imply a strict representation of the process.

The vertical scale depicts a person's awareness and knowledge of the Gospel, from a minimal awareness level of -7 through to a nominal +4 where the centre-point of 0 might be considered the conversion zone. (Zone is a preferred term since it is not always clearly defined. It might also be noted that the point at which a person's attitude moves from negative to positive is also not clearly defined). The peak of +4 is purely arbitrary, not intended to convey the impression that a person has arrived once a certain level of knowledge has been attained. It is a continuing process. There is no upper limit.

The horizontal axis depicts a person's openness to the Gospel and Christian teaching. On the left we have those who are closed or who are rejecting it. To the right are those who are open and desire to know more. Expressed in another way we could say that those on the left are moving away from Christ, while those on the right are moving toward Him.
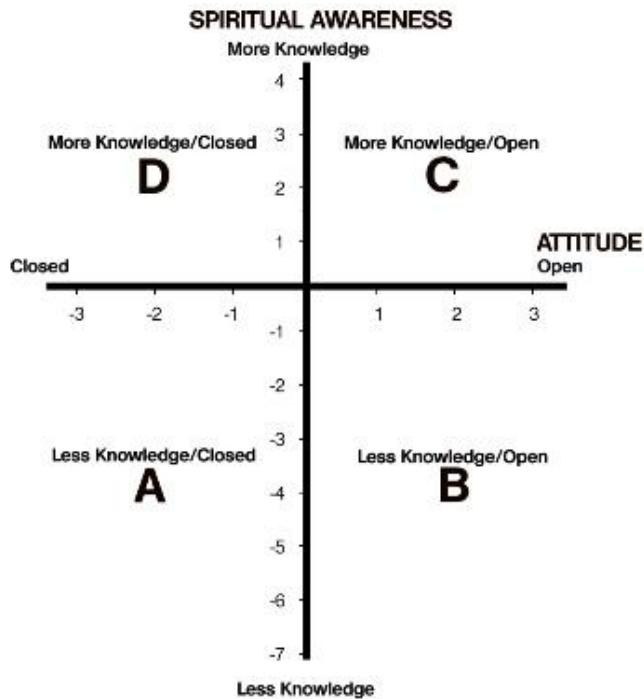
Figure 3

What does the Matrix demonstrate? There are four distinct quadrants which each display different sets of characteristics. The further from the centre point the more extreme are these characteristics while the closer to the centre the less pronounced they become. But in general terms people in the four quadrants display the following:

Quadrant (A) - Less Knowledge/Closed (bottom left)

- closed to the Gospel and ignorant of it
- rejecting the message (seemingly) and indifferent to it
- possibly resistant to Christian outreach and evangelism
- hostile or resistant to Christians, evangelism and church activity
- unlikely to ever attend church

Quadrant (B) - Less Knowledge/Open (bottom right)

- open toward Gospel and hungry to know more
- accepting the message
- welcoming toward Christian activity
- a ripe harvest field

Quadrant (C) - More Knowledge/Open (top right)

- "born again" Christians
- members of a fellowship of believers (if one exists, and they are free to attend)
- growing in Christ
- active in the Church
- bringing others to a knowledge of Christ

- whole-life followers of Jesus

Quadrant (D) - More Knowledge/Closed (top left)

- a difficult group who have experienced conversion but have back-slidden or dropped out of active fellowship
- generally negative toward Christians and the Church
- spiritually "cold"

How the Matrix Helps Us

The Matrix helps us in two very useful ways:

1. To determine what kinds of programs we need to make for our selected audiences -- and what we need to be saying in them
2. To assess the suitability of existing programs or activities for reaching our goals

So, how does the Matrix help us understand our "audience" and what they need to hear?

Our listener (or selected audience) can be located at some point on the Matrix. Figure 5 shows the likely location of three distinct groups:
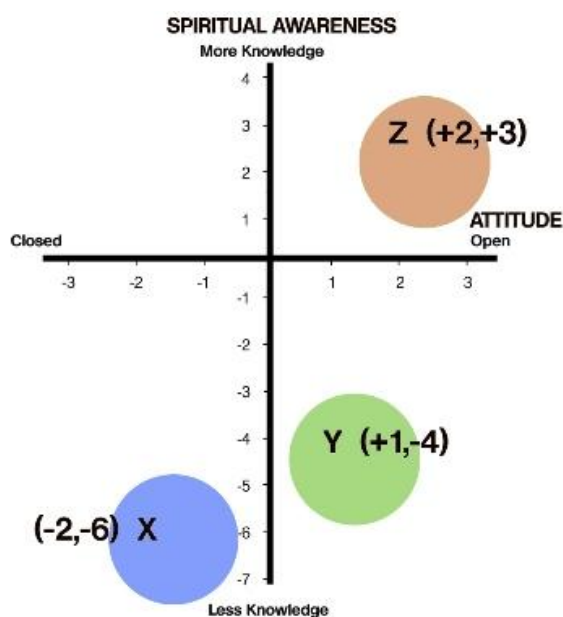
Figure 5

If we feel that we know our listener well we can possibly make a shrewd guess and say that he/she is at a point such as (-2,-6) in the Less Knowledge/Closed quadrant (A) for example. This would be interpreted as saying that the listener (at point X) is quite closed to the Gospel (-2), and is also very ignorant of what it is about (-6). This listener could be taken to be representative of a core group you are trying to reach.

Another listener (Y) (or group of listeners) might be at (+1,-4) which suggests that they are open to the Gospel and ready to know more. A third listener (Z), a believer, may be located at (+2,+3) indicating a positive attitude, eager to grow spiritually, and fully functional as a Christian.

We can find people like this in the Bible:

- In the Old Testament Jezebel and Ahab (I Kings 16-22) resolutely turned their backs on anything to do with God. On the Matrix they might be at (-3,-4) in the **Less Knowledge/Closed** quadrant (A).
- The Woman at the Well (John 4) would clearly be in **the Less Knowledge/Open** quadrant (B) -- though her spiritual understanding was far more than minimal. Her openness to receive Jesus' teaching demonstrated an appetite for spiritual truth that developed as their conversation progressed. Put her at (+2,-3).
- Who should we nominate for the **More Knowledge/Open** quadrant (C)? How about one of the disciples — John? Or we could choose the apostle Paul as he moved from (-2,-3) in the **Less Knowledge/Closed** quadrant (A), say, to (+3,+4) in the **More Knowledge/Open** quadrant (C) and beyond. In fact we could name a wide variety of individuals who were totally committed to serving Christ.
- Demas was described by Paul as one who had deserted him "having loved this present world." He had fallen away. The O.T. prophet, Balaam (Numbers 23-24), might serve as an example of some in the **More Knowledge/Closed** quadrant (D). Or perhaps even king Saul in his older days.

These are, of course, guesses to illustrate the point. In a real life situation today we need to be more careful in our assessment of where people are at. Guessing is not very objective and can easily reflect a poor understanding of the audience and where they are — both spiritually, and in their real openness to the Gospel. To conduct a research study would be much more enlightening. A good example of this is the *Bangkok All Media Penetration* study[5] conducted by Viggo Søgaard in Thailand. Using clustered samples it pinpointed attitudes and the levels of understanding held by different sectors of the Thai populace in Bangkok. (See chapter 5 for more insights into conducting research).

Our overall purpose in our communication is to help our listener to move toward the More Knowledge/ Open quadrant (C) so that he can grow in Christ as a member of a local fellowship of believers.

This involves two components:

- the vertical component (a person cannot come to faith without a basic understanding of the Gospel), and
- the horizontal (which indicates that for a person to come to faith they must have an open attitude to the Gospel and feel positively drawn toward God himself).

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[5] *Bangkok All Media Penetration Research*, Viggo Søgaard, 1979, Southern Baptist Mission, Bangkok

It also means that our communication should include both cognitive and affective elements – that is, knowledge and positive attitude. Knowledge alone will not convince a person. But our message, inspired and anointed by the Holy Spirit, must also convey elements of grace and sensitivity to the listener's situation. Sometimes we may need to focus on building the relationship first, ministering to the listener's real needs (or those of his community) before we can even consider imparting specific spiritual knowledge. If not, we may not be heard.
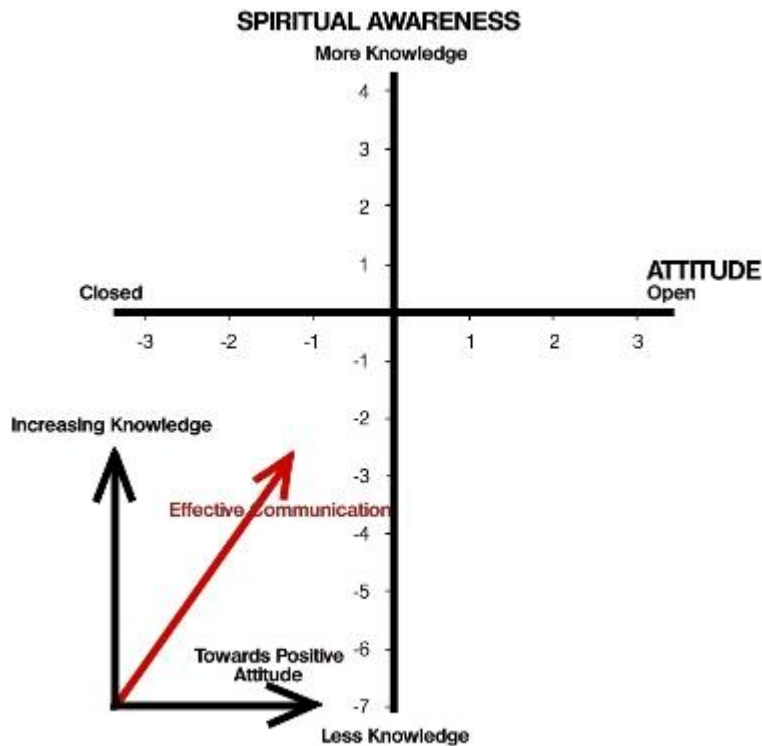
Figure 6

Once we can identify with a degree of certainty where our listener is located then we can begin to design our evangelistic strategy appropriate to his situation and level of understanding.

This may be by radio alone if we have no other options available. Or it may be some other more appropriate means.

Preferably it will include a variety of media or forms of outreach, each contributing its own relative strengths in the overall communication strategy.

But in this book we are looking at what can be done *by radio*. Many people involved in using radio for the Gospel have unrealistic expectations about what their broadcasts can accomplish. While radio has decided strengths (such as immediacy, going behind barriers, being non-confrontational, personal, etc.) it also has many drawbacks. It cannot provide face-to-face contact or dialogue, it cannot touch, it is transitory and cannot provide much detail without special types of educational techniques, etc.

Now let us consider again listener X at (-2,-6) in the **Less Knowledge/Closed** quadrant (A). How can we help him move toward Christ and into the Kingdom, in the **More Knowledge/Open** quadrant (C)?

We need to look at our overall communication strategy and identify goals that are consistent with the role of radio programming. We then need to provide a range of programs that meets the diverse audience needs at different stages represented in the quadrants.

For example, we might suggest a very valid but modest goal as being to help our listener move from (-2,-6) to (0,-6). This means the program would serve to break down the listener's prejudices toward the Gospel (and Christians?) and help him to become more open and receptive. This could be a valid goal in a long-term strategic plan -- and one which is very well suited to radio.

In one Asian country, a key objective for a radio program was to demonstrate that listeners were loyal citizens and had something intelligent and constructive to contribute to the nation. This was contrary to the dis-information given out by those antagonistic to Christians.

Another example comes from the United Kingdom where the respected BBC has a great influence on broadcast standards and practice. One of these is to restrict overt radio evangelism. Thus, one Christian radio program producer made it his goal to get people to go to church who were not in the habit of doing so. That was the simple goal of his program – and everything was focused toward that end. This approach was not well understood by many church people who felt that a golden opportunity was being wasted. They did not understand the nature of radio, nor the constraints under which this producer had to work. It also illustrates the need for Christian communicators to work within the constraints that surround them. Many opportunities exist, though these may mean that we have to lower our expectations – and perhaps be more creative in the process. It may even result in better programs…

As the Holy Spirit moves people toward Jesus, our radio programs can lay a pathway over which they can travel. The nature of the pathway changes during the process, and it may look something like this:
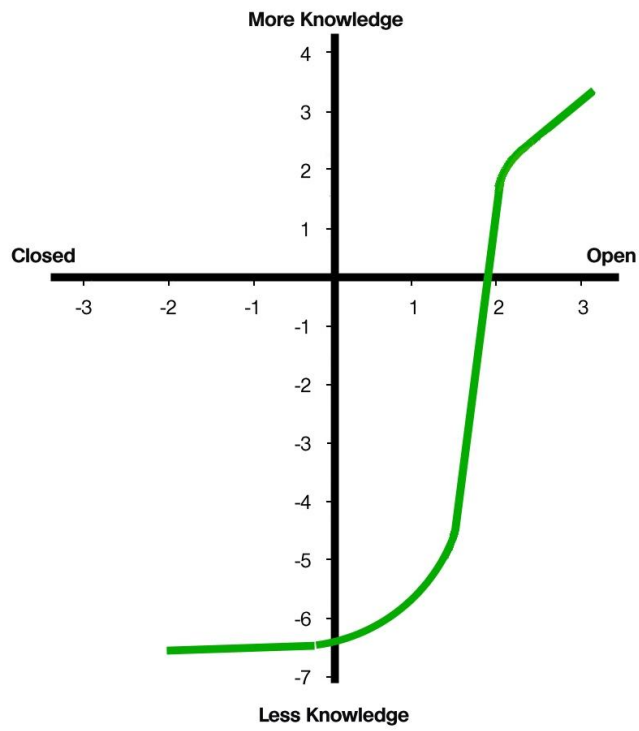
Figure 7

But what is that pathway made up of? If we look more closely we may find the following:
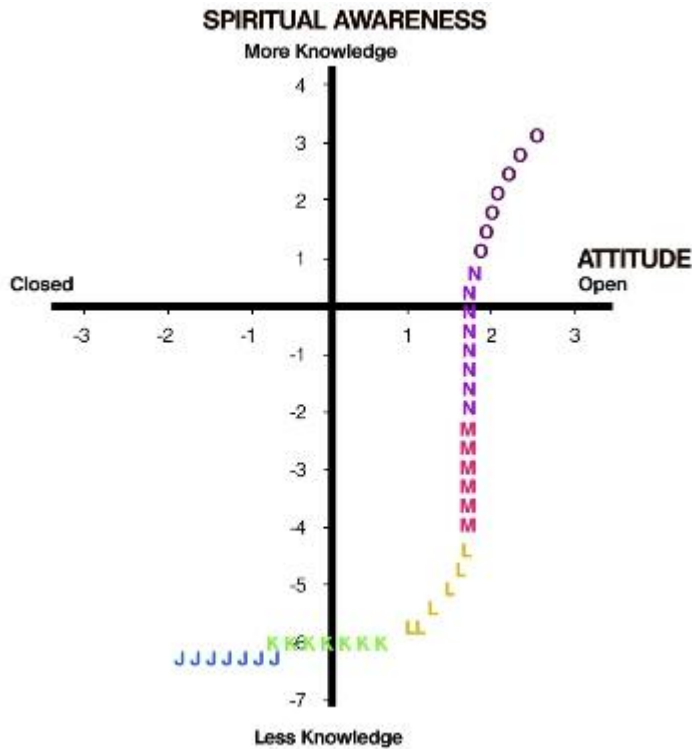
Figure 8

To use biblical terminology we might say that programs J-L constitute SOWING, WATERING is program M, while program N is REAPING. NURTURING is done by program O[6]. Each of Programs J to O has very specific goals, and fulfils a different role from the other. It caters to a different audience with a different set of needs (as well as being further along in the spiritual growth process).

Obviously this is an over-simplification, in order to make the point. Reality will inevitably be a lot more complex as various other factors come to bear in a person's life, bringing him to that point of commitment. The Holy Spirit determines the ultimate mix of ingredients needed for each individual.

How well does the jigsaw fit?

Each piece of the jigsaw puzzle has a unique place where it fits. Fitting together various kinds of programs allows for a lot more creativity as well as purposive, audience-centred programming. Program roles can overlap and be intermingled, with one program perhaps fulfilling more than one role at the same time.

On-air time limitations will impose constraints on how much can be done in each day's schedule and wisdom will be required to cater to different audiences. In one Asian language the shortwave service was limited to one hour daily. The program schedule was carefully designed to optimise the time by catering to different

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[6] For biblical background read John 4:35-38 for understanding process and I Cor.3:6-9 for sowing and watering

audiences sequentially within that hour. The one-hour block was basically broken down into four 15-minute sectors:

- The first sector started with a story of human interest with no specific Christian content. This is followed immediately by a low-key presentation of the Gospel.
- The second sector presented a rationale for the Gospel for those coming from a different world-view, challenging some of the underpinnings of their belief system.
- In the third fifteen minutes the emphasis moved toward specific teaching for Christians, while the fourth sector emphasised Bible-school type training for pastors and lay leaders.

In this manner program content becomes progressively more theological as the broadcast continues. As listeners understand more they are drawn into listening for longer periods and more regularly. Audiences will respond to programs — and move on. We need to move with them, but what do we do with those who move in behind to take their place?

In one country, a program designed to move people from the Less Knowledge/Closed quadrant (A) to being more open had very little specific Christian terminology. It looked instead at lifestyle and social issues from an implicit Christian world-view through drama, discussion, and other formats. After some time, listeners began asking specific questions about Christianity. A 15-minute program was then added to the schedule. It was aired immediately after the original core program on one night each week. This second program enabled the producers to raise more specific Christian issues and topics. Because the listeners were now asking the questions, the producers now had permission to talk about these things. The listeners were ready. They had been prepared. The original program remained untouched, however, to keep on preparing others still in process on the pathway, but not yet ready for more direct Christian programs.

It is also possible to weave various elements together in a single program as part of an integrated whole. Hmong language Bible teaching, for example, may be interlaced with health tips as appropriate – like how to wash your dishes to reduce the spread of disease - rather than making clear distinctions between one program type and another. It all gets mixed together in the framework of a conversational holistic approach which the listeners love.

The Matrix and Roles

This leads us back to the theme of chapter 1: *roles*. It is not hard to see that certain roles will be more appropriate than others for listeners moving through the quadrants, at various points along the pathway. Let us look at them briefly once more:

1. INFORMATION - News and Current Affairs

This kind of program – though Christian in orientation – will approximate very closely to what the listener expects to find on other stations. As such it is non-

threatening and speaks to the listener in terms that are familiar. It would be applicable to listeners in any of the four quadrants.

2. ENTERTAINMENT - Enjoyment and Relaxation

A non-threatening, easy-listening style of programming to establish a relationship and trust. It is also suitable to a wide spectrum of the listening audience and should be an ingredient of every program to some degree.

3. INSTRUCTION - Functioning as Teachers

This is where we find ourselves getting more specific because instruction should be levelled at listeners according to their level of understanding. Just as we do not feed advanced mathematics to beginners, neither do we feed the Gospel to those who would find biblical concepts and terminology foreign and off-putting.

4. ADVOCACY - Being Agents of Change in a Broken World

This could be pitched at a variety of levels, but will be used to emphasise the active, practical dimensions of the Gospel that have an outworking in society through raising the quality of life.

5. POSITIONING - Promoting Awareness of Christian Social Concern and Action

This has a two-pronged approach – primarily in raising the awareness of what Christians are doing in society. It is an indirect form of promoting the Gospel and its relevance to today's society with its situations and problems. The second prong helps inform Christians and inspire them to get involved too.

6. INSPIRATION – Providing Friendship and Hope

Such programs could be used to come alongside listeners in a wide variety of situations based on their needs. If a low level of understanding of the Gospel is assumed such programs could help a wide spectrum of people, otherwise they could be tailored to specific needs and situations.

7. WITNESS - Pointing to God's Presence and Activities

This places the reality of God into contemporary life. There will be spin-offs for Christian listeners, too, in the form of encouragement and affirmation, but its greatest effectiveness must be seen as an evangelistic tool.

8. APOLOGETIC - Comparing Christian Belief with Others

Such programs specifically challenge the fundamental inadequacies of a world-view that does not make provision for a loving God who cares for the individual and has made provision for him. They unashamedly present the validity of the Gospel for people today.

9. PROCLAMATION - Declaring the Whole Gospel

Without compromise these programs are designed for those who are open to learn more and are moving closer to belief, presenting the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ.

10. COUNSELLING - Being Close to Our Listener

These kinds of programs would be for anyone who has questions of a social, personal or spiritual nature. The kinds of issues covered will largely determine what audience the program is pitched at. Conversely, the issues raised will largely determine the kind of audience attracted to the program.

11. SUPPLEMENTARY - Providing Helpful Resources

Meeting practical needs in ways appropriate to radio programming.

12. CELEBRATION - Celebrating the Good News with Joy

Clearly, this is primarily intended for the Christian audience. The program creates a celebration experience for them.

13. MODELLING - Demonstrating Christian Community

Believers will feel the universality of the Christian community, regardless of denomination, label or nationality.

14. INTERACTIVE - Encouraging Listener Participation

Providing interactive options for all who listen. A very important dimension that transcends the one-directional limitations of radio.

The Matrix in Analysis

The Matrix serves us in two very useful ways – for planning and for analysing existing programming output. If you are already involved in planning program schedules, applying the Matrix to each of these programs in turn can prove to be a very enlightening exercise. But we see more clearly where we are now in terms of the suitability and balance of existing programs.

It should be noted that the usefulness of the Matrix here is not confined to an evaluation of radio programming alone. It can be extended to other areas of Christian witness.

But since this book is primarily about radio we focus our attention now on how the process of analysis works in this specific context. You can make your adaptation to other forms of Christian ministry as appropriate. Use the following process:
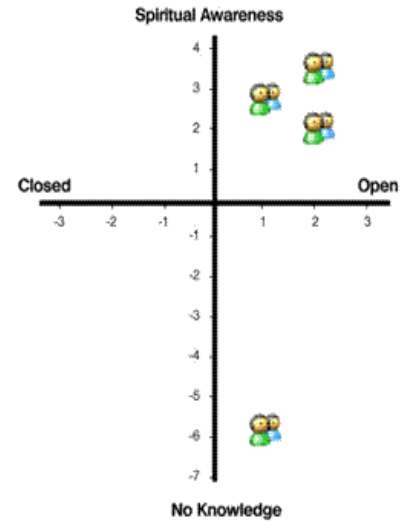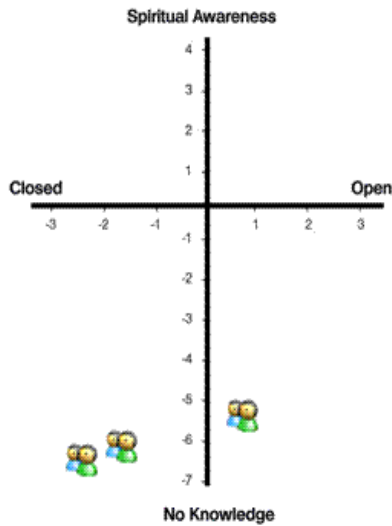
1. Take a look at the above diagrams as an example. The left-hand one depicts the audiences you are trying to reach. The right-hand one shows where, in reality, your programs might be heard and understood. The two are not the same!
2. Now decide in as much detail as possible the specific groups of people you are trying to reach, help or have a ministry to. Plot each of these groups on a blank Matrix (see Appendix C)
3. Now look at each of your existing programs in turn and plot them on the same Matrix, using your best judgment to determine where they would be both understood and appreciated. This needs to be in terms (primarily) of (a) the audience's understanding/knowledge of Christian belief (and your terminology and delivery style) and (b) their openness/closedness to the Gospel.
4. When you have done this you should be able to see where the gaps are. If your programs are on target then you will find your programs will match the audiences.

It is more likely that there will be some differences between those listeners you think you are talking to or reaching - and those whom you really want to reach.

The big question is whether your intended audience will understand and be interested in what you are trying to talk to them about. Be honest!

Postscript

If you want to engage in further discussion on this topic kindly visit the Radio Roles web-site using either the Contact Us tab or the blog.

You can also read up more about The Gray Matrix at the dedicated web-site: http://thegraymatrix.info

Further Information

You can download further copies of this document by visiting the Radio Roles web-site at http://radioroles.com/downloads/rpr_ch2.pdf