

Effective Communication: The Key to Project Success

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- Why does Communication matter?
- Considering Methods
- Managing Meaning
- Communicating for closure

- Theme of the last three years has been Information
 - Evaluated the need for better information
 - Considered the value of information
 - Thought about information for change
- Today
 - How we can ENSURE that Information is Communicated
 - How we can KNOW that communication has taken place

- Why does communication matter?

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- Assertion:
 - Projects fail more often through inadequate communication (of all types) than for any other reason
 - We meet, write plans, memos, emails, texts and reports – but how much do we really communicate?

- Why does communication matter?
- Assertion:
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- Question:
 - How well do you REALLY communicate with the person you know best?

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- Rationale:
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 - If we don't have control we WILL fail

Considering Methods: Strengths & Weaknesses

- Business Cases & Business Plans
- Project Plans
- Emails, Memos, Notes
- RAG Reports
- Meeting Minutes
- Phone
- Face to Face

Considering Methods: Strengths & Weaknesses

- A man is sitting on his roof while flood waters rise around him
- Being religious, he asks God to rescue him
- After an hour a lifeboat appears
- ‘Need any help?’
- ‘No thanks, God will provide’
- Another hour, another lifeboat – same conversation
- Another hour, a helicopter – same conversation
- Another hour: ‘Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?’
- Voice from on high: ‘Forsaken you? I sent you two lifeboats and a helicopter – what more do you want?’

Considering Methods: Strengths & Weaknesses

- We don't always communicate in the way that OTHERS expect
- Others don't always communicate in the way WE expect

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- Business Cases & Business Plans
 - Sales documents written by people who don't understand the solution
 - For Decision Makers who don't understand the question
 - According to rules written by people who don't understand the business
- What is the PURPOSE of the document?
- What CONSTRAINS its content?

Considering Methods: Strengths & Weaknesses

- Example:
 - Definition of a camel?

- Example:
 - Definition of a camel?
 - A horse designed by a committee!

- Project Plans
 - Proposals for delivering the solution to the question that wasn't understood within the rules that reduce its likelihood of success
 - Written by people who weren't party to the original idea
 - Constrained by the organisational 'realities'
 - Budgets, resources, competences of 'real' people

- Project Plans
 - ‘Write something that will get us the Budget, we’ll decide how to spend it later’

- Emails, Memos, Notes
 - Questions, thoughts, side issues, post-hoc objections
 - Modifying the plan (informally)
 - But not part OF the plan (not fully reflected)
 - Potential to be forgotten, missed, ignored
 - Available for the ‘lessons learned’ inquiry!

- RAG Reports
 - Formal statements of progress against (unmodified) plan
 - Reflecting a ‘point’ of achievement
 - Saying little of the substance of the situation
 - Unlikely to be used for revising the plan
 - The basis for the (filtered) ‘Board Report’

- Meeting Minutes
 - An incomplete record of a partly heard conversation between several people
 - Each of whom was trying to make a point
 - Most of whom were talking
 - Few of whom were listening
 - Even fewer of whom were understanding
- How much ‘communication’ happened?

- Phone
 - The ultimate in ‘weasel’ communication
 - Quick, easy, cheap – and there’s no record!
 - No time for ‘reflection’
 - Look out for:
 - ‘I spoke to...’
 - ‘I discussed with...’
 - ‘I left a message about...’
 - Prove it!

Considering Methods: Strengths & Weaknesses

- Face to Face
 - The best form of communication
 - The hardest to understand!
 - Complex, rapid, nuanced, subtle
 - What was said?
 - What was heard?
 - What was understood?
 - By the transmitter? By the receiver?

- Do you and I 'experience' the same conversation?
- Do I hear (understand) what you say?
- Do You hear (understand) my response?
- Do we 'share' meaning?
- How much meaning CAN be shared?

- Think of the complexity:
 - Words
 - Interpretation(s) of words
 - Tone
 - Manner
 - Body language
 - Mood
 - Our ‘interest’ in the outcome

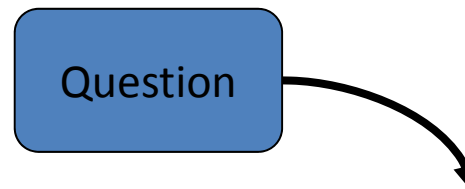
- Example:
 - Transmitter:

“This project plan is a pile of s**t!”
 - Receiver 1:

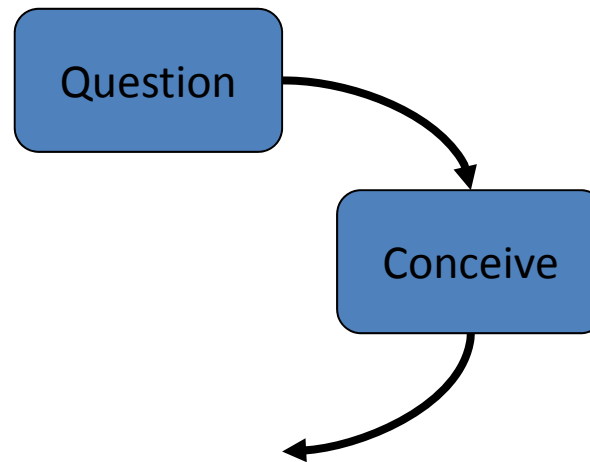
“This project plan is a rich source of nutrients!”
 - Receiver 2:

“This project plan contains the essential ingredients for an exponential growth trajectory”

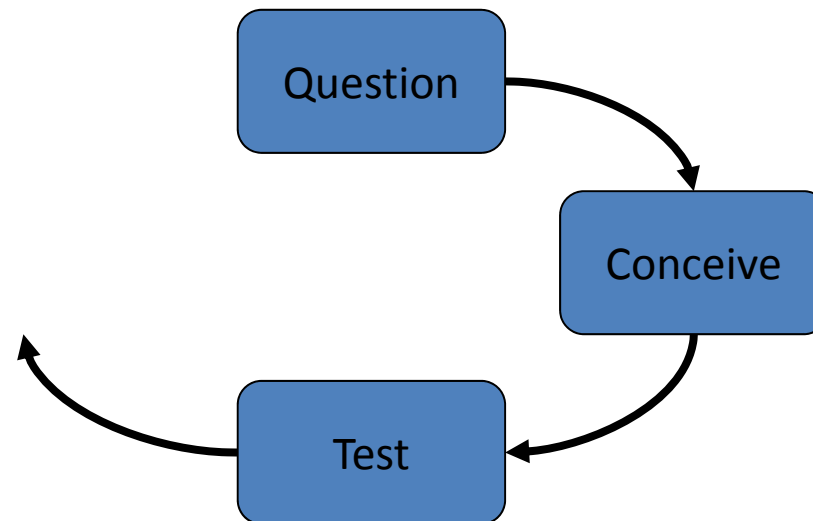
- A Reflective Cycle:



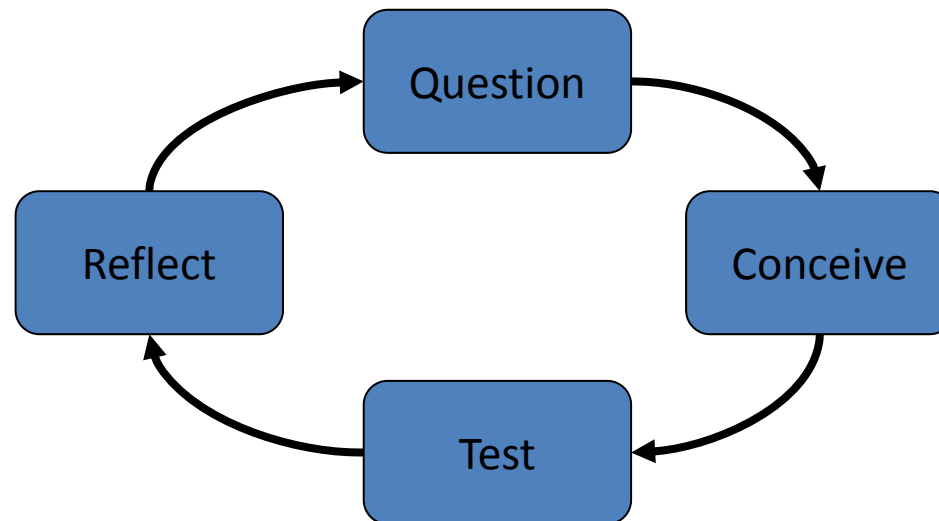
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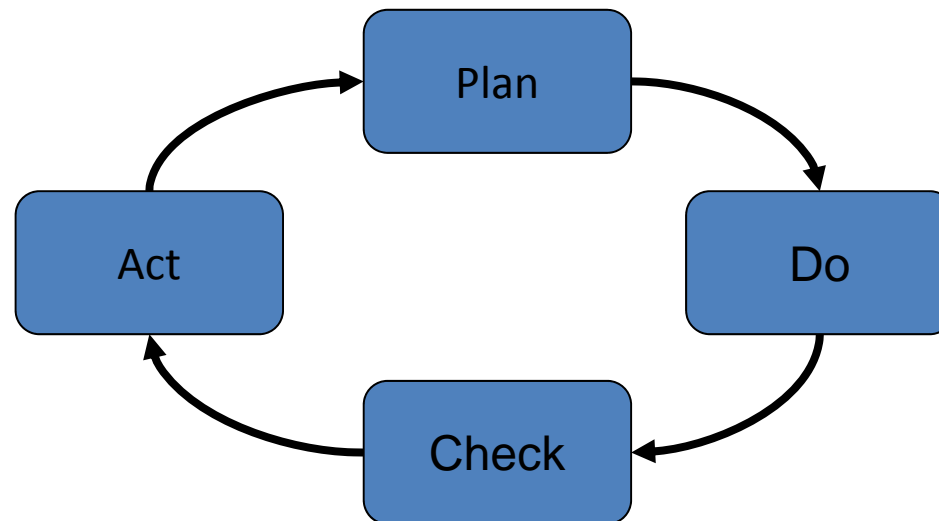
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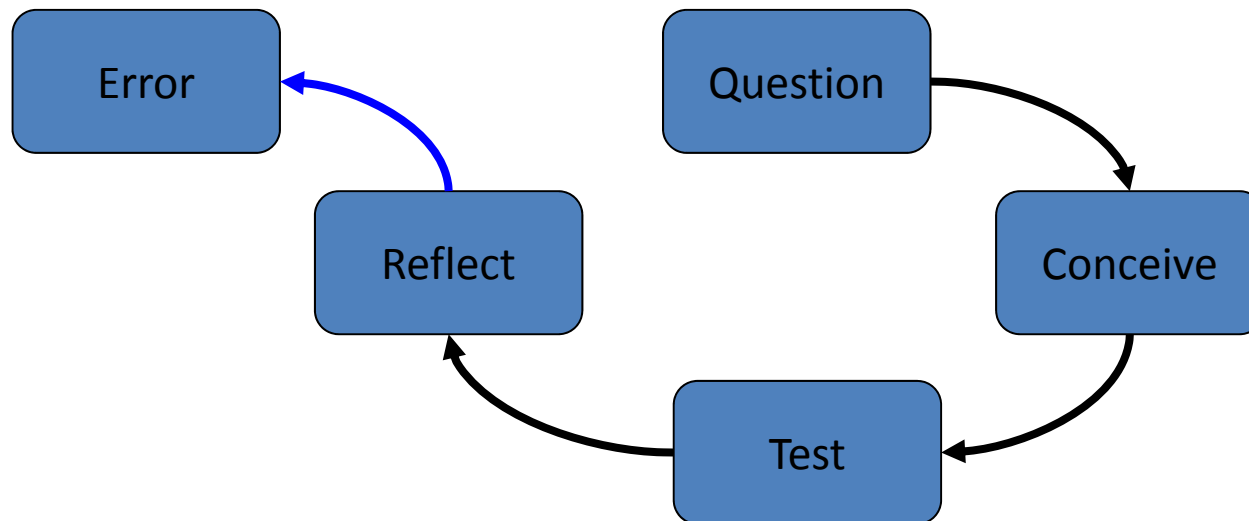


- A Reflective Cycle:



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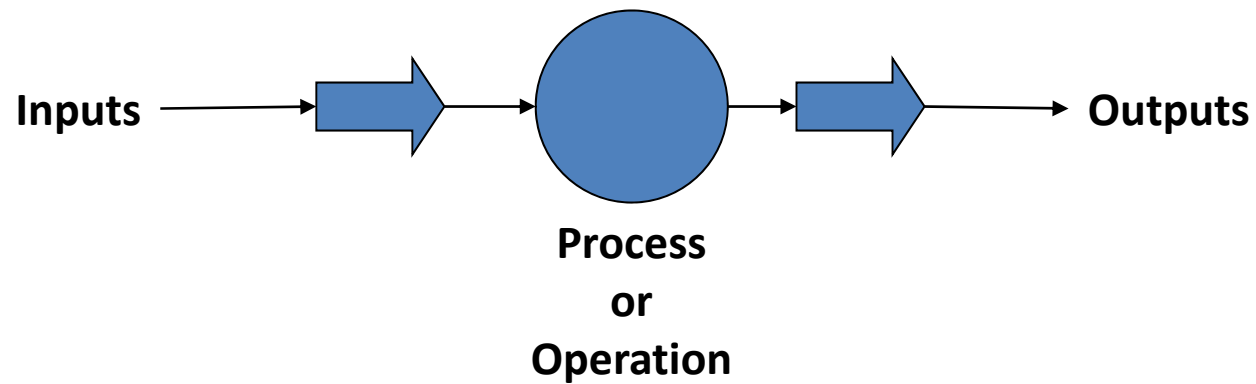
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 - Transmitter:
“Send reinforcements we are going to advance”

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 - Transmitter:
“Send reinforcements we are going to advance”
 - Receiver:
“Send three and fourpence, we are going to a dance”

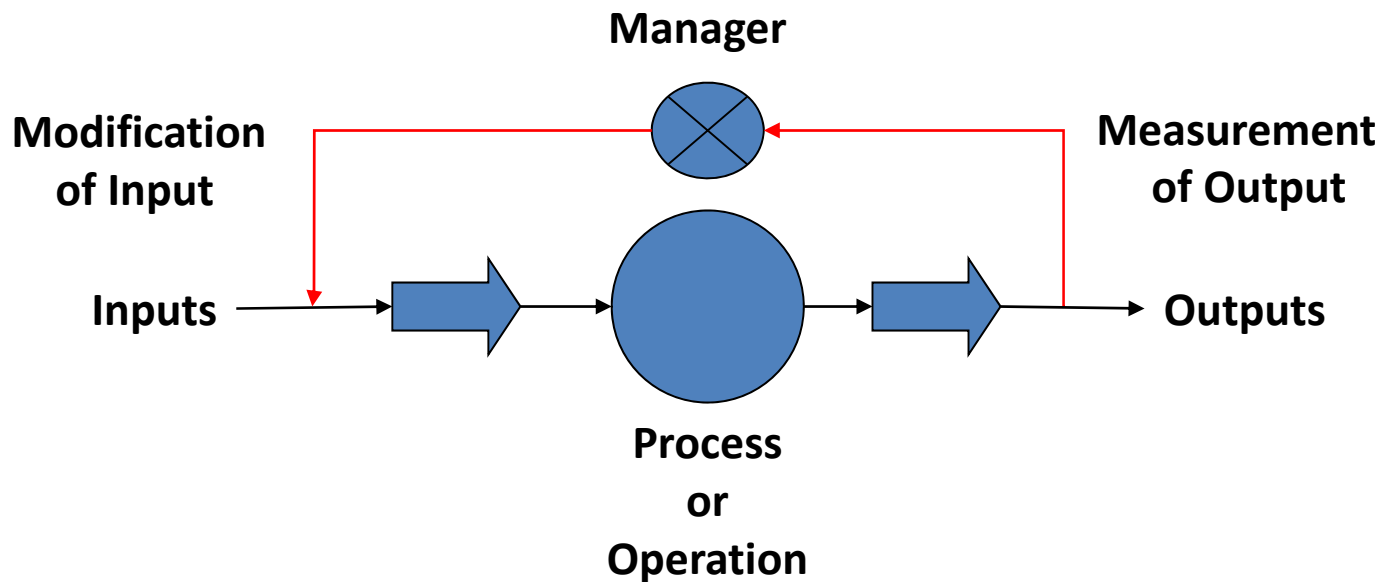
- Projects fail when communication fails
- Designing, building and controlling the communications is **AT LEAST** as important as building the Task, Resource and Timing Plan
- And, possibly, **MORE IMPORTANT**
 - Effective communication can compensate for poor planning

- The essence of a closed loop communication system is the ‘homeostat’
- A ‘device’ used in nature (and in servo-mechanical systems) to maintain the status quo
- In the case of projects the ‘status quo’ is the achievement of the expected outcome NOT the designed plan

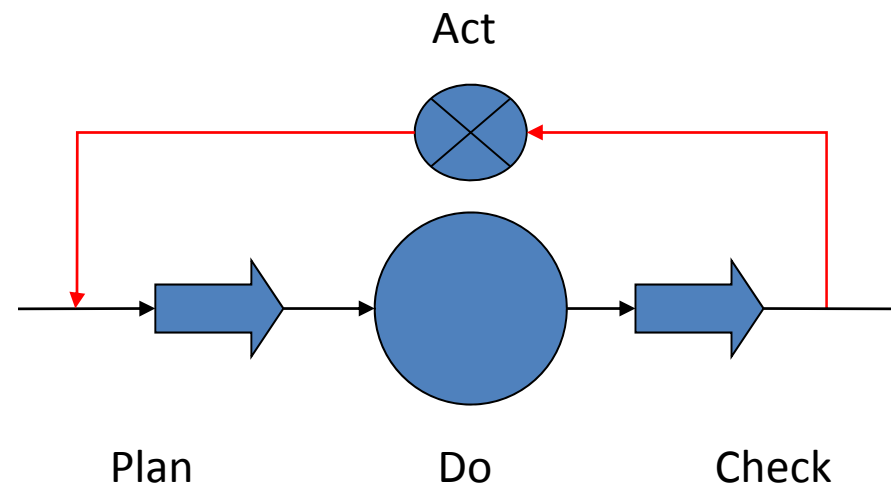
- A homeostat



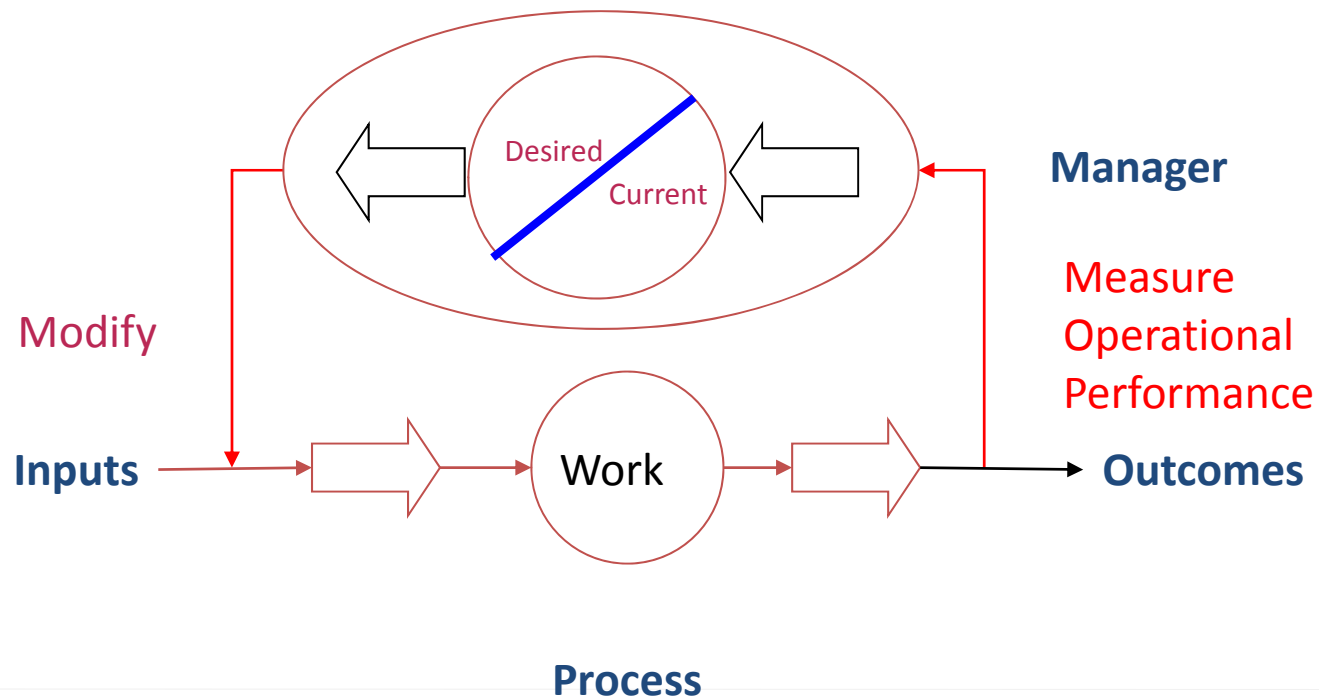
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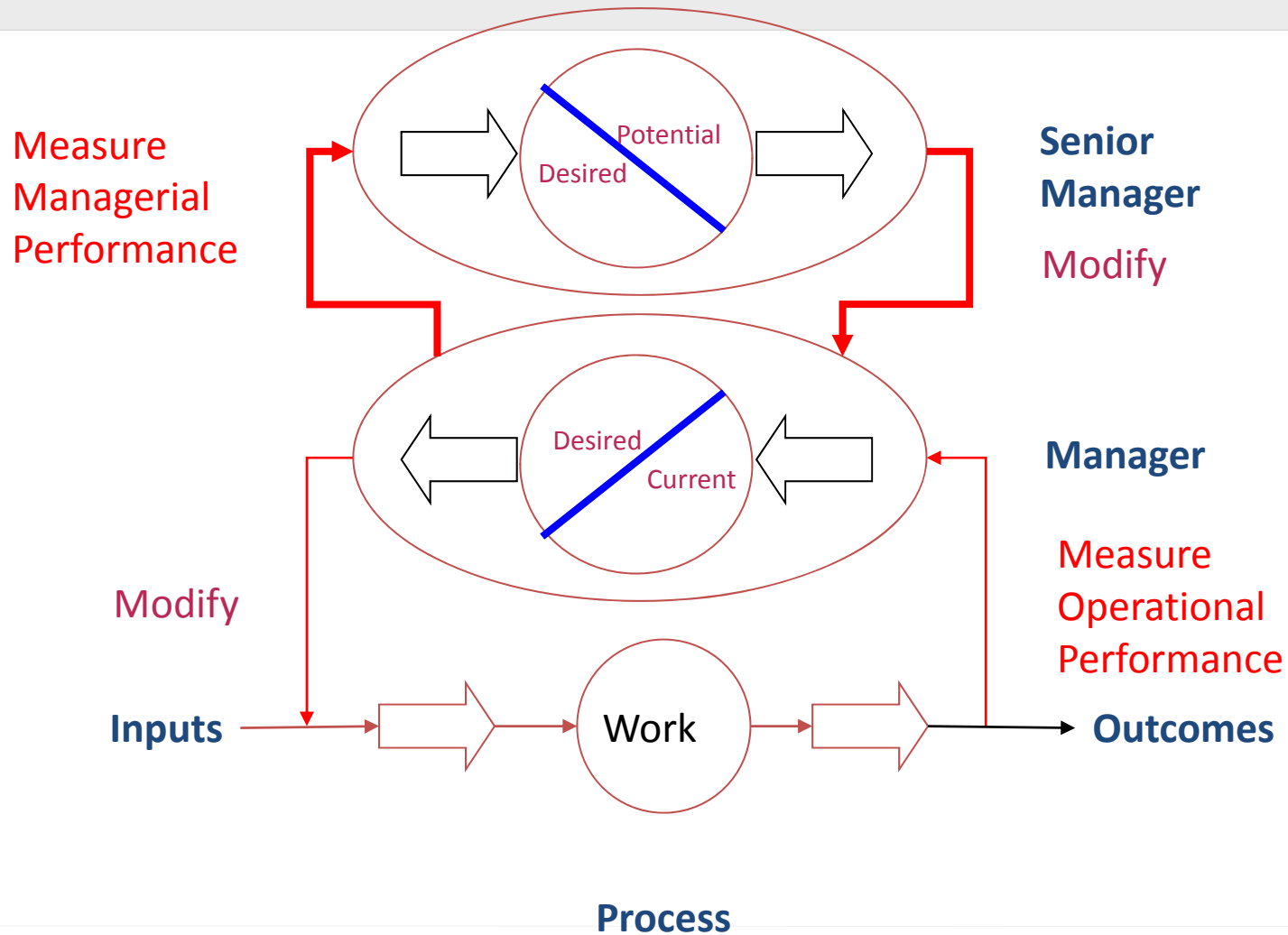
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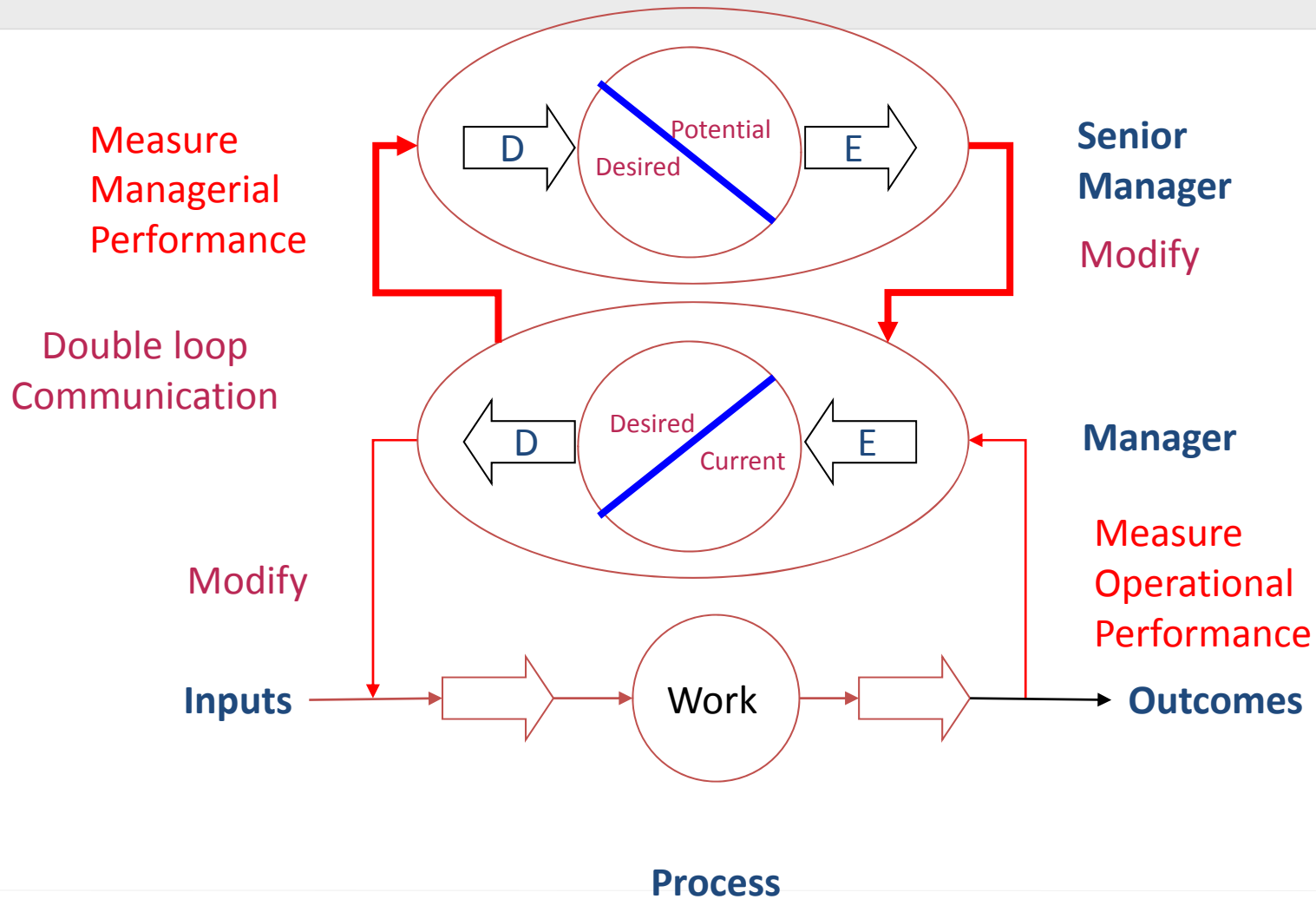


Communicating for Closure



Communicating for Closure





- Why does Communication matter
- Considered Methods
- Managing Meaning
- Communication for Closure