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Foresight, hindsight, IODP and science communication

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There aren't many circumstances that require looking into the future to decide what people will be interested in about the past, while writing in the present. Dr. Roz Coggan wasn't kidding when she drew a picture of a scientific ocean drilling vessel and labelled it as a Time Machine! So how do we go about communicating the science in the sediments, the cliff-hangers in the cores?

Since 1966, the scientific community has looked to the oceans, and the natural laboratories hidden beneath them, to answer fundamental questions concerning the composition, structure, and key processes of the Earth, unravelling geochemical, biological, physical, structural, climatic and geohazard-related complexities along the way. As the current phase of scientific ocean drilling (IODP) is drawing to an end, an international team has drafted a new vision for the future of this inspiring and unique program, released officially in Fall 2020.

The 2050 Science Framework for Scientific Ocean Drilling consists of seven Strategic Objectives and five Flagship Initiatives. Spanning all of these are four Enabling Elements - key facets that facilitate research activities, enhance outputs, and maximise their impact. Enabling Element 1 covers the broader impacts and outreach associated with scientific ocean drilling, including highlighting the societal relevance of its research topics, inspiring and training the next generation of ocean scientists, addressing knowledge sharing and collaborations, and working towards greater diversity and inclusion in geoscience. These are not small issues to address, and overall Enabling Element 1 sets an aspirational target for science communication going forward:

"Using a variety of social media and web-based platforms, data and results will be broadly disseminated to educators, policymakers, and the public, securing scientific ocean drilling's position as the authoritative source of information about the Earth system." (Koppers and Coggan, 2020)

We believe that with such broad aims, now is the time to formulate large-scale strategies for science communication. By bringing in aspects of strategy and branding, stirred together with a good dose of umbrella narratives, we aim to develop a transmedia approach to science communication, taking different present audiences on unique journeys into the past with an eye on the future. We will need to assess framing and relevance, the power of storytelling to communicate facts, and how best to ensure that our activities contribute to excitement about learning the unfolding stories of the Earth. Now is the perfect time to initiate this effort, and it is

hoped that this review of multiple aspects of Science Communication, Public Engagement and branding can help begin these discussions.

“What is it that we human beings ultimately depend on? We depend on our words. We are suspended in language. Our task is to communicate experience and ideas to others”. Niels Bohr



Original illustration by GeoProse from the 2050 From Koppers, A.A.P., and R. Coggon, eds. 2020. Exploring Earth by Scientific Ocean Drilling: 2050 Framework.