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Fresh Look At Communication Patterns And Process

By

Augustine Loorthusamy
FRESH LOOK AT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND PROCESS

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The need for communication and the basic pattern of communication are as old as man himself. Yet the increase in technical means of communication is producing a change "in kind" in human communication, affecting basically the human spirit. This is something that cannot be ignored.

The radical importance of communication to man as a social being is perhaps being fully realised only in our time. For it goes beyond the self, the family, the community and the country itself.

If it is true that yesterday's rational man has become today's rationalising one then blame it on the electronic environment of instantaneous communication. In the words of Alfred-North Whitehead:

"The major advances in civilisation are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur."

Today, electronic circuitry, an extension of the central nervous system affects man in a totally different way, altering man's environment and sense perception. Radio, TV and movies
more than anything else play a paramount role in altering and shaping man's social and moral behaviour. In Asia as in other developing countries, advertisements are a means of brain washing people of needs which may not objectively be real needs but artificial ones. To a great extent, these affect people's social life, family life, even education, and unwittingly even religion.

The social stratification in the developing world is generally imbalanced. The great majority of people are poor particularly in the rural areas.

Analogous to poverty in the rural areas are the great masses of urban poor. The marginalised, those needing social pastoral care most, are the peasants, the workers who live in slums, the minorities and the tribal communities.

In a situation where the great majority are poor, religion becomes a source of psychological and emotional security. How to transform religious attitudes and psychological dependence into one of FAITH where God is indeed a Personal God calling men to be partners with Him in creation and redemption, in which real development of people and community can take place, becomes an urgent necessity.
In the same way a controlled mass media prevents people from looking at their situation in a more critical and objective manner. Crass commercialism, government propaganda, promotion of consumeristic tendencies have become the primary aim of mass media, resulting in a passive apathetic population. Concomittant to that, our homes have become junkyards, our food processed, out behaviour plastic.

Today's "Age of Anxiety" is to a large extent brought about by trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's rules - yesterday's concepts.

Profound changes in the "medium" are desperately needed in our society. The medium is no longer the message but the MASSAGE. If fundamental changes do not take place in our basic values and attitudes real development cannot take place.

My Bias:
No thought is that original not to have been triggered off by someone's personal or some other experience. Some of the things I will share here may have already been known and experienced by others. There will also be some material here with which you may totally disagree. Disagree you may but one thing is certain they are "truth" to me. But I will also hasten to say that my experience in this is confined to the Philippines and Malaysia basically. I have also been
profoundly influenced by two giants in the field of Audio-Visual Communications. They are Pierre Babin of Crec in France and Marshall McLuhan of Canada. As such I have drawn heavily from them.

**McLuhan's Fundamental Theory**

The most determinent factors in the history of civilisation are not so much the ideologies nor the wars but the ideas that were brought about by technological invention. The great technological discoveries that had to do with communication were most determinant: the wheel, the alphabet, the printing press, the steam engine. All these have radically changed the system of communication.

McLuhan studies in particular the effects of the invention of the printing press. All civilisation since the 16th century have been influenced by the printing press.

We have two types of people today - those who are of the alphabet and those who are not. That is how the printing press has affected lives. If one wished to make history, one has to enter the world of letters. To become a Christian, one had to know the catechism. The Daughters of St. Paul was founded for this - it was a congregation of the printing press. McLuhan says inventions make the man; the medium is the
message. Owning a TV set changes one, more than the TV programmes themselves, according to McLuhan's thought.

We have entered into the electronic civilisation - the ear is more important than the eye. Audio-visual is sound, words and pictures closely unified, mixed and amplified by electronics.

Audio-Visual Man is Modified or Qualified Man.

Modern man is not the same as he was before. When we speak of audio-visual, we think for example of how the microphone amplifies the voice. Actually, the microphone does more than that. Not only does it amplify my voice, it changes its quality. Today's singers have a lot of success because the microphone does wonders for their voice. Consequently, they hypnotise crowds. With a good mike, you can hear my slightest breath. I can communicate to you my emotions, my fears. I can transmit to you my soul, my personality, not simply my voice.

Imagine a man on a water buffalo in the farm and another one in a powerful automobile... These two men would have two different personalities. The man on the buffalo is more passive; he is slow, patient. He accepts life as it comes. He is easy going.
The man in the powerful car slowly becomes violent, impatient, irritable and aggressive. He knows that pressing on the accelerator will put him ahead of everybody else. To slow him down is to irritate him - more so if you are in a traffic jam in downtown Manila.

The use of audio-visual is bound to modify your personality. You have in your hands a machine that transforms you and gives you new ways of expressions.

The good or the harm lies not only in the TV programmes but on the fact there is a TV set in the house. In a short while we shall be feeling the effects of radio and TV in our society - AND HOW.

The Modern Man is also a Radar Man.
The radar is the symbol of our modern era.

In the olden days, people went up the mountains to adore the gods and the sacred trees. The vertical trees were the link between God and man. Then came Christianity. The sacred tree symbol of union between God and man was changed into the cross. Aside from being upright, it had also a horizontal portion as if it were reaching out on all sides, universality. In the Philippines one sees crosses on tops of mountains, some sort of a continuation of this cult of the sacred tree.
The cross has become the symbol not only of Christianity but of all religions uniting man to God. It seems that today the cross on the mountain top is replaced by the radar towers. It seems that the radar is the new symbol of this age.

Electronic instruments are not conceived as something exterior to man but as a continuation of our person. The car is an extension of my body as I drive it.

Today, the radar is the prolongation of my own body, my nervous system, my emotions. This has introduced deep changes in man's attitudes.

Man is passing from explosion to implosion... McLuhan coined words to show how electronics has transformed man and education.

It used to be that if I wanted to explore the world, I had to get out and go beyond myself. That was explosion, a going outside.

But today, if I wish to know the world, I merely have to turn on the TV and information starts pouring in. The radar picks up the waves from all over the world and communicates it to me on the sofa of my living room. In turn, I am like a radar receiving all these impressions from without. It is
a veritable invasion. There is no more privacy. Some people have T.V. in the bathroom.

The whole world has turned into a village. It was like that in the villages of long ago. Everyone was on the village gossip - even to the sickness of the cow. The village women peeping through their windows saw to the spreading of the news. Well, today, the whole world has become a village. And international gossip is the order of the day.

Participation is one of the meaningful words of our times. When an event takes place elsewhere, the whole world gets to know about it. When Elvis Presley died in America, people cried in Kuala Lumpur.

The '68 demonstrations in France repeated in Montreal, Bogota, Latin America. Everywhere, the same slogans, labels, heroes & villains' names, Mao, Che Guevara, Ali Bhutto, Idi Amin.

That is what is meant by participation.

Mao’s influence on youth today can be traced back to media, not to mention John Travolta.

Wars in the olden days were localised; today, wars take place in our very living rooms. Vietnam is a household word, and so is Cambodia now.
From participation is born a global conscience

General France of Spain had ordered the execution of a dozen prisoners. Result: terrific protest from all over the world. That arrested the Franco move. This is an example of this sense of the world sitting in collective judgment at the world tribunal. This is the global conscience being formed... this is the global village coming to birth.

Psychology tells us that the 2 elements which define man are those of time and space. An insane person is one who has lost the right categories of time and space. Such as the man who claims he is Rameses II. Incidentally it is quite difficult to get bed space in insane asylums these days.

Our identities used to be preserved by our familiar categories of time and space. We used to get up with the sun and go to bed with the sun. Now it is no longer so. With the superjet, I arrive in New York even before I leave Paris. I have gained time.

In so losing these categories, man has become more and more fragile, vulnerable. He no longer has his old defenses that rendered him poised, regular and measured. The regularities of the religious houses belong to the olden times. Their regulations were written before the advent of electricity and electronics.
New laws have to be written today that will correspond with this electronic civilisation. Man has changed; this will have strong consequences on the religious life - family life.

Man will become increasingly vulnerable... less capable of protecting himself. Thus he has to discover new ways of adjusting himself. There seems to be no other solution than to become an interior man, for the external protections are crumbling away.

McLuhan is his book deals extensively on the effect of the medium in man. Because of the massage that is produced in man, the media (instrument) determines the kind of man. For example the printing press is itself the message and this effects the behaviour of man. When you use television, the instrument itself is more important than the message, in transforming you.

1. The printing press has massaged man and has created a particular type of intellect which is strong, very theoretical, ideological, analytical. And in other words, he is a man who rationalises much, is intellectually honest, a bit tensed and also stiff. He could be any of the typical teacher or professor who is rigid, and loaded with titles and degrees. He could be represented by a symbol of "eye-glasses."
2. Today's intellectual being born is more relaxed and his symbol is the blue jeans. What is outstanding in these young people is the ears, not the eye glasses. He is totally at ease and attentive to what is going around him. He is much more concerned with sound and he is more open to contemplation because he listens not only with his ears but with his total body. He is more intuitive, and less discursive. He does not get involved in syllogisms and principles. He likes to be involved in situations and he likes things that are lived and experienced. He has a terrific sense for people and personal contact. He likes the subjective aspect of truth and not concepts nor abstract principles.

There are two ways of reasoning or modes of intellectual behaviour that make two (2) different types of people.

In a civilisation where words carried precise meanings, we used to demand exactness and precision and went away convinced we had attained truth.

This is no longer true for the audio-visual civilisation. We ought to reflect, then, on the consequences this will have in our communication of the faith. Words will no longer be as important in audio-visual communication. To say "God" is relatively easy but the problem is how to present God in audio-visual language. How to say "God" as image - how difficult and subjective this becomes!
In Audio-Visual, precise words are no longer the main concern. It is the mode of sensations you want to create and the message you wish to get across is what is important. Gradually truth becomes what the group expects. What is truth, for example, is what is successful in TV. I possess truth when the expression of it reaches the people and they approve it. Once I have given them what they expect, they seem to have received the truth.

Hence truth is no longer the search for precise words; it is making people agree with what you are presenting. Truth is not what is exactly right nor corresponds to precise words but it is what the most number of people expect.

Newspapers are written so people may buy them; whatever appears then becomes truth. Three newspapers give three different death totals in a single plane crash. The next day they revise it but no apologies are made.

Nowadays too, the computer replaces the syllogism.

In Ottawa, I recall Pierre Babin having gone to a computer center. The fellows worked through the night. I asked one of them to explain to me what he was doing. It appeared that they were working to find out the best recipe for hot-dog. I wondered how the computer would find out which was the best.
Tests were made on the colours, aroma, spices, kind of meat and fat of each kind of sausage. Sample populations were fed with the sausages. Each reaction was recorded and results were fed into the computer. The best combination became what is preferred by the most number of people.

I may still prefer hot-dogs done according to traditional family recipes; the computer has taken over the role of the ancestral recipe.

Suppose, I asked, "how about when people got tired of this particular combination?" Once again, the computer would give the answer. Surveys would continue; the computer would be fed the results and changes would be made accordingly. The taste of the largest group of people dictates the change in combination.

Here you have the new way of reasoning and presenting truth. Truth no longer comes from the superior nor from the ancient rules. Today, surveys are made and the group consensus becomes the truth. Truth begins to acquire a new definition.

Truth has become subjective. We seek it within ourselves.

We cannot see if the sun is not within us. We can only see the light outside if the light shone within us. We seek the truth within, no longer without.
We shift from a linear to a mosaic way of reasoning. A mosaic is made up of different tiny coloured pieces. There is no logical connection, only a total view.

Do not look for logic then in an audio-visual montage. The links will only be good if the total results create the impression you want to make. A programme is as good as the total effect it creates.

The Link between rational and emotional thought.

Occidental and Oriental thought differ greatly.

With the printing press and Western temperament being what it is, the Occident developed a mentality which is above all very rational, discursive, analytic and abstract. This has lasted for ten centuries; hence it is no dream world in the West.

It is out of this mode of thought that the industrial civilisation was born. The Western man analysed things, rationalised, categorised. That is how he dominated his world.

Emotionality, sentimentality, imagination became suspect. The intellect was the only faculty to be developed. It was for religion as well as for science.
Audio-Visual expression must involve the total man - the body, the intellect, emotions, dreams, imagination and sentiments. Otherwise, we will never gain an audience nor produce something interesting. The emotions must be constantly linked with thought.

TV and cinema communicate an idea by playing on the emotion, the affectivity and the reactions of people. We used to divorce ourselves from the emotions. Now we see that we have to proceed through them.

This is the way youth think and we adults get frightened. They tell us they would rather have the imagination and be alive than be intellectual and dead; they condemn us for being straight and yet dead.

This disequilibrium is so evident in our universalities. Students hungry for emotions and self-expression lead a double life. The daytime is for intellectual life and night time is to take care of the emotional. Teachers are scared because the students lose their heads in all these disco joints.

It is now time that we pass to the stereo.
For many centuries we have been operating only on the first track or single track which is rational, logical and discursive. We hardly used the second track which is the emotion and imagination, except for the poets and the artists who were considered a little bit "off the track".

Now in audio-visual we have come to the use of the 2 tracks, stereo. We cannot have audio-visual if you operate only on one track. So, if there is a radio station which is only rational and intellectual, it will not have many listeners. The second track, the emotional and imaginative is needed.

Now we might also go to another extreme by using and developing only the second track, then we will be back to the same kind of horror.

Today, we have to go stereo. It will be difficult for the religion and school to teach. We have to go stereo not mono anymore, using track one and two, both at the same time. It does not mean to mix the 2 into 1 track, nor does it mean that one is to dominate the other. In a stereo there are 2 different microphones and different entries. There is a blending of the 2, and occasionally one overlaps the other. Once in a while the rational may dominate and once in a while the emotional. It is the harmony of the two without one dominating the other totally. Just like the husband and wife in the home.
THE MORAL BEHAVIOUR OF TODAY'S MAN

Today's man is fragmented, de-structured, exteriorised.

The Phenomenon of Fragmentation

Sociologists claim that mass media has caused the fragmentation of modern man. Radio and TV programmes, the newspaper and magazines have made him what he is now. A 'women's magazine in the Philippines talks about the latest hair style to the Pope's coronation all in one magazine. The feeling one gets after reading a magazine is different from that of reading a novel. Everything is in bits and pieces. You come to know a little about everything. Thus the success of the "Readers Digest".

The De-structuring Process

Sociologists point out too, that mass media has de-structured man. Television, they say, is to man as an earthquake is to volcanologists. When one has listened to radio and watched TV for a considerable length of time, it seems inevitable that yesterday's certainties crumble to ruins.

In the Philippines there are 5 television stations, all in blazing colour. A number of them start telecasting from 7 in the morning to 2a.m. the next morning. Most of the programmes are canned American grist.
A recent survey states that 77% of Metro Manila's households (8 million) possesses a radio and 88% of the households have access to T.V. The study further states that an average child of 6-12 years in a residential area in Makati watches 32 hours of T.V. a week. The implications are most disturbing.

Sensationalism is a standard in mass media. A modern proverb goes "The train which arrives at the station on time is not worth speaking about; it is the train which does not arrive which is interesting." Only what is abnormal is newsworthy, not that which is ordinary and habitual. It is these which eventually become the laws of behaviour.

In other words, we begin to accept the normal, what yesterday was unacceptable. Let murders and sexual deviations be in the headlines long enough and they will soon become normal. Take movie censorship it all depends on the people's capacity to accept such and such a situation or scene. There is not much morality behind all this really. In Denmark violence on TV is practically banned but SEX is allowed, even promoted. In America the reverse is true. It all depends on who plays the game and by whose rules.

Exteriorisation

The audio-visual world is one of spectacle, of show. It is not reality that TV presents to us; it is the reflection
of the reality. Radio does not present to us the events but commentaries on these. It is, thus, that unconsciously we rely more on the reflection rather than on the reality; one takes precedence over the other.

The appearance, the reflection over-rules the reality; the brand of the product is more important than the product itself. When certain products don't sell advertising agencies get to work on the wrapping and the selling price is increased a bit. Then the product sells. In 1977, the advertising industry in the United States spent US$200 billion the same as the Department of Education.

Today recognition comes through mass media; it is mass media that "consecrates". All someone has to do is to appear at the Folks Art Theatre put up a show in Manila and he's got it made.

I believe that the audio-visual massage removes the taste for ideology, systematisation and structuring. Instead it gives the taste or desire for seeing, living and experiencing. Morality springs from an inner light just as the goodness of the eye is lighted from within.
Tradition and rules no longer govern. Morality is to be faithful to the depths of one's being. The foundation of moral education to my mind is to help the being discover what he is in the depths of himself and to help him be faithful to that.

What will carry us through life is this interior exigency that will guide us like a lighthouse, like a compass. There comes a sudden change of government, an upheaval in social structures and what will remain? Only what is awakened within ourselves. Those who have discovered the dignity of man will stand; the rest will topple.

The Three Types of Conscience

The foundation of moral education is the development of what is called the profound conscience, which is distinguished from the socialised conscience and the ideological or cerebral conscience.

The Socialised Conscience: Little children usually inherit the morality of their parents. The good is doing what their parents do. What is good is to do what the environment expects of them. This socialised conscience is that which pushes men to conform to what society expects of them. In the long run, it is the socialised conscience which endows them with a conduct acceptable and which will look good to society-at-large.
Everything — from attire, purchasing and church going is governed by this socialised or mundane conscience. It is said that in North America, the greatest sin is the existence of huge masses of people living according to this level of mundane conscience, and that especially in the religious dimension. This is reflected by their empty churches.

The ideological or cerebral conscience: This conscience begins in adolescence. It is the projection of the absolute in our human instinct, of the ideals of justice and truth which man has within him. It is the product of reason and is made up of principles. Thus we can speak of Marxist or of a catechetically constructed morality.

There comes a time when this ordered and systematic way of life, this rigid law cannot stand. In front of our limitations and our weaknesses we realise that the absolute law and principles of morality can no longer impose themselves. In a world where there is more politics than morality, the inner crisis is developing. At this moment, we either get crystallised in our rules and laws in some kind of pharisaic hypocrisy or we might allow ourselves to drift gentle and easily according to the socialised conscience. The third possibility is to enter into the realm of the profound conscience.
The profound conscience: The profound conscience, for me is fidelity to the interior demands I sense in the depths of myself. The exigency of truth is a demand to be faithful to oneself. Between this profound and the historically-rooted socialised conscience is a whole lot of difference. The profound conscience indicates intuitively to a man what is good for him at the moment. It may happen that what is dictated from within maybe different from the external law; but he intuitively feels that the real law is to be faithful to oneself. This calls to mind Sir Thomas Moore who refused to give into the demands of the king and his lords because he felt that he would be untrue to himself.

Thus, it may be that some demands are made of a person from his depths, though these may not be demanded of objective law. The profound conscience consists in being faithful to oneself. This would be what Carl Rogers calls the total I.

As we grow into adulthood, we don't go by cerebral moral principles anymore. Distinctions are no longer cut-and-dried; instead, we go by this profound intuition which governs our entire being.

We should help people educate their profound conscience. Joan of Arc said she was listening to voices. What was important for her was to listen to the voices and to be faithful to them.
This is morality for me: to find again this inner voice and to act according to it in freedom. McLuhan says that there are two kinds of car-drivers: those who drive continuously looking at the rear-view mirror and those who drive looking ahead. I think that to act according to one's profound conscience is not be forever glancing at the law and tradition but to act in freedom, with our gaze fixed on what is before us. It is looking to what is in front of us that we shall discover what we ought to do. It is the "eye" that must be educated.

To educate the profound conscience is to educate man to be present to himself and to be faithful to what is best in him. It is to permit one to be transparent to himself.

What does this education of the eye and ear consist of?

It would consist primarily in educating the eye and the ear to consider things as basically good and wonderful. To believe in Creation and the Incarnation is to regard things as fundamentally good.

It also means training the eye and ear to suffer whenever anything stops the movement of and mars the quality of life. This is for me the only sin: to stop life; to diminish its quality; to tear down the dignity of man. This is for me the only evil and educating youth to this sensitivity is quite different from educating them to the law.
Finally it is to train the eye and the ear to be convinced that everything is possible. This is to confirm the resurrection. The quality that is in man defeats all limitations. To educate a child in this faith and this hope is to light up his eye from within. The whole point is in allowing youth to listen to their own inner voices, to discern it and to love it as that which is the best of themselves. This is to preserve the youth from the strong influence of the adult world and from the oppression of the 'law'.

Youth must be educated to listen to this inner voice; their education must revolve around values such as man's inherent dignity, respect for people, love for authenticity and personal honesty, admiration for those who are faithful to themselves and the capacity to make personal decisions.

If so many youth spend long solitary hours in nature, I believe it is because they are listening to their inner voice. They may have romantic or dreamy reasons for doing so, but in the end, they do so to find their real selves. We must allow youth this time to dream and even to "get board" in solitude.

Important, too, however is education to responsibility.
One of the main functions of human communication within a social system is to act as a powerful catalyst in affecting attitudes or opinion change, an essential ingredient for the gradual modification of existing traditional habits and attitudes bringing about changes within the framework of a country's development process.

The process of communication is conducted within specific channels and through specific persons whose positions within a social system are structured in such a way as to maximise the degree of fulfilment of these functions. But then things are changing. With the advent of a technological culture and with the world becoming 'a global village' due to instantaneous communication, long held values and beliefs are turning to "myths".

Marshall McLuhan (Understanding Media 1964) sees modern man as the relic of the logical linear "hot" culture of moveable type. Stunned by his encounter with the "cool" world of mass communication, man has struggled for equilibrium and the result has been apathy, anxiety and alienation.

The road to recovery, McLuhan suggests is to recognise that electronic media are subtly and constantly altering our
perceptual senses. The serial logic of printing is fading out before the intuitive "mosaic" of instantaneous communication.

There seems to be a mindless movement to cope and 'play' along with the ever increasing pace of rapid change. Added to this, crass commercialism has further made man a consumption oriented animal and thus he has become effectively "enslaved":

Any attempts to counter act this through the mass media (controlled) will be futile. An alternative media has to be developed. One such medium could be the development of Micro Media or Group Media. Photo Language and Sound Slides would be part of that media. The use of appropriate expressive photos of man and society, pictures that cover the whole gamut of human experience will hopefully bring about a critical awareness of self. Photo Language promotes self-expression and inter-personal (face to face) communication. Total human development covers socio-cultural, political, economic and spiritual dimensions. There is no development without change. Change begins with the conscious recognition of situations as they are and desire to want things to be different and willing to work towards that goal. It is also my belief that no real societal change can take place without political involvement. Without critical political awareness change
cannot come about. Micro Media it is hoped will bring about this increased level of critical awareness.

Eisentadt (1961) identified close primary interpersonal relations as the most important channel of communication. Also Seriff et al (1965) advocated the human group as the typical source for attitude formation. Group Media with its emphasis on group dynamics and social interaction stands as an ideal medium for conscientisation and self-actualisation.

Group Media is a simple inexpensive medium for human communication and conscientisation. It can be used by educators, group facilitators, and especially social workers in Community Development Work. While emphasis is placed on its use of conscientisation and specifically political consciousness its uses are more than that. It is an effective means for self-expression. It is non-threatening and it is profound. It helps one to speak for his or her interior. It helps one to bring one's thoughts, feelings and aspirations to the conscious. When properly used by development workers it will be an effective medium for genuine people's participation for no social worker can succeed if people do not express what they feel and think.
The following fall under the topic Group Media:

1. Sound
2. Sound Slides
3. Photo Language
4. Graphism (Posters etc.)
5. Stage Drama
6. Radio Drama
7. Movies (1/2 hour)
8. Video Tape
9. Collage
10. Photo Montage
11. Mimeo Press

Some Thoughts on the Facilitators Role

In any group activity:

a) The facilitator plays a low key role rather than high key;

b) the facilitator adopts a lateral stance (with and among) rather than a vertical stance (talking down);

c) the participants are active and involved in assignments and not just passive listeners;

d) the group members are called upon to be creative and imaginative esp. drama, role playing, collage, montage, etc.;

e) involvement should lead to an awareness - a conscientising process.
This eventually leads towards self-realisation and ultimately self-actualisation.

Conclusion

Mass Media has most clearly proven itself socially irresponsible and hopelessly entrapped by its own avarice. The wastelands of television, one might hope, will be irrigated and reseeded with integrity. Some form of large-scale media surveillance perhaps government or a private trust, must be instituted - perhaps not with the power of censorship but certainly with the power to expose publicly communication techniques that operate against the public interest. I conclude by quoting Herbert Marcuse who says:

"The real catastrophe is the prospect of total moronisation, dehumanisation, and manipulation of man."
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