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COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE -- A RECONSIDERATION

by: Brajesh Bhatia and P.R.R. Sinha

Change is a natural phenomenon. Every society undergoes a series of natural changes over a period of time, but when we discuss change in relation to development, we are concerned with the people's aspirations and efforts for planned and directed change which can transform their lives. Transformation of people's lives is not indeed a simple process. It implies, first of all, an easy access to all that modernisation promises and provides. This, however, entails an active involvement and participation of the people themselves in the entire efforts towards planned change. Desirable socio-economic transformation would need a commitment on the part of the people to change and put in efforts and energies to achieve the goals of development. This indicates that the people concerned have to arrive at rational decisions as and when they are faced with the problems of decision-making. This process is important because while people are constantly exposed to various forces of change, they are at the same time inhibited in their decision-making abilities due to limited resources. Nevertheless, change is taking place all the time and if the process of change is to be accelerated, then the faculties of 'thinking' and 'doing' of the people have to be harnessed to the maximum.

An individual, for example, has to first change his mind before he changes the use of his hands. In other words, change in attitudes, values, etc., of an individual should precede change in his actions. That is why, whenever we discuss change, we think of change in both material and non-material terms. In fact, changes in non-material terms are more difficult to bring about than changes in material aspects.

Change in behaviour complex of an individual generally refers to changes in knowledge, attitude, skills, values, etc. Normally it consists of changes in both overt and covert behaviour. A change in behaviour complex cannot be achieved easily. Individuals do like to cling on to the ideas and values which not only have been passed down to them from generations but which have also stood the test of time. But a change cannot be meaningful and lasting if the people are not mentally prepared to accept such changes. As we know an individual is a combination of psychological elements. More specifically:

- He wants to gain -- health, time, money, popularity, comfort, leisure;
- He wants to be -- a good parent, sociable, up-to-date, creative, efficient, influential;
- He wants to do -- express his personality, satisfy curiosity, win others' affection; and
- He wants to save -- time, money, work, discomfort, worry, risks.

It follows from the foregoing observations, therefore, that an individual has to
be persuaded to accept changes first at the mental level and later at the action level. However, all communication channels do not possess similar persuasive characteristics. Furthermore, variations in the source and the receiver, in the socio-cultural milieu and other related aspects make the task of persuasive communication more difficult. Moreover, a receiver of a message is not prepared to risk the unknown if the message in question is quite new. But on the other hand, if the message in spite of its newness, fits in well with the perception and attitude of the receiver(s), changes can be effected more easily.

How To Achieve Change

Consistent increase in demands on communication has led to rapid changes in communication technology. This has happened not only in mass media but even in such media as traditional, folk arts and interpersonal. However, changes in communication technology are more pronounced than the expansion of traditional media. Starting with the invention of the moveable type, communication media have traversed the entire gamut of visual media based on camera and film, the invention of vacuum tube and radio, finally entering the spheres of transistors and satellites. One is simply bewildered at the speed and intensity of such breakthrough in communication technology. While the future promises even more startling inventions and applications of communication technology, it also makes it necessary to take a closer look at the relationships between hardware and software of communication.

A Difficult Task

Dissatisfied people are always demanding. Their demands depend on the nature of dissatisfaction which may cover basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing to fulfilment of educational, cultural, religious and even political needs. At times, these demands and dissatisfactions get tarnished due to overplay of sentiments and emotions.

However, the more dissatisfied the people, the better the chances that they will be receptive to change as evidenced from a number of observations and inferences based on empirical studies. People's mental and physical faculties have to be directed diligently to achieve the goals of desirable change. Communication can and in fact has been instrumental in furthering this cause. There are innumerable occasions when people refuse to change, when they are unwilling and reluctant to change. This might have been due to ignorance, lack of desire for change or due to contentment with their lot, unwillingness to risk the unknown, or a combination of all these factors. This difficulty can be overcome by employing various communication channels to inform and educate the people through motivation and persuasion.

Motivation is one of the main motors of human movement. The quality of interpretation and response by the people depend on the quality of stimulus provided by the source of information. The process of change starts and accelerates when the people are sufficiently motivated. Cultural contacts between rural and urban people within a country and contacts between people from different countries have also led to changes.
in various cultural traits, which in due course have impinged on changes in socio-economic traits as well. The speed of such a change depends on the effectiveness of communication at both levels - interpersonal and mass. Besides verbal communication, non-verbal communication also plays a significant role in inducing cultural changes.

Desirable change in all aspects of life is an acid test for the success of developmental efforts. Change can result from a number of factors such as motivation and persuasion, education, cultural contact, technology, dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, and of course, from force and legislation. But a lasting and enduring change is one which comes from a conscious realisation on the part of the people themselves. Development communicators, therefore, have to play a key role towards this end.

Changes in behaviour complex of an individual through communication can also be discussed in terms of a teaching-learning process. A communicator has to create conducive learning situations for the receiver to be motivated and stimulated to learn the new knowledge and skills. However, it has been found that individuals differ in ability to respond, readiness to respond and motivation to respond. As such, the message has to be put across to the receiver(s) through different communication channels at frequent intervals to elicit the desired response.

Guidelines from research

Research conducted in various parts of the world indicates that more exposures to a new idea with the help of a combination of communication sources are needed to achieve desirable changes in the behaviour complex. For example, the NHK survey on 2,408 Japanese respondents revealed different combination of media uses for news as follows:

- TV + Radio + Newspaper: 10.3%
- TV + Newspaper: 61.3%
- TV + Radio: 3.4%
- TV only: 17.8%
- Radio + Newspaper: 1.9%
- Newspaper only: 2.5%
- Radio only: 0.8%
- Others: 1.9%

Communication as a means to change behaviour can also be described as a process of information, decision, and action. The real test of behaviour change lies in the action part of an individual. This action can be referred to as adoption. Adoption is viewed as a mental process of thinking and doing and consists of various stages. Various research findings have indicated differential effectiveness of communication channels at different stages of the adoption process. One such finding has revealed the relative effectiveness of various media during adoption process as follows:
Adoption stages

a. **Need:** This is a stage when an individual wishes to change his existing practices

b. **Awareness:** The individual comes to know about an innovation without knowing its details

c. **Interest:** He makes an attempt to know more about the innovation

d. **Deliberation:** This is a stage of deliberation and mental evaluation

e. **Trial:** An individual uses an innovation in part or sometimes in full

f. **Evaluation:** The individual evaluates the performance of the innovation

g. **Adoption:** It is a decision to use the idea on a continued basis

Important media

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<td>Change agent, mass media and others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal sources such as extension agency and others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal personal sources including family members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family members, friends and neighbours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends and neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self experience gained at the trial stage</td>
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This brings us to the theory that no single communication medium can, by itself, change the behaviour complex of a people. There has to be very active interdependence of different media by way of playing supplementary and complementary roles as the case may be. An individual or a society needs a number of exposures to different communication sources in order to arrive at a desired decision to use and adopt the idea(s). Hence, a combination of communication media is far superior to any single communication medium in respect of bringing about a desired change

A Reconsideration

A deeper insight into the ramifications of diffusion and adoption of innovations on the one hand and the flow of information on the other, entails a careful reconsideration of various theories of communication and change. The question of 'who talks back', it has been found, is extremely important for communication effectiveness. People's reactions and problems related to various programmes for change are vital to the success of communication. Consequently, it is now increasingly realised that instead of boasting about 'how well I have communicated', one must be concerned about 'how well the message is received'. Quite a few communication scholars of late, therefore, have been talking about a Neo-Lasswellian model. The Lasswell model described a communication act as 'who says what to whom through which channel and with what effect?' According to the Neo-Lasswellian model 'who talks back?' takes precedence over 'who says?'. The two-step flow of information theory indicates that the message from source passes through an intermediary who in turn passes it on finally to others in society. This concept is also being questioned especially in the third world countries. The fact is that it is well nigh impossible to delineate any fixed number of steps in the transmission of ideas from source to the ultimate consumers. It might be one-step, two-step or multiple-step, depending largely on the socio-economic, cultural and political milieu of the society.
and psycho-personal traits of the individuals.

The concept of five stages in the adoption process has also undergone considerable changes. An individual or a society may or may not pass thorough all the five stages of the adoption process. For example, a farmer may use artificial fertiliser immediately after becoming aware of it without passing through the stages of interest, trial and evaluation. Another farmer, on the other hand, may pass through the stages of awareness, interest and adoption, and still others may pass through all the stages. This is very important in the developing countries because the bulk of the population still lives in rural areas and are illiterate, ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-clothed. These factors, coupled with the differences in the availability of means, mainly financial, among the different categories of people and differences in the decision-making ability, have made us realise the limitations of the classical five-stage adoption process.

These are some of the theories which have undergone modifications out of sheer necessity to be relevant to the development needs of the Third World. Needless to say, all theories of communication are based on a number of empirical evidences and are assumed to be universally applicable. But as they have been evolved and developed in cultures alien to those of the Third World, their applicability is sometimes questionable. Therefore, it would be desirable and necessary to view all these communication theories critically. Should the local situations require changes or modifications to these theories, one must not hesitate to do so for the sake of achieving the goals of desired change, growth and development.