

**Cross-Cultural Communication For Development  
- Crossroads -**

**by**

**Robert Frost**

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

- CROSSROADS -

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one...,  
And that has made all the difference."

-- Robert Frost

The East-West Center is an institution established to promote understanding and better relations between people East and West. In our attempt to accomplish these goals we have chosen certain broad problems common to East and West and invite people to gather around and focus their attention on them, learning in the process to cooperate in seeking solutions to these problems. The problems chosen deal with population, food, communication, culture learning, and technology and development. The people chosen represent the various disciplines of knowledge, the many countries of Asia, the Pacific and the United States, and different categories of people represented by scholarship (both younger and older), business, industry and government. In our search for cooperation on these problems we are developing relations with institutions in this part of the world which deal with the same or similar problems.

Our communication institute was begun after a year of planning by Dr. Wilbur Schramm of Stanford University and Dr. Lakshmana Rao of this Center (AMIC). Although we are developing relations with many institutions in Asia, we have a special place in our heart for AMIC. The suggestion made by our planning group was that we concentrate in the beginning on two basic areas: communication for development, and problems in cross-cultural communication. I would therefore like to address my remarks to those two areas of concern.

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Communication is such a common, ordinary part of our existence, like breathing, that we are generally unconscious of the fact that we are constantly communicating or of what we are communicating. Definitions abound which include all the conscious and unconscious messages sent and received as well as the various transportation systems. The conscious communication is generally intentional and the unconscious is unintentional. (Of course, even the conscious, intentional communication may unintentionally communicate something else at the same time. An example might be an arithmetic teacher who is a strict disciplinarian may teach her pupils to dislike arithmetic - Or, President Nixon's recent invitation to Sato was certainly meant to communicate support and friendship but some people in Japan asked why Nixon travelled around the world to see Soviet and Chinese leaders but called Sato and Willy Brandt to the United States). For the purposes of our thinking it seems best to narrow the topic to mass communication which is our focus of interest and mass communication is intentionally performed. Of course, mass communication includes not only the so-called mass media-- TV, radio, and newspapers, but also universities and schools, in those societies where mass education is promoted, and the publishing of books, particularly in those societies where inexpensive paperbacks flood the market. I would like to point out a few conditions in our modern world important to communication and indicate some of the alternatives on crossroads in the communication expert's path.

There is little doubt that we are moving into the age of knowledge, into a time of global communication. The knowledge explosion is upon us with the communication explosion straining to reach new heights. Before long satellites will soar above parts of the earth channeling information from huge computerized data banks to people around the globe. Within this milieu I see communication experts concerned with the flow or transmission of knowledge through a society and across social and

cultural boundaries. In a way, knowledge is a possession like other commodities. In every society there are haves and have-nots. The question is how knowledge can move from the haves to the have-nots, from the knowledge producers and finders to the knowledge users. Within any socio-cultural group, and certainly across socio-cultural boundaries, there are impediments which either interrupt the free flow of knowledge or distort the message so that misunderstandings occur. The factors that impede the flow <sup>of knowledge</sup> or interrupt the transmission of knowledge or distort the message define the problem for the communication experts. Although it is sufficient for the average person to have a general understanding of the flow of knowledge in society, the communication expert needs a systematic, explicit understanding of how and what knowledge flows. And possibly even more important, he should be aware of and come to grips with the large social, educational and ethical dilemmas involved in his work of aiding the flow of knowledge.

One of the first facts that communication experts must realize is that knowledge is power and those who transmit knowledge transmit power. The flow of knowledge is the flow of power and those who enhance the flow of knowledge enhance the flow of power. Within modern technological society, knowledge has moved to the center of the stage. Every society which advances scientifically and technologically becomes a knowledge society. The main feature of such a society is that its major industries tend to be "brain-intensive" rather than labor or capital intensive, that is, they are concerned with the finding and production of knowledge and its transmission and use in society, putting emphasis upon activities like research, data processing, information storage and retrieval, education and mass communication. Probably, the most striking example of a knowledge society is modern-day Japan, which is poor in natural resources but rich in knowledge and skills. This ties in with the incarnational view of knowledge which I hold, namely, that power lies

in knowledge wrapped up in a human being who has the courage and wisdom to use his knowledge. becoming preeminent then and men of knowledge in these societies assume a new position of prestige and power. Scarcely a scholar of real competence lacks opportunities to go out into society and serve as consultant to government and business, carry out programs of technical assistance, or even run a business on the side. There was a time in the history of the West when knowledge--especially theoretical knowledge-- was somewhat of an ornament. The community of learning kept itself aloof from such "lower" forms of activity as the application of knowledge. The modern age no longer tolerates that sort of detachment. "Relevance" has become the rallying cry, and relevant knowledge has impact and power.

The power of new knowledge is probably one of the strongest forces for change in the world, especially when knowledge is distributed widely in a society. When new knowledge is put to work, it creates new situations and new problems which generate the motivation for the search for more new knowledge. The new situations in turn create more changes so that we see a phenomenon whereby the discovery and use of new knowledge has a cumulative affect of causing and speeding change. A simple example of this was given me some time ago by a man who spent many years working in the World Health Organization. He told me that research has shown that in certain parts of the world the knowledge of the process of water purification reduced infant mortality in half over a five-year period. Imagine the impact this has on population growth. Therefore, knowledge of birth control is introduced which in turn has an impact on perception of the family, man's ability to control nature and other values. Man thus begins a process of planning whereby he intervenes more rather than less into the "natural" world. Whether or not to take action no longer is the question. In this process man changes his environment, and man-made

environments change most rapidly. The cities are possibly the greatest example. I can go back to the small town where I was born and raised--as were my mother, grandfather and great grandfather--and see little change. However, the large cities are the places of air and water pollution, juvenile delinquency, crime, and slums, the place where people are mobile, where deterioration sets in first. Man's environment has changed most drastically in the very places which are not only man-made, but also are the seats of learning and the centers of communication.

The changes that occur with new knowledge are seen equally in man's outlook on the world. In the significant book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas S. Kuhn attempts to show how scientific paradigms change across time. These paradigms are models of the world which scholars use as a framework for their thinking and research. He says:

Effective research scarcely begins before a scientific community thinks it has acquired firm answers to questions like the following: What are the fundamental entities of which the universe is composed? How do these interact with each other and with the senses?...Normal science... is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost. (pp. 4-5)

Even more important, during scientific revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before. (p. 110)

What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-perceptual experience has taught him to see. (p. 112)

Such changes in man's perceptions of the world's fundamental entities and in what he actually sees are bound to challenge the ancient verities and values of any society, for people begin to develop new ways of looking at the world, new answers to ultimate questions. Thus begin changes in man's deepest, innermost self. If, for example, religion is defined as "the aspect of depth in the totality of the human spirit," or again "religion in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern," (see Paul Tillich Theology of Culture, pp. 7-8) then any knowledge which answers to whatever extent the deep, ultimate questions of man impinges upon the religious dimension of man and is religiously significant. And again, those who transmit this knowledge affect religious perceptions. Furthermore, such changes generally do not take generations to occur but years, demanding adjustments and, where adjustments are slow, causing discontinuities and extreme tension in the life of man. Certainly the generation gap is greater today because of the speed of change across time.

The kinds of gaps that take place across time have an analogue in the gaps that cut across cultural boundaries. A culture is a set of historically derived ways of living, thinking, believing, perceiving and acting which is learned by all members of a culture who are either adopted at an early age or born into the culture. Each culture breaks up the natural world into its own categories which it arranges into specific relationships. These categories and their relationships form a structured whole, a pattern or design, which influences the perceptions and meanings of each member of that culture. By the time a member of the culture becomes adult he is a well-conditioned product of his own culture and therefore finds it difficult to function effectively in another culture.

When learning a second language, for example, the member of a culture will tend to carry over the phonological and meaning habits of his first language into the speaking of the second. We can all recognize a foreign accent of someone trying to speak our language. His first language has limited his ability to speak the second language properly. In the same way, a person who has grown up in one culture is limited by that culture and finds it difficult to understand the ways of living, thinking, believing and acting of people in another culture. His first culture has placed blinders on him for it has taught him how and what to speak, see, hear, think and believe. In fact, most people tend to generalize, or even absolutize, their ways of living, thinking and believing. Crosscultural communication is thereby impeded, for men tend to read the meanings of their own culture into the artifacts and actions of another culture.

A further important consideration in the whole process of transmitting knowledge for development is the nature of the traditional educational processes, especially as they are embodied in the universities. Any educational program which sets out to prepare people for service in development must be oriented primarily to the nature of the work to be done in the world outside academia. This stance means that the locus, content, and teaching/learning methods of the program should be determined by the nature of the non-academic or non-school world. The implications of such educational criteria are vast because the traditional university system has developed other criteria based upon other values. My own admonitions given to my students in linguistics still ring in my ears. The criteria upon which to decide about and judge a linguistic description are the following:

Comprehensiveness - Be sure to include all the data - there should be no left-overs,

- Consistency - Make certain that nomenclature and description of relationships do not conflict; do not call an entity different names in different parts of your description,
- Simplicity - Your description should be simpler than reality and the simplest answer is the best; do not use more explanations than necessary,
- Reliability - So work that other men using the same data and methods will come out with the same or translatable results; the knowledge gained as well as the method(s) used must be public,
- Validity - Your work must have relevance to your goals, accomplish what you set out to accomplish.

Furthermore, within academia men work in an atmosphere that is deliberately detached and rational, and they place high value on verbal and conceptual solutions. Objectivity is a high value, and emotions are withheld to the greatest degree possible. People are evaluated on the basis of their ability to operate in this situation, a situation of little risk and small impact on other people.

On the other hand, within the non-academic world of the open market place, the situation is almost the reverse. Men must make decisions without all the data in; in fact, much of the data will be contradictory. Emotional distance is impossible, for the emotions of people and the constant flux of personal relationships are some of the primary data with which men of affairs work. Reliability in the sense of repeatability is an unreal concept, for events do not repeat themselves. Also, even if one reaches his goals, he often does not know what difference his decisions made because the situation is extremely complex, with causes and effects difficult to separate and identify. Certainly solutions will not be simple, for indeed there may be no "solutions" at all but

only a choice of alternative difficulties to be faced:

A second important consideration is the rising cost of maintaining the universities and schools. Part of the reason for this is what I would like to call the syndrome of rectangularity. This syndrome on university campuses derives from the fact that people are accredited for their knowledge by the number of exposure hours they have had with their professor or teacher. For sitting in a class with a teacher two or three hours a week for fifteen weeks, a student is given two or three semester credits. In order to provide space for these exposure hours, rectangular rooms are built with blackboards and a teacher's desk at one end of the room and a number of student desks facing that end. In turn, rectangular buildings are built to house the rectangular rooms. These buildings, rooms, blackboards, and desks used for this purpose cost a lot of money. When one adds the academic and maintenance staffs, the costs leap to astronomical amounts.

A third consideration in thinking about the role of universities and their role in the communication of knowledge for development in the various disciplines of knowledge. Certainly specialization is necessary for it leads to professionalization. However, it can also lead on the one hand to sectionalism which is the plague of all organizations and businesses and on the other to a set of conflicting methods of analysis, scientific paradigms and epistemologies. Furthermore, the appearance of new knowledge or new technologies does not necessarily produce solutions to problems. Knowledge must be put into action. Performing this marriage of knowledge and action involves a whole series of decisions for policy-makers. The whole process of development involves changes in a nation, its economy and social structure. When the leaders of a country decide to develop their country, they decide to set in motion

a process through which their people will increase their capabilities to enhance the quality of life basically through solutions to the problems they face. In so deciding they also decide to manipulate human beings, human behaviour. It is at this point that men come to crossroads in decision making and therefore, for our purposes in a slightly narrower scale, crossroads in communication.

#### CROSSROADS IN MASS COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The above description in no way exhausts the factors involved in our present social milieu in which mass communication operates. From these, however, arise various crossroads where decisions must be made as knowledge is used for development. The first crossroad we face concerns the control or non-control of knowledge and its application. If knowledge is power, who should control it? Or should it be controlled at all? Some would make the alternative planning on freedom. Within the traditions of the West, knowledge was seen as having very high value. There have always been those who attempted to control it but with very little success. The basic proposition was that all truth is God's Truth. All true knowledge was thus both sanctified and sanctifying. Within each society that holds these assumptions, then, knowledge must be permitted to flow freely. However, added to this stance was a philosophy of laissez-faire in the application of knowledge. The problems resulting from this approach can be seen in the deterioration of the environment in the United States, for example. If knowledge is allowed to flow freely will it become ad hoc and run away with us? How can we plan and organize ourselves in order to live harmoniously with our environment?

A second crossroad is the determination of significant or non-significant knowledge. Today the world is flooded with information/knowledge so that men's communication networks get overloaded. Why enhance the flow of all of it? And still, possibly the best way to raise the level of creativity of a society is to provide the largest number of

people with the greatest amount of knowledge and skills possible. But we also know that the mere piling up of more factual data does not lead to the solution to problems. Someone has to decide what knowledge is significant for which people at what point in their intellectual development. Whether we like it or not mass communication is here and knowledge is bound to flow, or be transmitted. Satellites, pocket TV sets and wrist radios are no longer dreams of the futurologists or the writers of comic strips. All men will have more knowledge at their finger tips. What knowledge will trigger action, especially action which solves problems and enhances the quality of life? Even more important, men need insights. To most people the clatter of a teapot lid merely signalled the fact that the water was boiling. To Robert Fulton it meant power to propel boats. Can we teach insights in our educational system, or through other means of mass communication?

There are two other factors which must be taken into consideration in this area of planning - or of freedom and slavery- in relation to technology and knowledge. In the United States very few people would stand before a master painting or beautiful sculpture and confess that they do not understand it. However, I am amazed at how many people will almost take pride in confessing that they do not have the slightest idea how a machine works, even a single automobile motor, to say nothing of a computer. And, they have little inclination to learn. Many of these same people are screaming that man is becoming a slave of the machine, or of technology, never realizing the possible relation between their ignorance and their feeling of "slavery" to technology. Is it legitimate to communicate only the results of the search for knowledge and its application without building in the knowledge of the process or framework for arriving at these results? Without communicating how things work?

Another factor lies in the area of teaching people to see the consequences of their decisions and actions. No one can even antic-

all the consequences of his actions, but he should try. Actions, like men, are known by their fruits. Good intentions are not enough. Besides, if men take the liberty to ignore the possible consequence of their actions, are they really free? It is so easy to fall into traps. How can man be taught to anticipate consequences? Can mass communication help?

A further factor involves the continued borrowing of knowledge from outside the society. Should the knowledge-have-not countries continue to borrow from the knowledge-have countries without developing their own capability for producing and finding knowledge, they will remain dependent upon the knowledge-have countries. The importation of highly sophisticated techniques and technologies may induce an increase in the Gross National Product statistically, but it will also lead to a greater dependence upon the countries from whom the technology was borrowed. Such dependence will continue until a broad knowledge base is formed at home. The problem is not just the transmission of knowledge but rather how to dynamize social systems so that they will begin to move on their own. Such self-propelling power is the stuff on which dignity and freedom are built and maintained.

Unfortunately, not all that flows through mass media is knowledge in the sense of truth. Communication among people is constantly impeded, if not blocked by the form of interference called propaganda which gives completely different interpretations to the same phenomena. How can people be prepared to listen and decide what is truth, what is half-truth and what is untruth? P.T. Barnum tells the story of how he had difficulty getting people to leave the circus tent when one show was finished. Most people would stay on and see the show the second time. One day he paraded a large sign in front of the audience which read, "This way to the egress." People flocked to the door only to find themselves outside the tent. He had used their ignorance of the word egress to achieve his purpose. Here is an example of the exploitation of ignorance, a device also used

in propaganda.

At one level we can ask how legitimate this kind of attempt to manipulate is. At another we come to a view of the nature of man and society. How manipulative is he. How manipulable? How deterministic, how free? How good, how recalcitrant? Furthermore, when knowledge comes from outside a man's society, its credibility depends upon one's view of, one's trust of, the outsider. How can we communicate better cross-culturally?

We know that variations among cultures also distort the message. Communication is made possible by community and, in turn, community is based upon communication. This chicken and egg relationship is fundamental for understanding the crossroad related to cross-cultural communication. It is interesting that the Modern English word commune is derived from the Middle English word comun meaning "common". Both community and communication are derivatives of the word commune and thus from common. The implication is, at least in English, that both community and communication need something in common to function properly. Within one nation state, or within one cultural community in that nation state, communication is based upon common ways of living, thinking, believing and acting. However, across cultural boundaries this amount of commonality does not exist.

If our assumption is correct that each culture describes the world in its own categories and that something common is needed for cross-cultural communication, what are the implications for those who design and control the means of communication? One answer is to frame our message differently for people with different cultural backgrounds. The categories of one language, or better still, one culture are not adequate for those of another. For example, in my own professional work I contrasted the Japanese and English languages to predict the points and amounts of

difficulty that a Japanese would have in learning English. This contrastive work is simple compared to the attempt to contrast symbolic systems of different cultures. After all, language is only one part of culture. The point is that the same symbol can and usually does convey different meanings in different societies, or that different symbols can convey approximately the same meaning. Or to put it in another way, no two cultures have the same set of meanings nor do they use similar symbols to represent similar meanings. In cross-cultural communication the message must be given the proper form and style so that the receiver gets the message which the sender intends. The problem is that for effective cross-cultural communication the message might have to be framed in 130 different ways so that the people of the 130 nations which comprise the United Nations would understand the message in the same way. However, should this be done, with the free flow of knowledge people may begin to feel that someone is talking out of 130 sides of his mouth!

The commonality necessary for cross-cultural communication is demonstrated by the world-wide community of science or by the world-wide community of people who work in airports. Scientific conferences are held without too much misunderstanding. Airplanes arrive, are serviced, and leave without too much trouble. The problem arises if, through our mass media and educational systems, we try to provide a base of common information and knowledge of the different cultures and heritages, and the accumulation of scientific, social and humanistic knowledge. This might be one alternative to the heterogeneity of the earth - since the heterogeneity of the global system of nations basically hampers global communication and thus global cooperation. However, one wonders to what extent it is either desirable or feasible to try to homogenize the world's cultures in order to provide the commonality necessary for smooth cross-cultural communication. Differences are stimulating. But, a

single interpretation of historical events, for example, is equally undesirable - and impossible. An attempt to provide for public consumption a history of any of the recent wars in Asia is a case in point. The question is whether we should attempt to create a common communication base for different cultures.

An even more practical problem is the difficulty of deciding what language to put the knowledge into. Should people try to decide upon a common mass communication language for regions? For countries? For linguistic communities in countries? No country in Asia is monolingual. If satellite communication devices will be hovering in the skies overhead in the not too distant future, how many channels will be needed to reach all the different linguistic groups in the area? When one multiplies the disciplines of knowledge times the branches of each discipline times the number of languages in an area reached by a satellite, the dimensions of the problem begin to boggle the imagination. Add to that the fact that much of current knowledge has still not even been translated into many of these languages and the true dimensions become apparent.

This brings us to the crossroads of policies on education. Probably the first question is, who should be educated for what purposes? Certainly this is a basic decision which must be made by each country. However, whether it is decided that higher education should be open to all (which seems to me to be the only possible decision for any nation which is becoming or already is a knowledge society) or only to a few, certain other questions must be faced. Can mass communication reduce the cost of higher education produced by the rectangularity syndrome already mentioned? There already exist ways by which practitioners of a profession license would-be practitioners: medical examinations for doctors, bar examinations for lawyers, accounting examinations for Certified Public Accountants. Each is certified that he has the knowledge

and skills to practice his profession. Can this be done for economists, sociologists, physicists, and philosophers? Furthermore, our accrediting would take on a different form, the form of the learning experience might also have to change. We might bring it closer to the practices and values of the non-academic market place where men are evaluated by what they can accomplish, not by their ability to put black marks on white sheets of paper.

But to what extent can new communication devices bypass the universities and schools? The process is certainly time consuming. However, certainly the application of knowledge is seldom learned in books. Neither TV nor radio can replace apprenticeship. What of the dialogue that is so necessary to sharpen thinking? Probably even more important is the question of what happens to the personality, the emotional maturity, of people who learn so much via television and radio, who experience so much vicariously. Vicarious experience is necessary since we cannot all experience everything. But how much? One of the sadder sights in the world is a person whose emotional maturity has not kept pace with his intellectual maturity.

A further crossroad is the question of whether a society can adopt modern knowledge without succumbing to bad after effects. Can a society accept the goodies without the garbage? The problem of environmental deterioration, already alluded to above, caused by a run-away application of knowledge and consumption of resources is too well known to be repeated. One hopes that the new knowledge societies will learn from the older ones, developing new kinds of knowledge and new habits and stewardship to avoid falling into some of the well known technological traps. A more subtle form of difficulty relates to the shifts in philosophy, religious beliefs, or weltanschauung. Man wants a whole world; he desires integrity. He constantly attempts to relate his faith to the world around him. But in a world of constant and rapid changes, he also must constantly be shifting and changing. Certainly his world will expand as his knowledge increases. This can be exciting. Often he will want to satisfy his own deep curiosity

by going to see for himself. Some will move away from their own people and in the interim both will change. In such a situation how can trust - the sine qua non of peace and good human relations - be maintained? How does friendship mature? Can a man find integrity in a world in which his values become relative? Certainly all the knowledge will challenge him as never before. Will he consider this good and try to grow or bend and fight it? Of one thing we are certain, since culture is a systematic whole, a set of patterned and interrelated behaviour, one part cannot be touched without affecting all other parts.

Finally, what can be done about all of these crossroads? First, a much closer cooperation, a new relationship, among the men of knowledge, the decision-makers, and the communicators is imperative. Certainly the men of knowledge in the disciplines must cooperate across disciplinary lines in the social market place. Such cooperation in a kind of mission-oriented research should go a long way in producing the kind of socially relevant knowledge we need. But more than that, cooperation is called for among men from various walks of life - the scholar, the businessman, the government official. Each has his own perspective to contribute. And beyond that, cooperation is needed cross-culturally. Despite their cultural differences, men share a common humanity which provides a solid basis for cooperation among those who have the will to cooperate. Furthermore, this kind of cross-cultural cooperation again adds a dimension to the process of knowledge discovery and should help define more adequately the paradigm of knowledge through which we determine reality for each culture categorizes the world differently. As each learns from the other the paradigm shifts. This interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, multi-professional kind of knowledge calls for the communicators to cooperate in framing the knowledge in the proper form so that it can be transmitted more easily and understandably.

Second, a great deal more work must be done in cross-cultural communication. Within one culture the means of communication are basically

known, and businesses, educational institutions and governments call upon communication experts to help them. However, we really have no cross-cultural communication experts. These must be trained. Furthermore, there are those who glibly assert that Eastern knowledge will solve Western problems, or that Western knowledge will develop Eastern societies. Who knows? Here again much more knowledge is needed and many more people must acquire that knowledge.

Third, because of the spread of knowledge and the force it exerts for changes, including changes in knowledge itself, the educational systems must teach people how to learn so that they may continue to learn. As more and more knowledge flows freely, some men will discard old knowledge and accept the new. Others will hang on to the old and eschew the new. Some will strike a middle ground. In any event, men have a greater opportunity to grow individually and socially because of this knowledge explosion. Mass communication has a unique role to play here if there are men of knowledge and wisdom feeding in the messages.

Finally, within the world of discontinuities, communication experts are concerned with continuities. In that sense communication is a healing science. Each communication expert then takes, or at least should take, a very affirmative attitude toward the world. There is little doubt that knowledge can be used as a power for evil. However, communicators must also believe it can be a tremendous power for good, and thus work in whatever circumstances they find themselves for the improvement of the human condition. Men may disagree on what constitutes "improvement" but given the affirmative, healing stance, human relationships will not crumble either within or across cultural boundaries.

Furthermore, the communication expert must take an ethical stance. The rapid increase in the amount of knowledge and the extent of its transmission have caused vast changes in our world affecting almost all men on the earth. The challenge lies in the awakening in hundreds of

millions of people a vision of almost unlimited possibilities. But more fundamentally, it also means the development of a new kind of personality, one adequate to the challenge of our rapidly changing world. The future of our world depends upon our ability to breath this new hope and life into men everywhere. These are some of the challenges I see communication experts working on.