

Establishing Communication Patterns in Developing Countries

DAVE MILLER

The beliefs that people hold condition their understanding of a situation as well as their attitudes and actions, and thus they affect the pace and direction of development in any field.

Kusum Nair.

THIS VERY MINUTE, the lives of millions of human beings in the world hang in precarious balance; the future of a hundred or more developing countries is being determined now.

Most of them face gigantic problems of food production, law and order, illiteracy, and development of the individual if they are to take their place in the free world.

The professional communicator, native or otherwise, becomes involved in freeing individuals and groups in developing countries from the bonds of their narrow alternatives. Having no small effect in this struggle is the very fact of how well the professional communicator himself, or the specialist advisor is able to communicate.

The advisor from another land must span the chasm of language and cultural differences and establish patterns of communication which are unique for that particular country and at that particular moment in development.

Two assumptions are necessary at the outset in discussing this problem. First, there is a difference between **undeveloped** countries and **underdeveloped** countries. Horowitz distinguishes in this way.

There are tribal societies which for one or another reason are unconscious of alternatives to their own way of life. The **undeveloped** society has no consciousness of being undeveloped. The **developing** nations have a concept of emergence and characterize themselves as being underdeveloped economically and technically. (1)

The second assumption is this. Communication between cultural groups is not only a problem of language. According to

Edmund S. Glenn, communications between cultural groups is not even **principally** a problem of language.

It has been stated that each man has a philosophy, whether or not he is aware of that fact. This means, of course, that people think in accordance with different methods or patterns of thought. The methods may vary from individual to individual and even from nation to nation.

Ideas originated by philosophers permeate entire cultural groups; they are, in fact, what distinguishes one cultural group from another. The term "national character" is, in reality, the embodiment of a philosophy or the habitual use of a method of judging or thinking.

To quote Glenn further:

The determination of the relationship between the patterns of thought of the cultural or national group whose ideas are to be communicated, to the patterns of thought of the cultural or national group which is to receive the communication, is an integral part of international communication. Failure to determine such relationships, and to act in accordance with such determinations, will almost unavoidably lead to misunderstandings. (2)

Some Problems of Communications

That everyone is not able to communicate in another country may be illustrated by a few incidents.

An American professor cannot get used to European traffic regulations. It strikes him as ridiculous that the driver who gets there first has the right of way, whether he comes out of a side-street alley or a main thoroughfare. (3)

An expert in public administration finds Italian bureaucracy close to unbearable. Though studying bureaucracy is his life's work, he seems to be unable to comprehend why curriculum changes in Italian universities entail so much more red tape than at home.

How do these problems affect the ability of the specialist to communicate? Here are other examples.

In Turkey, an American professor asks for American flags for the front fenders of his car to make sure that his "diplomatic status" is recognized. When informed that only the American ambassador is entitled to that privilege, he protests that, "These people simply don't appreciate the sacrifice I've made in coming here to help them." (4)

Preceding colleagues were allowed to sell their cars on the free market, but due to a change in Turkish law, a professor from America is forced to sell his to the Turkish government

at Blue Book value plus cost of transportation. His reaction to this is that, had he known this, he never would have gone to Turkey, and he "wants the Turks to know it." (5)

A visiting professor in the Istanbul Hilton reprimands the waiter for "interrupting" the conversation. The interruption consists of crepes suzettes. (6)

The receiver has problems, too, in getting ready to receive the communication. For instance, in the Middle East, a man is asked what he would do in a certain instance if he were one of the country's leaders. He replies, "But, I'm not." He cannot visualize himself in any situation other than his own, and expects the same of his children. (7)

Not language, then, but empathy, a genuine interest in people, the ability to place yourself in the other person's situation, becomes the crucial element in communication. That communication is done without words is evident in this quote from an advisor to Venezuela, Paul J. Grogan.

The American represents an affluence that may be distasteful to the typical citizen of a lesser developed country. We fail to see the connection, to feel any guilt, or for that matter, any wealth; but, somehow, in the mysterious workings of our economy and their imagination, iron ore from the Guayana region becomes a Cadillac, South American rubber furnishes the tires, and Lake Maracaibo petroleum derivatives fill the fuel tank, as we go tooling off to the drug store for, what else, a banana split and a cup of coffee. (8)

It has been suggested, then, that **relationship** is one of the most important determinants of communication. As a result of relationship, the receiver hears the sender's attitude more clearly than the logical content of the sender's words. According to F. R. Roethlisberger (9) communication depends upon capacity and willingness to see and accept points of view different from one's own, and to practice this orientation in a face-to-face relationship.

An Adjusted Representation of a Communication Model

Shannon and Weaver's basic communication model has been used in many ways since its publication in the late forties, however, its usefulness to the professional communicator as a way to view the communication process has remained unchanged. (10) Realizing that communication is a two-way process and that the following representation does not account for this fully, it still

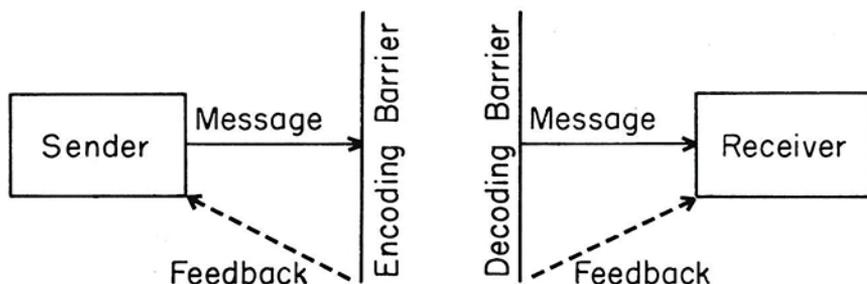


FIG. 1. Modification of communication model by Shannon and Weaver.

might be useful for specialists concerned with the problems of cross cultural communication to consider the modification shown in Figure 1, taking into account only the sender, the receiver, and encoding and decoding barriers.

It should be recognized, however, that both sender and receiver have many sides. There are forces—biological, social, environmental, psychological, educational, and cultural—acting upon them at the moment of communication attempt.

The sender must develop an understanding of patterns of thought of the host country and adapt his communication attempt to them. He must develop “cultural empathy” which transcends encoding and decoding barriers.

With this in mind, perhaps the specialist-communicator can move from the basic model with sender and receiver to the more complicated model shown in Figure 2, taking into account these forces and making use of the term “cultural empathy.”

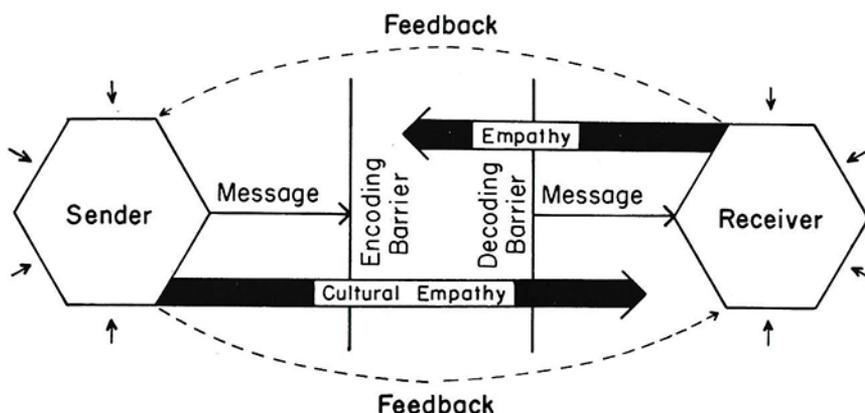


FIG. 2. Forces acting upon the communication process are taken into account in this more complicated communication model.

The receiver (or learner, perhaps) must develop a degree of empathy to receive the communication. Lerner and Rao (11) from their studies of the Middle East and Asia consider the development of empathy and the "mobile personality"—again, the ability to place one's self in someone else's situation—as the key to psychological variables in bringing about change.

Some Implications

That patterns of thought offer a key to establishing patterns of communication is a proposition that must be considered by the professional specialist-communicator in a developing country.

In addition to technical competence and willingness to work, he must be able to adjust to a different cultural environment. He must be able to accept a foreign country for what it is and be prepared to work in it. He must not be "culture bound" but be able to bring about **empathy** within those with whom he communicates, and develop **cultural empathy** within himself to communicate and teach effectively.

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