

A SURVEY OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS NEEDED AND COMMUNICATION METHODS USED IN THE DISSEMINATION OF DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION

†Earl McDowell

††Linda Baney

ABSTRACT

This article reports on the results of a survey conducted on the role of change agents in the communication development process. Change agents working with twenty non-profit development agencies were asked to evaluate the amount of time they spent communicating development information, the communication skills and methods used, and the roles they play as change agents in the development process.

INTRODUCTION

The function of disseminating development information to the users at the grassroots level is a vital step in the development process. Yet there is a paucity of generalized information on the skills needed and methods used by development change agents.[1] (FAO, 1979). There are two primary reasons for this:

- * As each development situation is unique, the communication skills needed and methods used must be specific and appropriate to the situation. (UNESCO, 1982) [2]
- * Development workers at the grassroots levels are often as isolated from the centers of development information as the user. Therefore, they are difficult to tap as information sources for research in development communication.

Never the less, the experience workers have in development communication may provide useful information to the international development community. This information will help development policy makers and planners prepare information more appropriate to the situation.

†Dr. Earl McDowell is an Associate Professor of Speech Communication in the Rhetoric Department, College of Agriculture, University of Minnesota.

††Linda Baney is a Research Assistant in the Rhetoric Department, College of Agriculture, University of Minnesota. She has recently completed a Master of Agriculture degree in technical communication in international agricultural development.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The central purpose of this project was to develop a survey to be used by development researchers to collect information on communication skills needed and methods used by change agents.

The following research questions illustrate the objective of the project:

1. What percentage of the change agents work week is spent communicating development information?
2. What communication skills are required for the dissemination of development information by the change agent?
3. What communication methods are used by change agents to disseminate development information?
4. What are the roles change agents play as development communicators?

PROCEDURE

To observe the above objectives, a literature search was conducted to determine the scope and range of communication skills and methods required by change agents. (Lionberger and Gwin, 1982) [3]. A survey tool was then developed from the information gathered during the literature search. A packet of ten survey tools were distributed to twenty different non-profit development agencies to be distributed to development workers in the field. (Boynes, 1976) [4].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The vast majority of development workers indicated that they communicated development information through one to twenty percent of their work week (35%), and twenty-six to fifty percent of their work week (39%). Variance may be due to the differing job responsibilities among development workers. Those workers with administrative duties will have less opportunity to interact with the users of development information at the grassroots level. Those development workers with the responsibilities of the change agent have more contact with the users of development information they are responsible for disseminating. (See Table 1.)

Communication activities development workers find themselves using reading, writing, speaking and listening. Over fifty percent of the development workers indicated that they spent one to ten hours per week involved in each of these communication activities (see Table 2). These figures may indicate that development workers are trying to spread their time and energies to blanket as many communication activities as possible. They read to keep informed of innovations in development, to find information to facilitate their work in development, and, more likely, to be entertained. Their writing communication activities may be a part of their administrative duties, or a means by which to communicate with the rest of the developing community. Speaking activities may range from group discussion in a committee to instruction.

Listening is probably the most vital communication activity at every level and stage of the development process. Development workers who are trained in active listening find

TABLE 1 Percentage of Respondents Indicate the Percentage of the Work Week Spent Communicating Development Information

Percentage of Work Week	Percentage of Respondents
0-25	35
26-50	39
51-75	17
76-100	9

TABLE 2 Percentage of Respondents Indicating the Number of Hours Spent in Communication Activities

Communication Activities	Hours					
	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60
Reading	65	17	4		4	
Writing	57	30	4			
Speaking	52	30	4	9	4	
Listening	61	22	9		4	4

that they have access to innumerable information sources. For instance, by listening to the user of development information, a development worker will walk away with a finer understanding of conditions existing in the development situation. Another advantage to listening would be a more realistic understanding of the user needs. One respondent indicated that fifty-one to sixty hours per week were spent listening, a valuable skill in any development situation. (Burgoon and Ruffner, 1982) [5].

Over fifty percent of the development workers who responded to the survey indicated that the following communication skills were required for their development work: Writing business letters, regular bulletins and reports; talking one-on-one, group discussions, conducting meetings, participating in meetings, training courses and interviewing. The highest rated skills required for development work were writing business letters (83%) and interviewing (100%). (See Table 3).

Of these communication skills that development workers felt were necessary to the development process, over fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they would like more training in writing business letters and reports, as well as conducting group discussions and training courses. They also revealed a need for training in advertising, public relations and writing instructions or manuals. The highest rated skills in which respondents felt they needed more training were writing business letters (100%), writing regular bulletins (96%) and writing instructions or manuals (100%).

When asked to indicate the methods used in communicating development information, more than 86 percent of the respondents noted that they use^d lecture, discovery, team teaching, audio-visuals, drama or storytelling and competitions. The highest rated methods used by development workers were lecture (83%), discovery (84%) team teaching (80%). The same development workers indicated that they needed more training in the following communication methods: Simulation, games, self-training and seminar. The highest rated communication method in which development workers felt they needed more training was self-training (64%). (See Table 4).

Finally, development workers were asked to define their role(s) in the development process. Over fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they played the following roles: Information carrier, friendly listener, motivator, process facilitator, agency linker, ability builder, program director/administrator, promoter, counselor and skills teacher. The highest rating roles were that of information carrier (96%), friendly listener (84%) and motivator (88%). (See Table 5).

It is interesting to note how communication plays a part in every role indicated by the respondents. This in spite of the fact that almost fifty percent of the respondents were not professional communicators: Agricultural extension (38%) and rural health workers (8%). Such results indicate the extent and importance of communication in the dissemination of development information. (See Table 6).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Almost three quarters of the change agents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they spent up to fifty percent of their work week communicating develop-

TABLE 3 Percentage of Respondents Indicating Required Skills and the Need for More Training in Communication Skills.

	Required Skills	More Training
Business letters	83	100
Memos	13	44
Regular bulletins	65	96
Advertising	4	52
Public Relations	48	83
Educational or training material	13	35
Instructions and/or manuals	26	100
Proposals	26	26
Reports	74	65
Talking one-on-one	52	26
Group discussions	91	78
Conducting meetings	57	35
Participating in meetings	74	44
Lectures	44	26
Training courses	74	61
Professional presentations	35	30
Interviewing	100	26

TABLE 4 Percentage of Respondents Indicating Communication Methods Used and the Need for More Training in Communication Methods.

	Communication Methods	More Training
Lecture	83	36
Simulation	20	56
Discussion	32	32
Games	28	52
Discovery	84	24
Individual training	16	48
Inquiry	24	36
Self training	28	64
Field trip/farm tours	36	28
Seminar	44	52
Team teaching	80	28
Result demonstration	16	4
Method demonstration	48	24
Group training	16	20
Audio-visual demonstrations	52	32
Puppet shows	28	4
Drama/storytelling	52	16
Dance/Music	16	12
Competitions	72	20

TABLE 5 Percentages of Respondents Indicating the Roles They Play as Development Workers.

	Percentage of Respondents
Information carrier	96
Friendly listener	84
Motivator	88
Process facilitator	71
Agency linker	75
Ability builder	64
Institution builder	36
Program director/administrator	64
Group worker	44
Fence keeper	12
Promoter	60
Local leader	32
Counselor	72
Protector	12
Worker helper	28

TABLE 6 Demographics Information on the Respondents of the Surveys.

	Percentage of Respondents
Sex	
Male	81
Female	19
Title	
no response	5
Agricultural extension	41
Rural health worker	9
Professional communicator	46
Education	
no response	4
Grammar school	0
Technical/training school	13
College	0
Graduate School	57
Post Graduate School	26
Age	
25-35	36
36-42	20
43-50	16
51-60	28

ment information.

2. Respondents to the survey indicated that the following communication skills were required for development work:

- writing business letters, bulletins and reports,
- interpersonal communication, interviewing,
- group discussions, conducting and participating in meetings,
- training courses.

3. Respondents to the survey indicated that the following communication methods were used in communicating development information:

- lecture, team teaching, discovery,
- audio-visuals,
- drama or story telling,
- competitions.

4. Respondents rated themselves highly as development communicators in the following roles:

- information carrier
- friendly listener
- motivator

The significance of these results should indicate to development organizations the kind of training in communication skills and methods which should be offered to development workers in the field. Specifically, development workers should receive training in writing skills (business letters and bulletins), oral skills (group communication and interviewing) and listening.

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