

# Development Communication in Action

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Building Understanding and  
Creating Participation

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# Chapter 5

## Communication in the Service of Development: Identifying Fundamental Hurdles

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*At no point in human history has there been as much concern with social change than at the present. Social change is occurring rapidly and with profound effects in, many sectors of social life throughout the world. In most instances where change is not taking place or is taking place only slowly there is often great concern about how to stimulate change.*

*Zaltman & Duncan, 1973.*

**Development** is defined here simply as a **movement** (change) from existing conditions or situations that are no longer considered conducive to societal or group goals and aspirations to those that can meet expected societal or groups goals and aspirations. **Social Change** is defined as **actions** taken to reduce or eliminate the nonconductive or negative side-effects of social and physical development. Therefore, whether one is using the concept of *development* or that of *social change*, the ultimate goal is the same - positive change to enable better conditions of living and of human interrelationships. But 'positive change' is one of the most difficult goals to achieve. The road to such a change is always strewn with social, economic, political, psychological and cultural hurdles. Generation after generation has walked the rocky roads and the stormy seas that lead to positive social change. No wonder Niccolo Machiavelli noted in *The Prince* in 1513 that-

There is nothing  
more difficult to plan,  
more doubtful of success, nor  
more dangerous to manage,  
than the creation of a new order of things.

Change programs and efforts, in addition to problems inherent in change itself, have always faced problems that are not uniquely inherent but have substantial impact on the outcome of change endeavors. Unless these problems, referred to here as *hurdles* are recognized and guarded against, no change effort can be successfully executed, and no executed change plan can endure for long.

The first fundamental hurdles to cross in the race to positive social change are those related to *misfit of*, and *resistance to*, the advocated change. In other words, the first concerns of the development communicator or social change agent are –

- (a) how to ensure that the new order of things advocated its operational planning and its implementation area 'good fit' in the target social system; and
- (b) how to make this 'goodness of fit' find expression in as little a resistance as possible to the new order of the advocated change.

To meet these requirements, the development (social change) communicator must first *know* the target social system, that is, have substantial and relevant knowledge of the socio-cultural contexts of the people and of their physical environment. In addition, it is imperative that he/she should be sufficiently knowledgeable of those factors that enhance social change and development, as well as of the many areas of possible resistance to any attempts at creating new social order or changing existing order of things to which people have already become familiar. The issue of *knowing the audience or the target social system* is fully discussed in Chapter 7. Here, we will discuss those factors that enhance social change and development efforts, and those that are capable of disabling or derailing such efforts.

### **Enhancing Characteristics**

There are a number of fundamental criteria that any advocated new order must meet before it can be considered a "good fit" in a target social system. These criteria, called Dimensions of Social Change by Zaltman & Duncan (1973: p. 13), and Characteristics of Innovation by Rogers (1971: p. 15) constitute the enhancing characteristics for and of social change. We have slightly modified these fundamental criteria, changing what some of them were called, and examined them in some

details in the light of theoretical and practical evidence. The following are considered the most important of these characteristics.

1. **Relative Advantage:** This goes beyond mere *comparative* advantage which is the apparently advantageous benefit of an advocated change over the old order of things. Relative advantage concerns the difference in benefits in relation to how well that benefit fits into the target social system. It is not as much concerned with 'face-value' differences as it is with substantive 'social-value' differences. It emphasizes quality and relevance of benefits over mere numerical or quantifiable differences. A difference may be small or even non-existent; but if the new order, that is, the advocated change, serves the cause of, for example, social justice, fair play and equality or equity, it could be considered relatively advantageous. This was what happened in the Philippines in the 1970s when, in spite of its economic disadvantage to the nation, land redistribution to the peasantry was carried out, because the action served a more substantive social value cause. Relative advantage is the single most important motivating factor in social change and development. Without it, nothing else could significantly matter, even though its presence does not mean automatic acceptance by the target social system of a proposed change. If, in the context of the target social system, a proposed change does not offer better substantive and clear opportunity than the existing order, the target group may not see any reason to change. But if, as seen by the people, the advocated change has the potential of positively and significantly impacting on the target social system, not only will the people accept, they would also be easily induced to be involved in and committed to the efforts directed at bringing about the change.

It is not that comparative advantage is not important in inducing acceptance of social change proposals by target social systems. It is important, and sometimes, it is the only advantage that needs to be examined. But in many cases, comparative advantage is just the 'tip of the iceberg'. Higher incomes may be good, but in the context of a target social system, preventing destructive status-symbol consumptive behavior may be better. Parks and play-grounds may be useful social amenities, but could, under the socio-cultural conditions of certain type of target social systems, become arenas for rapes, drugs and child abuse. Concerted efforts to make a nation very powerful may be advantageous in terms of national status and international prestige, but could, as examples from a good many developing countries have shown, lead to diverting national resources from basic human needs to arms and ammunition. Relatively speaking therefore, it is more advantageous to

use the resources to meet basic human needs than to use them to buildup military strength, in spite of its international glamour. It is precisely because of this apparent possibility of comparative advantage camouflaging its dysfunctional effects that development communicators prefer the concept - *Relative Advantage*. Sometimes, comparative advantage may have no under-currents of socio-cultural or economic dysfunctions. This is when the benefits of the new order are not only higher and better than those of the old order but are also in line with the expectations of the target social system. When this happens, the process of accepting advocated change is made easier.

Here is an example that should help to clarify the difference between comparative and relative advantage in social change and development. In the United States of America, a Municipal Council in Texas, gave the owners of a shopping mall the permission to buy up and demolish adjacent houses around the mall, so that they could carry out an expansion of the mall. The mall owners were told and agreed to pay each landlord whose house was to be demolished 20% Over and above the market price of their houses. The landlords rejected the offer and protested against being forced to sell their houses. In spite of the angry protests of the affected landlords most of who have lived in these houses for decades, the Council did not rescind its decision. The houses were 'forcibly bought and bulldozed'. The Council explained away its action in terms of financial and economic improvement of the area (comparative advantage) which the landlords did not dispute. But they (the landlords) saw a higher value and benefit in being allowed to remain in their cultural and social roots and in not destroying the emotional attachment they had to their houses. In terms of their welfare and family prestige, keeping their houses and avoiding disruption of their lives (even though would rob them of higher financial and/or economic gains) were seen to be of a relatively higher value/advantage than the extra 20% of the value of their houses.

**2. Compatibility:** This is the degree to which the advocated new order of things is consistent with the needs and aspirations of the target social system in particular, and with its socio-cultural contexts in general. This is the one characteristic that most emphasizes *goodness of fit*. "Consistency" here does not mean "sheepishly or blindly going along" with existing order of things, which is an antithesis of the concept of change. It means, instead, providing alternatives that are valid within the system - alternatives that speak to the **needs** and not just the *wants* of the people. This could mean changing an existing value because of its adverse effects; teaching a new way of doing things without which advancement in that aspect of the people's life would be impossible; restructuring old and non-facilitating political relationships that subtly but firmly enslaves the people; or eliminating

an anti-social behavior pattern that is giving the social system a bad image before the world. All these, though not compatible with existing order of things, are compatible with the deeper values of beneficial social order, productive education, and good government.

When development communicators speak of *compatibility*, they mean facilitating the creation of socio-cultural, economic and political conditions that meet the people's *needs* whether or not such conditions also meet the people's *wants*. For example, in 1977 in Nigeria, a farming community to which this author was sent to work as a development agent asked the government for a matching-grant to build a Town Hall. But there was no motorable road to this village - a farming community -that experiences great difficulty in getting its products to the market that was ten miles away. Obviously, what this community needed (as they were led to recognize) was a road; but what they wanted was a town hall. Having a road that could facilitate transporting their farm products to the market was no doubt more compatible to this community than building a town hall. But this community, like most others, was not able to recognize its real needs. One of the most frequently encountered problem in social change endeavors is the inability of most communities and target social systems to differentiate between their needs and their wants. While *wants* are not to be discarded or ignored completely, it is *needs* that constitute the main objective of compatibility.

What all this boils down to is that compatibility in social change always calls for consistency with fundamental or basic values and needs, not necessarily with secondary or peripheral values and wants. In fact, the very idea of change is incompatible with existing order of things, but not necessarily with fundamental values and needs. The demands of a social change project may be incompatible with a people's right to smoke, but provide an opportunity for strengthening the fundamental value of living a healthy life and the need for breathing clean air.

Because other motorists have a right to safe high-way (Individual Freedom), my right to drive as I like (personal Freedom) is curbed by life-saving regulations. Development communication is directed at helping target groups and individuals understand and accept the rationale behind the emphasis on needs as against wants and therefore to appreciate the role of *compatibility* in social change.

**3. Trialability:** This is the extent to which an advocated change project can be subjected to trial efforts or implemented in manageable and reasonable bits. Advocated changes or development projects that

can be tried out first before full implementation are known to have stronger appeal to target groups than those that cannot. One of the reasons why vasectomy has not been a very viable tool for birth control is the chord of finality which it strikes in people's mind. Even though it is not castration (which has had even less success in birth control efforts) vasectomy is strongly associated with irreversibility. But when, for example, a new 'improved' seed is introduced to farmers, there usually is no flat rejection of it, even though there is also usually no exuberant acceptance. It is usually accepted with caution, until it has been tried out. The possibility of trial saves the seed from being rejected outright and gives the advocated change a chance of being accepted and implemented.

When trialability is ignored where it is possible to use it, the outcome could be disastrous. In the early 1960's in the Delta (then Bendel) State of Nigeria, a new brand of fertilizer was introduced to improve on the production of yam tubas. Older farmers, with the natural suspicion that usually surrounds any new idea in a heavily culture-conscious social system, accepted the fertilizer with suspicion; they applied it to a very small and insignificant portions of their farmlands. Younger farmers with little experience and a desire to buy into anything new and modern, applied the fertilizer wholesale to their farms. The result was catastrophic; yam tuba production from the lands to which the fertilizer was applied was a complete failure. While production on the farmlands on which the older farmers did not apply the fertilizer remain constant (with tubas 9"- 18" in length, and 12"- 21" in circumference), production on the portion of their farmland on which they had applied the fertilizer was almost zero (with tubas 3"- 6", and 6"- 9"). Some of the yam stems actually produced no tubas whatsoever. What happened on a very limited scale to the older farmers happened on a wholesale scale to the younger farmers. Trialability saved the older farmers from loss of revenue; its absence (neglect) caused the younger farmers a whole year (and even more) of farm-produce revenue.

Trialability does not only removes the fear of uncertainty or the fear of large scale failure; it, in fact, prevents possible disasters in social change endeavors. In addition, it tends to reassure target groups that they have the opportunity to revert back to the old order if the trial proves that the advocated change would not succeed within the social system. Success of the trial would help to build up the people's confidence in both the project and the development communicator, and therefore serves as a bulwark against rejection. Even a failure does not

always indicate that the advocated change is untenable within the social system. Often, such a failure of the trial helps point out deficiencies in both the advocated change and its plan of implementation. Thus, rather than lead to the rejection of a new order of things or action, a trial that fails to prove an advocated change as 'fit and proper' for a target social system, helps to improve the change efforts. It usually instigates a reexamination of the proposed change and of its plan of implementation with a view to restructuring them to fit the socio-cultural contexts of the target social system, and the deeper values, needs and aspirations of its people. Trialability is a characteristic that provides very strong impetus for implementing social change or development projects for, more often than not, trials - even when they are not completely successful - create learning opportunities. As a result, trials that do not meet expectation are generally followed by a critical evaluation and restructuring of the social change plan leading eventually to full-scale implementation.

**4. Simplification:** This is what Zaltman & Duncan (p. 14) and Rogers (p. 230) have called *Complexity*. This characteristic is directed at ensuring that there is no complexity involved in understanding the demands of an advocated change, and in the process of implementing such demands. If what the change proposal entails is difficult for the target social system to understand, the people may not be easily persuaded. In addition, if the target social system understands the expectations, but foresees what seems to be insurmountable difficulties, it would not be too eager to initiate the process of implementing the advocated change. In other words, both the level of comprehension necessary for the target social system to understand the change proposal, and the level of knowledge that is necessary for the proposal to succeed must not be too high above the capacities of the target social system. Otherwise, the advocated change would face rejection based, not purely on its merits, but on the disparities between the people's capacities and what it would take to successfully implement the change. "The complexity of an innovation (development project) as perceived by members of a social system, is negatively related to its rate of adoption" (Roger, 1983: p.,231).

In the early 1980's, the World Health Organization carried out a development campaign aimed at eradicating guinea-worms from the Abakaliki area of Eastern Nigeria. The major thrust of the campaign was to 'convince' the people in that social system to boil their drinking water before use. The campaign did not succeed, not because the people



did not listen to the messages or did not understand what they heard. No, the representatives of the people were fully involved in the discussions on the devastating effects of the disease, on why and how to combat the disease, and in the construction of the development messages. The campaign failed because of the complexity of the process involved in boiling and filtering water before drinking, and because of the unnatural taste of boiled water for which the people had no solution.

Simplification demands appropriateness in the structure (content and relationships) and procedure (operational strategy) of the advocated change in relation to the level of the target social system's capacities. The structure and the procedure for the implementation of any social change or development project must be at the identified level of intellectual capacity, comprehension, skills, and abilities of the target social system, otherwise motivation and commitment would not be forthcoming from the people. Problems with simplification is an obvious indication that there is a crying need for information and education in the target social system. These, therefore, should be the first development or social change task to be carried out. Often, the demands of simplification unwittingly help point up problematic antecedent problems that must be dealt with before a particular social change project can succeed. Therefore, not only is this characteristic useful in itself; it is also very significant in helping to expose initial and usually 'hidden' hurdles that make the scaling of conspicuous and targeted hurdles impossible. For example, to be able to teach literacy successfully, an instructor needs first to learn how to instruct at a level that is comfortable for the illiterate student!

**5. Communicability:** This characteristic is concerned with the degree to which it is easy to disseminate and discuss the facts of a social change project. If people *are* bashful of, or *are* constrained by cultural demands from, open and free discussion of the issues involved in a change program, then it is not likely that such a change would come about easily. It is discussion that helps create greater knowledge and understanding of a change project. And it is such knowledge and understanding which help elicit acceptance and commitment. If the subject of a social change project is one that people *are* not willing to openly talk about or discuss either because of cultural demands or social taboos, it usually faces problems of understanding and acceptance. The problems that birth-control campaigns have faced in most developing countries derive from the communication inhibitions created by the

culture and social structure. For example, in high context cultures, such as those which obtains in most, if not all, developing societies, communicability is almost always a problem. It is not taken for granted, for in such communities, *who says what to whom when and how*, is regulated by the culture and sustained by the social structure. Unless those at the pinnacle of the social structure declare a topic suitable for open discussion, no one would freely disseminate information on the topic or discuss it openly.

In order to build communicability into a change program that is constrained by culture or social inhibition, the development communicator must first deal with the restraining hurdles, creating a conducive atmosphere for open discussions and dialogue that would enable the scales to "fall off" the people's eyes. Then he must find relevant and alternative ways of circumventing the constraints. This means that dealing with the constraints must replace the original change project in urgency, for unless the constraints *are* removed or circumvented, the change will almost certainly fail to take off. Sometime, there may be no cultural restrictions on disseminating information on a topic or discussing it in groups or public, but strong social inhibitions may prevent any serious sharing of ideas on the topic. People may jokingly refer to the issues related to the social change topic, but will feel obliged not to talk about them seriously for fear of ridicule or social isolation. For example, in many African communities, men and women do talk about birth control, but mostly as something that others, and not they, do. And when the conversation shifts to getting condoms and submitting to surgical contraception, the topic is either quickly changed or the participants start leaving unceremoniously. But topics like the education of children or clean and safe neighborhoods, which are openly discussed and for which many people are willing to give their time and energy, have made tremendous progress in many societies. The easier it is to talk about different aspect of a social change topic/issue, the easier it will be for the people to understand its ramifications and to make *informed* decision about accepting or rejecting it.

The other side of communicability is what Rogers (1983: 16) has called **Observability**. It is concerned with the degree to which the results of a social change or development project can be seen or observed by others. Observability requires that there should be as little hindrance or difficulty as possible in letting the outcome of social change or development projects be seen by or made known to others. The outcome should be such that it can be easily observed. This

characteristic produces what has been called *radiation effect* (Moemeka, 1987), making it possible for more people within and outside the target social system where the project was successfully completed, to observe the outcome and use it as a guiding light towards meeting the demands of a proposed or an ongoing new project. Radiation Effect holds that if the result of a social change project is positive, and if such result can be easily observed, then, if other conditions are met, more people would implement the demands of that project.

Observability and radiation effect also derive positive impact from projects that were either not successfully implemented or did not meet the expectations of the target social system. Carefully observing the unsuccessful outcome of a project and learning from its mistakes, gives a development communicator and his/her target social system a unique opportunity for knowing *how not to do it*. Radiation effect, therefore, is about spreading the implementation of the outcome of successful projects as it is about spreading but discouraging the implementation of the outcome of unsuccessful projects. A 1975 Mexican example will help illustrate both the impact of observability on, and the importance of relevant and development-boosting communication, in the development process.

Contemplating a US\$149 million development program, Mexican planners were faced with a major challenge: *To avoid the bitter and wasteful experiences of an agro-industrial project carried out in the 1960s, which drained 83,000 hectares, built new villages, schools, roads and medical centers, and yet met with serious resistance from local residents.* The project planners were determined to do better. They initiated an interactional communication process with villagers. Video was used to record the views of people and then played back during community discussions. A genuine dialogue between planners and rural communities resulted in a program of Integrated Rural Development. At every stage of the project - planning, facilitating people's participation, training and evaluation - communication played a decisive role. The development project carried out in an area of 500,000 hectares, increased the income of 3,500 farming families by fifty percent, and trained over 500 development professionals in communication methods. The economic rate of return was 7.2 percent higher than originally planned. (Connections, 1995: p. 10).

These enhancing characteristics are individually important in any development or social change program. It is not that they are each (with the possible exception of Relative Advantage) absolutely indispensable. But ignoring any of them when considering how to

ensure a target social system's motivation and commitment may constitute a serious handicap to success. It is also important to note that, although the characteristics have been recognized as objective criteria that enhance the acceptance of, and willingness to be committed to, development projects, the target social system may not perceive them as such. Therefore, the critical factor in their utility is the people's perception. Unless the target social system perceives each of the characteristics as enhancing, they will not have the impact described above. The closer the perception of the majority of the target social system members is to the objective facts of the characteristics, the greater the impact which the characteristics would have on the fate of the change advocated for that social system. It follows, therefore, that apart from ensuring the presence of the characteristics in the conception, planning and implementation of advocated change projects, there is the very important task of creating the communication environment in which the people can positively perceive the characteristics as enhancing.

### **Hindering Characteristics**

On the other side of the coin of social change are those factors which, by their very nature, tend to always work against the introduction of new ideas or the implementation of new programs. One such factor is the centrality of beliefs related to the advocated change. Rokeach (1968) has pointed out that the more central a belief, that is, the more it is functionally connected or related to other beliefs and the more strongly it is held, the greater the likelihood of it being a source of resistance when advocated change is incompatible with it. In addition, there are few, if any, changes that have been introduced and implemented without any voices of dissent. Because change involves the alteration of the status quo, it always faces resistance - mild or strong. Whether people will mildly or strongly resist change is, first and foremost, influenced by their world view or their articulation of social reality.

Those who see reality as a 'fixed entity' that cannot be changed (Covering Laws), and therefore should not be 'disturbed' are almost always opposed to any alteration of the status quo. They do not like "to rock the boat"; change does not sit well with them, and they always stoutly resist any efforts directed at reallocating more power to the underprivileged. Those who see reality as 'individually determined' or created (Interpretive Rules), based on predispositions, are less closed-minded to change, but do exhibit very selfish perspective. They would

argue in favor of advocated change but only if the expected outcome of the change contains ingredients of personal gains. If the change outcome is tending only towards a global (community) benefit, with very little specific personal gain, they would not be too excited about it, and certainly would not feel obliged to participate. To this group of people, the extent of the benefit of the project to the community is of little concern. They would rather use their time and energy in pursuing personal goals than spend them on community goals. If they are well-to-do, (and majority of them usually are) their resistance is even stronger, because they would resent reallocation of power and resources to those in need.

Those who believe that no single factor can fully explain reality, that is, that what is *real* or *good* or *true* is usually the result of the unique combination of interdependent variables (Open Systems) are most open to change. They generally take a retrospective look back, a circumspensive look around, an introspective look into, and a prospective look forward, at the social situation vis-a-vis the advocated change before making up their mind. For them, no change proposal is good or bad on its own; whether a change effort will benefit the community and therefore should deserve consideration, would depend on the relationship of that change proposal to the prevailing socio-cultural realities of the community. When those in this group are in the majority and/or have enough power, they are able to direct the flow and rate of change in their community. Their suggestions and exhortations are mostly objectively guided, and are not based on selfish or irrational views.

It is a very necessary duty of the development communicator to imaginatively harness these different world-views to advantage - openly encouraging the open-minded, re-educatively handling the closed-minded, and persuasively changing the minds of the selfish. This is no easy task. But if any change effort must succeed, it must begin on a solid base of community commitment. While divergence of views is not necessarily a bad thing, it can, if not handled creatively, put a stop to a change program before it even begins. In order for the development communicator or change agent to imaginatively harness divergence of opinions on a development project for a target social system, the development communicator **must know** that social system well enough to be able to identify the opinion leaders among the different divergent groups. No development communicator can easily identify who, in the target social system, can sway opinions one way or the

other, without adequate knowledge of the socio-cultural realities and interaction patterns of that target social system.

The open systems group is generally the very desire of any development communicator or social change agent. It is this group that would seem to face change proposals and situations intelligently, making objective and non-biased decisions. But even for this group, unanimity is never a given. It is not that those in this group do not ever resist change; they sometimes do, especially when the change advocated is seen by them as irrelevant in the target social system. At other times, some members of this group may resist change, even in the face of strong pressure to alter the status quo. But such resistance is caused by a number of factors that derive from the socio-cultural and environmental realities of the target social system. Zaltman and Duncan (1977: p. 66) identified four broad areas from which such resistance can emanate. Collectively called *Barriers to Change*, they are Cultural, Social, Organizational, and Psychological. Each broad area is made up of a number of resistance factors that are generally rationalized within the context of individual social systems.

#### (a) Cultural Barriers

These are hindering factors brought to the surface as a result of lack of correspondence or symmetry or relevance between the culture of the target social system and the demands of an advocated change. The perception of such incongruences could be individual or group based and tend to be rooted, in general, in the prevailing socio-cultural and economic situation, and in particular, in cultural values and beliefs. Socio-cultural and economic barriers find expression in numerous types of resistance which, invariably, have *solid justifications* in the context of the target social system. Okediji (1972: p. 4) lists a few examples of such resistances and their corresponding rationalizations in relation to contraceptives.

### **Types of Resistance**

1. Resistance rooted in ideologies that run counter to population control and beliefs about the negative and positive aspects of specific methods
2. Resistances rooted in traditional heritage of a people.
3. Resistances rooted in social relationships with particular reference to co-wives, attitudes towards birth control believed to be prevalent among peer and reference groups, and normative values pertaining to "moral-immoral" as well as "natural-unnatural" types of behavior.
4. Resistances rooted in economic well-being.
5. Resistances that are anchored in the personality needs of the individual with particular reference to sex-role images and sexual relationships.

### **Corresponding Rationalizations (Examples of)**

1. (a) Elites in developing nations often accuse the highly industrialized nations of an overconcern for controlling their population; they claim it is a "neocolonialist" plot;  
(b) Belief that particular contraceptive methods cause sterility, cancer of vagina, no enjoyment of sexual intercourse;  
(c) Nationalistic ideology rationalizes that uncontrolled population contributes to the strength of a nation, etc.
2. (a) The community, village, family and clan accept large families;  
(b) The desire for male children, especially in patrilineal societies in which descent and property are traced through the male line, etc.
3. (a) In polygynous families co-wives who are favorably oriented to contraceptives are regarded by other co-wives as "prostitutes" who deviate from traditional standards;  
(b) To the extent that reference and psychological groups give social, economic support one cannot afford to deviate from their scales of values, which may disfavor the use of contraceptives as "unnatural behavior", etc.
4. (a) A large number of children is an economic advantage; they are useful in helping a family earn a living; children pay for themselves by working as they grow;  
(b) A large number of children serves as social security for their parents when they grow old (sic), etc
5. (a) A demonstration of virility;  
(b) Manifestation of manliness, etc

6. Resistances that are anchored in health conditions. High fertility represents a functional adjustment to the high mortality existing in such communities.

6. (a) From the point of view of under-developed communities, and (b) from the point of view of particular families, it is necessary raise large numbers of children to guarantee that a few will reach adulthood, etc.

**Cultural Values and Beliefs.** These are a major cause of resistance to change. Lack of work ethic, or competitive spirit, socially sanctioned unwillingness to accept new ideas and lack of socialization in certain key values like upward mobility and achievement motivation as well as strong belief and trust in traditional ways of doing things constitute constant barrier. People who have been brought up in a culture in which working hard for self is suspect, that is, where there is a socially sanctioned aversion to being conspicuously better than one's neighbors, are not likely to understand, and work for, change. On the other hand, those who live in societies in which hard work is not rewarded are not often willing to make the sacrifice that usually accompanies change efforts. As indicated above, those who have high level of trust in traditional ways of doing things will stoutly oppose certain types of change endeavor. The importance of a client's beliefs, values and attitudes within his/her own cultural framework cannot be over-estimated. In their study of health provision, Kreps & Thornton (1992: p.168) confirmed that a person's beliefs influence his/her perceptions of health and illness. Health care providers who ignore these beliefs overlook a powerful source of information and a potent tool for healing because evidence exists (Weston & Brown: 1989, p.80) that knowing a patient's beliefs, values and attitudes can improve the outcome of the interaction. A target social system's values and beliefs can become behavior instruments for resistance when the change advocated or the way it is advocated and the expected outcome are very different from what the people expect or are used to. For example, a change program calling for hard work in a cultural environment in which there is lack of work ethic, a change endeavor calling for family planning in a social system in which children are seen as wealth, or a plan to introduce labor-saving machine into an organization which has been based on labor-intensive operation, will each evoke resistance of some sort - some mild, others strong.

But such resistance almost always fades away in the face of a well-planned and executed development communication effort geared towards reeducation and carried out within the target social system on a dialogical basis. The change-preventing factors mentioned above may



be what the people *want*, but these factors are certainly not what they or their social system *need*. A communication strategy that imaginatively uses existing knowledge to carefully explain the difference and subtly show how the pursuit of *wants* is less fundamentally beneficial than the pursuit of *needs* would go a long way to winning the people over. But as an Igbo (Nigerian) adage wisely points out: *You cannot stay at a distance and physically help someone else to properly put on a necklace*. First, you must have been a familiar face; and second, you must go near enough to make the help possible. You must KNOW the target social system well enough to be able to circumvent those inhibiting socio-cultural factors.

A related social factor that is often not discussed is the unspoken belief in many traditional communities that their situation is a condition from which there is no escape. Known as fatalism, it is a subtle source of resistance to change both for communities and for individuals. For the individual, fatalism can be explained as a post hoc rationalization of behavior; but for societies and communities, it is a strong variable that impedes development and social change. If a people are convinced that what they are and have is all that they can be and own, they are not likely to be open to suggestions about change. A number of studies in the United States in the 1970s, using the Rotter Internal/External Tests which measures the degree to which a person feels he/she has control over those things that influence his/her behavior proved that fatalism is an important, albeit inhibiting, variable in social change. In one study, Zaltman (1974) found a positive relationship between the degrees of felt control and levels of innovativeness in family planning; *the lower the feeling of control, the less innovative the person is*.

**Cultural Ethnocentrism:** In social change, ethnocentrism - the ascription of superior qualities to things from one's culture - is a cultural 'sin' that is generally committed by both change agents and change recipients. But it is more often associated with change agents. Its major cause, of course, is differences in cultural background between the development communicator or change agent and the target social system. These differences which may be cultural, economic, political, social or intellectual often create very non-conducive attitudes and behavior, sometimes, unintentionally. However, whether intended or not, the impact of such differences can lead to, unless taken care of early, a variety of disabling situations.-

a feeling of superiority, especially on the part of the development agent

a superiority-complex that could 'push' the agent to want to lead from the front, that is, assume a *know-better-than-thou* attitude, instead of leading from behind, that is,

provide the necessary cues and information that would facilitate the people's understanding and decision-making process, boost their sense of self-worth, build up their motivation and increase their desire to be fully involved;

a target social system that resents the development agent simply because he/she is not of their own 'kind', and therefore perceives the advocated change as an imposition from the outside.

Such attitudes and behavior are, of course, the result of two underlying factors - lack of knowledge of the target social system by the development agent, and non-participation by the target social system in the change endeavor. They manifest when the development agent fails to *learn from the people*, and also fails to create opportunities for members of the target social system to be physically and actively involved in the conceptualization of, discussion, planning and execution of the advocated change. There can be reluctance on the part of target social systems to adopt a change they helped to formulate if they were not adequately involved in defining the problem to which the change is addressed. The tendency for development agents to be satisfied with passive or vicarious participation (Moemeka, 1987) of the client system often leaves differences in cultural perspectives between the agent and the target social system largely unresolved with adverse attendant consequences. Many such unresolved differences which a 'distant' development agent may not be aware of, have been known to create differing underlying perceptions about the real nature of development problems, and about how they can best be solved. Sometimes they do cause strong resistance to otherwise ostensibly advantageous change projects.

Closely associated with cultural ethnocentrism is Cultural Pride which manifests itself when the target social system sees the way a new order is being introduced as *putting down* of its long-cherished beliefs and values. This happens when the development or change agent

focuses total attention on pointing out the disadvantages of existing order of things, emphasizing the superiority of the new order - the advocated change - over the old. Such an approach by a development agent is like driving the people of the target social system against a stone wall from where they eventually turn round to fight - to defend their cultural heritage. This was starkly brought home in 1994 (Connections, 1995: p.2) to a government veterinarian in Benin Republic, who was sent to help improve life-stock rearing in Parakou village. He began his assignment with an aristocratic, arrogant, ethnocentric, know-better-than-thou, attitude - condemning existing practices and telling the people what to do. The villagers *heard* him but did not *listen*; they rejected his advice, in spite of the fact that their sheep and goats were sickly and thin, and in spite of the fact that the advice he gave them was the right one.

A burning desire to succeed forced the veterinarian to change his approach. Instead of condemning existing practices, he spent time studying them to identify their strengths and weaknesses; instead of throwing information at the people, he learned to communicate with them; instead of talking *at* the people, he learned to talk *with* them; and instead of pushing solutions, he learned to listen to the people views, explanations and opinions. Before long, the villagers began to implement the better practices that he suggested - the same practices which he unsuccessfully tried to ram down the people's throats initially.

Whether or not a development agent means it, non-involvement of target social systems in the development process is always interpreted by target groups as superiority complex on the part of the development agent. It is generally seen as denigration of the people's abilities and potentials and creates resentment which often leads to seeing the advocated change as an imposition from the outside. The appropriate approach - one which completely neutralizes cultural pride - is to involve the people, learn from them and give 'due' credit to the old order of things (after all, it has all along, somehow, sustained the people) while carefully and patiently showing how it no longer is adequate to meet ensuing expectations which the new order of things - the advocated change - can meet adequately.

#### **(b) Social Barriers**

Group Norms (Social Interrelationships), Group Solidarity and Fear of Isolation and Group Conflicts are all examples of social barriers that frequently cause resistance to change or development. These factors

which ordinarily are positive elements of human interrelationships for any society often become impediments if new ideas and change efforts are perceived as threatening their existence or their acceptance as sanctioned societal standards of behavior and community relationships.

(i) *Social or group norms* are behavior guides that delineate or define what society expects from individuals and what individuals expect from one another. They are "instruments" of social stability used to consciously and subconsciously 'construct' and maintain the conduct of any social system. Therefore, when an advocated change project is perceived as having the capacity of adverse impact on existing norms and social relationships within the target social system or between it and other social systems, that social change project would face resistance. One of the strongest factors that has worked against the social acceptance of western-style *freedom* in many developing societies is its tendency to radically change existing traditional social order in ways that affect society more adversely than beneficially. For example, *freedom* as practiced in western societies leads to reckless behavior and carefree attitude in many adolescent youths; to disregard of authority and ridicule of parental control, and it inevitably leads to what is generally described as "individualism", but which, in reality, is "personalism" or morbid selfishness. Even though this type of freedom under which the individual takes precedence over the community, builds up self-reliance, it destroys community spirit which, in traditional communalistic societies, is valued more than self-reliance.

The use of condoms, to take another example, has met with strong opposition in many developing societies. The opposition is, in fact, not against condom, but against what condom is socially associated with - adultery and prostitution. There is a strong norm against both in many developing societies; and even in societies in which a "blind eye" is turned against them, adultery and prostitution are still considered as socially perverse. In general, no one needs a condom before having sexual relation with a legal partner. Only those who are afraid of contacting sexual diseases or of the responsibilities for an illegitimate child need a condom for sexual intercourse. These are those who engage in adultery and/or prostitution - two anti-social sexual behaviors that have helped in no small measure to give the condom a bad social image as an instrument that promotes moral decadence and 'inflicts' unfaithfulness in marriage, and consequently divorce, on society. This is why there is, in many developing countries, a strong public opposition to the sale or distribution of condoms. This is not to say

that condom is never used by anyone in such societies. Those who use it, do so very stealthily - an indication of the strength of social sanction.

(ii) *Group solidarity* finds expression in unity of purpose adherence to established modes of carrying out mutual or reciprocal obligations. Any changes affecting the group must be changes strength the group and advance its purposes and principles. stronger the solidarity of a group, the greater the chances that the group as a whole or individuals within it would resist any new order of things that threatens that solidarity, even when there are obvious advantages of the new order of things. In this case, the unity and survival of the group is treated as a priority over any other possible benefit. In a more specific way, advocated social change projects can be adversely affected by the strength of the power structure within the target social system. This is particularly forceful with regards to those who exercise *referent* and/or *reward* power. If the group or groups to which the social system look up for guidance or depend upon for socio-economic and political well-being are not in favor of a change endeavor (usually because of its possible adverse effect on the group), the group or groups would tend to resist the change effort, even when the social system would have benefited from the change.. In general, when those who have power are threatened by a possible change, they tend to use their power to sway opinions to their side, thus creating in the target social system the need to resist the change. "The more a reference group is threatens by a possible change, the more active it will be in expressing its opposition to the target or client group" (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977: p. 73).

Strong in-group solidarity can be as much an advantage as it can be a disadvantage. When there is unanimity of purpose in favor of a development program, or when leaders of the group are in support of any project, in-group solidarity functions as an advantage, for the group would act in unison or in deference to its leaders. This does not obtain frequently, but when it does, the task of implementing social change runs smoothly. But it must be remembered that unanimity of purpose and obedience to group leaders, can equally work against a development or social change program. Reference has already been made to this type of disarming situation. Here it is important to mention one other adverse effect of in-group solidarity. It can be a very strong weapon against 'outsiders'. When a people have leaders that they trust, when they feel self-sufficient under their leaders, attempts from outside to

change their lives are usually strongly opposed, unless supported by their leaders. But "one who has stayed long enough in a cold pool of water no longer feels the water cold". He/she becomes aware of the coldness of the water only when someone else comes into the pool, feels the 'bitc' of the cold water and complains. Rarely are most communities that have social problems articulately aware of the full ramifications of their problems and rarely do they know completely how to deal with such problems. Infusion of new ideas and knowledge from the outside is almost always necessary even though never sufficient. But if such new ideas and knowledge are stopped from filtering into the community, positive change would become almost impossible.

One of the most conspicuous or obvious barriers to social change or development is *group conflict*. As already mentioned, the unity and survival of their group is usually uppermost in the mind of group members. As a result, members are generally very careful not to do or support anything that could create conflict within the group, or lead to their own isolation from the group, or to the disintegration of the group. This is a consequence of group solidarity. But it is more than that. It also reflects the need to be in a position of power against which opposing group cannot easily prevail. When there is a conflict between or among groups within a community or an organization, the social change supported by one group may be rejected by others. This is when "change or innovation suffers guilt by association" (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977: p. 74). This idea was developed by Frye (1969) who discussed what happens when there is conflict between two anxieties - Conservative Anxiety and Radical Anxiety. Frye describes conservative anxiety as one which makes group members say "*Let's-be-careful-about-losing-what-we've got*"; and radical anxiety as one which makes them say "*l.et's-be-careful-and-clear-about-all-this-stuff-and-have-a-fresh-breeze-blow through*". When holders of each type of anxieties communicate their fears, they usually do so effectively, inadvertently reinforcing the anxieties of the other group. This makes an objective examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed change very difficult; and its acceptance by both sides, near-impossible.

### (c) Organizational Barriers

The concept 'organization' is used here more as a verb than as a noun. Even though it has consequence for commercial, industrial, financial and other profit-making institutions, its relevance here is structural rather than institutional. This means that we are concerned

here not mainly with organizations as legal institutions but rather with how an organization is structured for purposes of carrying out the activities necessary for meeting its goals. The question is: How does the executive, administrative, and operative structure of an organization create barriers to change within the organization? Similar question applies to a community or a village or town. How does the governance structure of a village or community adversely affect attempts to cause positive change in the village or community? The organization of a system - industrial, educational or socio-cultural - into levels or layers of authority and responsibility implies the distribution and structuring of power within the system. Such perfectly normal and useful administrative arrangements, however, do create problems when new ideas or shifts from the status-quo are planned. This is usually because change or innovations may be seen as a threat to those whose power or influence would be adversely affected. Such fears of depletion or loss of power or influence rank high among sources of resistance to change.

One of the reasons why literacy and self-awareness programs in rural Africa did not, until recently, succeed well enough was because of the contradiction between what local leaders publicly say should be done, and what they privately wanted done or not done. While they publicly support programs that would improve the physical, mental and socio-economic conditions of the poor, they privately subvert such programs (by action or inaction) for fear that they (the leaders) would lose their privileged positions in the community. Sometimes, opposition to such programs is very overt, but the reasons are the same - the inordinate desire or determination to retain power and protect privileged positions. To take another example, at the Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, United States of America a perfectly profitable (academically and financially) change was stoutly opposed by faculty members, not purely to *maintain* the status-quo, but to **respect** it. Plans for the change were made purportedly without adequate consultation with faculty members (the Senate of the University) as the approved regulation of the university demanded. So even though the change (the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Program to teach Information Design) was academically appropriate and financially profitable (the department would have easily won contracts from industry), it was stoutly (if not vehemently) opposed. Why? Because it was held that the university authorities did not follow the rules. Frustrated by this *difficult-to-understand opposition*, the President of the University canceled the Inter-departmental program plan, and using

one of the unique powers conferred on him as the President of the institution, established a Department of Information Design.

A third example of how organizational structure adversely affects change comes from the same university. A plan to restructure the departmental set up of the university, by realigning academic areas that fit together, and strengthening weak departments was also strongly opposed. During open discussions, the reason given for the opposition was lack of adequate consultation. But privately, and from the tone of protest letters sent to the restructuring committee, the real reason for the opposition was departmental pride or jealousy. This is one of the setbacks of division of labor. When a proposed change affects the span of authority of a division or unit, the change is almost always opposed. Departmental heads did not want any depletion of their power through weakening of faculty strength or reduction of financial allocation. Those departments from which much was to be expunged, felt cheated and cried foul, thus creating inter-departmental competition or jealousy. The opposition to the restructuring was so strong that the plan was shelved. As Schein (1970, p.99) notes: "The fundamental problem of intergroup competition is the conflict of goals and the breakdown of interaction and communication between (the conflicting) groups." Such breakdown always leads to people *talking at*, instead of, *communicating with* one another.

Hierarchy of authority, channels of communication, division of labor, rules and regulations (and, of course, organized labor) are the important components of the structure of organizations. Before any change in any of them or in the structure itself can succeed, there must be sufficient harmony between the demands of the proposed change and the expectations of the different components of the structure. Without this, support for the change may be non-existent altogether or limited. For example, hierarchy of authority is generally jealously guarded in organizations. Any proposed change that would affect existing status differentials and/or cause loss of status by some personnel will almost certainly be resisted by those affected. Division of labor, to take another example, usually creates interunit competition. This produces intergroup conflicts and lessens the level of co-operation, thus making consensus difficult to reach, especially if one group will gain at the expense of the others.

One other factor that has strong impact on organizational barriers to change is the climate for change that exists in the organization. Zaltman & Duncan (p.78) explains: "The notion of climate for change focuses on organizational members' perceptions of the change process.



What does the change mean to them?" Campbell & Converse, (1972) adds two more important questions. "What are their attitudes towards change? Are there differences throughout the organization regarding the climate for change?" If some units in the organization have different climates for change, there would most likely be problems during implementation of the change. Of greater help in understanding the climate for change in organizations are the three important dimensions identified by Duncan (1972: pp. 205-245) - the NEED for change, the OPENNESS to change; and the POTENTIAL for change. The *need for change* focuses on the perception by organizational personnel about the need for change in the organization. If such perception does not exist, it would be difficult for change efforts to succeed. The *openness to change* focuses on the perception of organization personnel about the openness or willingness of departmental personnel to change. If, all other things being equal, departmental authorities are not well disposed to change, then change efforts would not be supported, let alone succeed. The *potential for change* focuses on the perception of organization personnel as to whether or not the organization has the capabilities for dealing with change. Two pertinent questions here are: Has the organization been successful in past change attempts? Is there a commitment to change in the organization? If the answer to any of these questions is in the negative, organizational personnel would most certainly oppose any proposed change in the organization. Resistance is generally greater when the climate for change is low, that is, when all three dimensions of organizational climate are perceived as low in the organization.

Duncan (1972) did not only examine the three dimensions of organizational climate vis-a-vis organizational personnel, he also examined the relationship among the three dimensions vis-a-vis their impact on change and change efforts. He found that the need for change is negatively related to openness to change ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ) and potential for change ( $r = -.57, p < .01$ ). In simple language, this means that the need for change is perceived as great when there is no openness to change, and there is no potential for changing. The more organizational personnel perceive that their organization needs to change before it can meet its goals and objectives and increased demands from its environment, the less they perceive that the organization is willing to change and/or has the potential to change. It goes without saying that if the organization had the potential to change and was always willing to implement necessary change, then all necessary changes, all other things being equal, would have taken place, making it impossible

for organizational personnel to perceive the need for change. This inverse relationship also creates its own problem. Perception of a high need for change can create anxiety in organizational personnel, because such a perception would well-up the feeling that they cannot change anyway, fully aware of the negative impact of the other side of the equation. "They are potentially less able to deal with change in that they perceive that their department is less open to change; there is more skepticism about the success of change efforts; and so forth. As a result, they may be somewhat less likely to try change" (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977: p.79/80).

#### **(d) Psychological Barriers**

These are barriers to social change and development on the part of the individual. They are created by, among others, lack of awareness (selective perception), the need for homeostasis, professional orientation, and low empathy. Also important here but not discussed are the fall-out from ethnocentrism and cultural pride - individual pride, arrogance and unwillingness to acknowledge other's superior quality, knowledge and suggestions and to admit one's own limited abilities; the arrogance of those who are knowledgeable, which quickly turns into the denigration of those who are limited in their knowledge of the issues or problems at hand. All of these lead to building selfish defences which then become more important than the task at hand, leading to concretizing of differences of perception and opinions, and therefore lack of consensus on change plans and efforts.

Selective perception and lack of awareness would seem to be among the strongest barriers to social change and development. When an individual is not aware that there is a problem in the situation, and therefore, is unaware of the need for change, that individual cannot, easily support a change effort directed at the problem of which he/she is unaware. Sometimes, an individual may be aware that there are some significant problems affecting the individual or the group or the community, but is unable to see any solution to the problems. For such an individual, suggestions for tackling the problems (proposals for change) may fall on deaf ears. Earlier on in this chapter we referred to the impact of Covering Laws perspective (that 'reality' is out there to be discovered and adjusted to rather than changed) on the level of resistance to change. Those who hold this perspective are only one step away from being fatalistic; they believe that whatever happens is determined by fate, and the only option open to the individual or to the target social system is 'adjusting to that which fate has determined'.

This is not particularly different from *fatalism* which Rogers (1969, p. 273) defines as *the degree to which an individual perceives a lack of ability to control his/her future*. There can be very few stronger and more debilitating roots of resistance to change than this. It is caused by lack of awareness or most often, by unwillingness to seek 'other' information (selective perception).

Fatalism has often been seen as a social 'disease' of the underdeveloped societies. It has for long been held that the unending underdevelopment of these societies is largely a consequence of fatalism; that they see their situation as a fix entity from which there can be no escape. The truth, however, is that fatalism obtains everywhere - developing or developed societies. For example, when an over-weight eighteen year-old German, or British or American agonizes over the fact that she cannot lay her hands off sugar even though she knows her weight problem is strongly associated with too much sugar, she is yielding to the 'hand of fate' - she is falling prey to the power of fatalism. The same is true of the inner-city dweller who strongly believes that because his grandfather was poor and his father is poor, he cannot get out of the poverty cycle; and the sub-urban nymph who, through indiscriminate sex, has contact gonorrhea many times, but says in utter despair: "I cannot help myself - I must have many men in my life." If these youths were willing to seek and utilize relevant information, they may have seen not only the need for change, but also may have been willing to make the effort to change.

Two other inhibiting factors in social change and development that deserve mention here are people's need to maintain a comfortable level of comfort, and the impact of professional training on how we perceive problems and solutions to those problems. Watson (1971) points to the inherent desire of all organisms to seek a comfortable level of arousal and stimulation (homeostasis), and to try to maintain that state. This is another way of saying that when we are comfortable where we are or with what we have, there is a tendency for us to opt for the status-quo. But change is the very opposite of status-quo. Therefore, unless we are extremely uncomfortable with the existing situation, we are wont to resist change. Change is geared towards the alteration of existing state of affairs whether mental or physical. There are very few, if any, social change and development projects that do not involve a level of arousal and stimulation higher than what is comfortable, especially for the elite of target social systems. It follows, therefore, that change efforts that create discomfort for residents of a target social system, especially for those who have political, referent or coercive

power in the target social system most often, if not always, face resistance from within. Other aspects of homeostasis that can adversely affect social change and development efforts include fear of failure associated with doing something new, and bad experiences with past change efforts.

Commitment to and conformity with the ideals, standards and expectations of professions can be sources of resistance to change. We like to uphold and practice what our profession demands. But a person's professional orientation can affect how that person views a change program, the rationale for such a change and how to achieve its goals. Deviations from the professional expectations of the social change agent or of those responsible for financing the program always meet with some reservations, if not resistance. The difference in perception between the nurse and the social worker on the issue of abortion is common knowledge among social change agents. While nurses are wont to focus on preserving the health of the patients, social workers are more concerned about helping the patients cope with abortion and its ramifications. There is no doubt that both the Nutritionist and the Environmental Hygienist (Sanitation Officer) work for the health and better living of individuals and target social systems. But while the nutritionist would feel comfortable recommending the making of composts that would produce manure for fertilizing the family garden in order to have healthy fruits and vegetables for the family, the environmental hygienist would be appalled to see such composts, associating them with germs and diseases. Is any of them wrong? No. Fruits and vegetables are necessary for good health; so are clean air and environments free of germs. The obvious solution is to reach a compromise, but this is easier said than done. Differences of perception and opinions deriving from professional training can cause very disturbing disagreements that often lead to project abandonment to the disadvantage of needy target social systems. "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers",

### **Resistance - A Blessing In Disguise**

The foregoing discussion on Hindering Factors of social change and development would seem to suggest that resistance to change proposals and plans is not only an endemic problem associated with social change, but is almost always a development obstructor. However, while resistance may be endemic in social change process, its impact

becomes negative only when it is allowed to thrive through lack of coorientation, and lack of empathy, or through jealousy, ignorance and selfishness. From what has been said above, it is clear that resistance can emanate from the social change or development communicator (agent) or from the target social system. But from whatever source it may come, resistance is not necessarily a destructive factor in the social change and development process. In fact, resistance is a healthy phenomenon to the extent that it acts as a smoke detector, drawing attention to issues and problems that would otherwise escape early or any detection, and cause greater problems in the later stages of implementing a development or social change project. The existence of resistance, though at first sight generally uncomfortable, does create opportunities for discussion and for thrashing out differences, and so helps to put change programs on more solid grounds.

This is not saying that resistance cannot act as a hindrance to change efforts. It can, especially if it is very strongly expressed, by the leaders of the target social system, and if it is supported by a majority of the people in the target social system. But, in general, most resistance to social change and development programs, without necessarily meaning to, end up acting as a help rather than a hindrance.

In order to turn resistance into advantage, however, the development communicator must understand the rationale behind the resistance. But he/she most certainly will not be able to do so unless he/she has entered into the socio-cultural contexts of the target social system. In other words, the development (social change) communicator **must know** the target social system well enough before the reasons for any resistance can become known and understood, and before the communicator can be in a position to turn the resistance into "*a blessing in disguise.*"

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