

SECTION – 2

Understanding Resistance to Change

Tell me why

Have you¹ ever tried writing down ‘10 convincing reasons’ (earthly reasons that nobody can punch a hole against!) to each of the following questions? Do not give any worldly reasons or sophisticated justifications. Be rational, reasonable and grounded to the rural reality. Write down 10 reasons that directly connect to a rural villager you are talking to - about sanitation. *If you get a big-enough why, you can always figure out the how.* Here are the questions.

1. Tell me why do you think I should construct and use a toilet?
2. Tell me why do you think I should not waste water / save water?
3. Tell me why do you think children should be trained to develop habits that are hygienic?

We need to do this homework because they [rural people] have one thousand reasons (which have become almost metaphors by now) why they do not need a toilet. Some of their reasons are:

- *But I have been ‘doing it in the open’ for years,*
- *Most of us don’t use toilet, are we all in the hospital, day in and day out, week after week?*
- *Shame?..everybody does that.. I’m not the only one doing it. What shame are you talking about?*
- *We don’t have money; the subsidy is too small*
- *But you give subsidy later. Do you think I have the money to invest so that I get your subsidy later?*

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Here are the questions.

- *The space we have is too small to accommodate a toilet.*
- *The sanitary complex is not at easy access from my house.*
- *I may lose my daily wage for at least a week, constructing this unwanted thing.*
- *You are right, but I DON'T WANT IT.*
- *Oh, maybe, you have been given some target to accomplish.*

It's a question of what one attaches importance to, and the difference in the perceptions of the rural people and the development workers. The bottom line in the reasoning of rural villagers is: I don't attach importance to what you refer to – toilet or hand-washing with soap. I don't attach any value to sanitation because I am habituated to doing it in the open, which is almost part of my true-self. I have never felt ashamed of it because I know I am not the only one doing it in the open. This is 'widespread mass opinion'. Talking about communicating to the masses, the word 'mass' comes with several interesting definitions in the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (Hornby, 2010). It gives an idea, who we are trying to communicate with when we say 'communicating sanitation to the rural massesⁱⁱ'. We are set out communicating with 'the rural masses', not a few progressive farmers; not a few people infected by / living with HIV-AIDS.

Resistance to Change

One daunting question among the development professionals working in the sanitation sector is: *(Enough) awareness has*

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been created in order to make them realise this undesirable open defecation practice – WHY DON'T THEY CHANGE? Unable to find an answer to this question, they end up dismissing the question as 'resistance to change'. They tend to think that rural people generally are hesitant about any new initiative; and are unchanging; or unwilling to change their old ways of doing things. What we, as development practitioners lack is 'self-critical analyses'. The easy solution we have discovered for quite some years now is the three letter *mantra* – I E C (Information, Education, Communication), and to carry it on business as usual. The fact of the matter about IECs is that they have ended up creating awareness and knowledge, but failed to trigger action to the extent desired; as much as they have failed to understand human behaviour and the reasons behind resistance to change.

Understanding Resistance to Change

The reason why they don't change could be because they are afraid of accepting responsibility.

- Lack the desire to change
- Lack the discipline to change
- Lack the belief they can change
- Lack of will to accept the need for change

You are trying to install new habits in their character; and break the habits they lived with for over 20 – 30 years. But they choose to listen to their autosuggestions and go by them. Most of our behaviour is habitual. Habits are a lot stronger than logic and reasoning (Kera, 2011). How often we hear from our colleagues: *'I want to give up smoking, but I am unable to'*. The implication of the statement is: *I am aware of all the reasons why I should give up smoking, but still this*

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habit overpowers me. Their mind is so conditioned and closed that they are not ready to take in any new idea or simply they are not ready to listen at all. There are several negative auto-suggestionsⁱⁱⁱ working in people's minds to offer justification for why they don't care – be it using a toilet or water saving. Habits render one powerless from making right decisions.

The Source of 'Resistance to Change'

To understand 'the source of resistance to change', it is necessary to understand a simple truth about what runs in his/her mind when a rural villager listens to your communication on the importance of sanitation. We are aware that the conscious mind of humans can think. The subconscious mind is not rational/ it acquires a world view and holds it for ready reference. Subconscious mind is the databank that feeds information to the conscious mind to respond.

When listening to you, his conscious mind keeps constantly interacting with his subconscious mind with reference to his autosuggestions. The reference he has in his subconscious mind about sanitation practices is negative (i.e. *I don't need; I have been like this for years; I am poor; the subsidy may not come in full; there is enough open place available etc.*). S/he is partly listening to you, while internally talking to himself, justifying to himself why he does not need a toilet. Subconscious mind is not rational /it's not chosen. It's unconsciously acquired during the course of life. It is getting habituated and to direct one to behave in a manner he has always been behaving. As he grows in age, it gets stronger and becomes rock solid (as 'engraved reference points' at subconscious mind). Thus goes the saying: 'habits die hard'.

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Even at times, when his conscious mind wakes up to say: 'yes, I agree with you', his subconscious mind quickly brings in a justification to satisfy why he should choose to say 'no'. His conscious mind may persistently come up with excellent reasons, but his subconscious mind keeps coming up with even more compelling counter-reasons. That's why when we try to convince such people (especially older people) we often feel like talking to a brick wall. That's the reason it is said: 'catch them young while they are still at school' (*Bal Swachh Bharat*). The challenge in rural sanitation is how to make a villager to consider and ponder over the truth in what you explain about sanitation. How to break his resistance, pushing him to reweigh habits that s/he has lived with for years?

How to deal with resistance?

There are two things to bear in mind here. One is there is no such thing as resistance. There are only inflexible communicators who push at the wrong time and in the wrong direction; and the second thing to remember is 'habits are stronger than reasons and logic'. Habits are hard and they have got engraved as mental-orientation of a person over the years. As you communicate to them, your soft messages are taken to their existing mental-orientation for an appraisal. Chances of bouncing off are high unless your message is flexible-enough for consideration and locally grounded that can stand resolutely at appraisal stage without bouncing back immediately. Most of us think communicating is akin to verbal boxing, where you should win the community groups. A good communicator, instead of opposing someone's views, is flexible and resourceful enough to sense the creation of resistance, finds points of argument, align himself with them,

Sense making is an 'interactive process'. In other words, reality isn't 'out there', rather we create it with others through communication, and negotiation.

and then redirect communication in a way s/he wants to go. *The superior fighter succeeds without violence.* This is called intelligent non-aggressiveness. This very much connects with our Swachh Bharat Mission's idea of presenting the Mahatma as a brand for a big-enough cause.

No resistant people, Only Inflexible Communicators

It is important for us to remember that certain words and phrases create resistance and problems. Good communicators realise this and pay close attention to the words they use and the effect they have on the participants group. The lesson is: there are no resistant people, only inflexible communicators. Just as there are words and phrases that automatically trigger feelings or states of resistance, there are also ways to communicate that keep people involved and open. For example, what would happen if you had a communication tool you could use to communicate exactly how you felt about the issue in question, without compromising your integrity in anyway, and yet you never had to disagree with the person, either? Would that be a fairly powerful tool? Well, here it is. It's called agreement frame. It consists of three phrases you can use in any communication to respect the person you are communicating with, maintain rapport with him, share with him what you feel is true and right, and yet never resist his opinion in any way. Without resistance there is no conflict. Here are the three phrases (Antony Robins, 1986):

“I respect and....”

“I agree and.....”

“I appreciate and....”

In each case, you are doing three things. You're building rapport by entering the other person's world and

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acknowledging his communication rather than ignoring or denigrating it with words like 'but' or 'however' or 'no' or 'you simply don't understand'. You are creating a frame of agreement that bonds you together. And you're opening the door to redirecting something without creating resistance. For instance, someone says to you, "you're absolutely wrong" about something. If you say, "No, I'm not wrong, I am talking sense", are you going to remain in rapport? No. This will lead to intensifying the resistance.

Notice, you don't have to agree with the content of the person's communication. You can always appreciate, respect or agree with someone's feelings (world view) about something. You can appreciate his feelings because if you had lived in the same context, you would have, perhaps, developed the same perception, who knows? When you communicate in this way, the other person feels respected. He feels heard, and has no fight. There is no disagreement, yet new possibilities are also simultaneously introduced for him to consider. There is a Murphy's Law which goes like this: *'If you can't convince, confuse'*. The response to your communication is 'confusion'. Now that you have given different perspectives to him, let him ponder over. S/he is not in the same 'resistant state' where you found him before. S/he is 'confused'. That's another level. That's good enough.

In face-to-face communication (during door-to-door campaigns) family-specific and person-specific communication may have to be designed rather than walking as if a message-sprayer has been tied to your mouth. Self-critical analysis can help. Self-critical monitoring is very

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essential in communication. Critical review of practice is vital to enrich development practice. Without criticality, the experiences of your development practice shall not contribute to the existing knowledge in, and theories of rural development. Development communication must stay to create the desired impact.

Perception & Negativity

Many communication challenges arise because of differing perceptions. The first requirement to stand firmly as a good communicator is not to register a 'negative image' of the poor and criticize them as traditional, old-fashioned and unchanging. Do not get disheartened either. Maybe, they have misplaced priorities. Your perception of things is different from theirs. Your mental orientation is different from theirs. They have been socialized in a different environment - in an environment where defecating in the open is 'absolutely normal'.

The process by which we influence each other's perception through communication and negotiation is in our ability to understand a given society. How we feel about something and what we do about it are dependent upon our perception of it. Many times, by enabling people change these habitual patterns, we can help them create greater choices for them. This is called reframing. Our approach to reframing and how we facilitate perceptual alignment matters. We shall see more about this in the sections that follow, with real-life examples. Now let us take note of some simple-to-use behavioural tips.

In face-to-face
communication
(Inter-personal
communication)
never talk as if a
message-sprayer
has been tied to
your mouth.
Listen and try to
identify the
mental block. It
helps.

Tit-bits

You can reach your outcome more efficiently by gently aligning and then leading rather than by pushing violently. Most of us tend to go to a sanitation campaign holding a view that that we are right, and they [the villagers] are wrong. That simply means one side has a monopoly on truth, and the other resides in utter darkness. This must be avoided. Learn to listen with open mind; you shall notice your perspective expand. Try to understand the mental block, and what causes it. Address it with appropriate behavioural influence tactics.

Second way to solve problems is to redefine them – to find a way to agree rather than to disagree. We've all found ourselves in stuck states, in which we recycle our own mental dirty dishwasher. We are used to constantly making statements like: '*poor sanitation causes a variety of diseases*', and we keep repeating it wherever we go. It's like a record stuck in a scratched groove, playing the same tired refrain over and over again. The way to get the record unstuck is to give the needle a nudge or pick it up and put in somewhere else. The way to change a stuck state is the same way: we need to interrupt the pattern – the tired old refrain – and start anew. Maybe, we can talk about privacy, comfort, and so on.

Confusion, as mentioned already, is one of the greatest ways to interrupt patterns / behaviour. People fall into certain habits or patterns because it is their way of using their resources in the best way they know. It's not easy to convince them, but providing them with several perspectives to ponder over, it is possible to confuse them. Confusion makes people

uncomfortable. And that's the first step to make them buy a new idea.

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NOTES

ⁱ This is a guide book with tips and techniques for practical application by Health Workers or Health Communicators in the field. Hence, the expression **you** and **your** refer to the Health Communicators, and the third person **they** and **them** refer to the villagers who are generally considered hesitant about constructing a toilet and using one. The first person 'I' refers to rural people as if s/he refers to herself/himself.

ⁱⁱ The word 'mass' means *a large amount of something that does not have a definite shape or form*; another meaning is *a large number of people or things grouped in a confused way*; yet another meaning is *the ordinary people in society who are not leaders or who are considered to be not very well educated*; they are the most or they are *the majority*.

ⁱⁱⁱ The use of the adjective 'negative' as prefix to auto-suggestion in itself is a perception. In the perception of a health and sanitation worker it is 'negative' because he has been trained to perceive it as negative from a given development perspective. It has been scientifically proved that population defecating in open are at-risk. They are referred to as 'at-risk population'. From this perspective, our use of the expression 'negative auto-suggestion' may be justified, although people defecating in the open may argue against our use of the expression 'negative auto-suggestion'.