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Book review: Involving People Evolving Behaviour

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McKEE, Neill, et.al. (eds) (2000)
Involving People Evolving Behaviour, Southbound Press,
Penang.

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Exploring the gap between knowledge and behavior has always been a central theoretical problem for communication planners and implementers involved in behavioral change. More often than not people are knowledgeable but their behavior shows otherwise. An archetypical example is smoking -- smokers know the negative effects of smoking but their knowledge contradict their behavior.

Sometimes behavior is within individual control but most issues in the developing countries require social support and structural changes before individual action can succeed. For example in agriculture, farmers who do not adhere to planting schedule, probably are unable to do so because of the lack of manpower, credit shortage to purchase planting inputs or lack of water due to land terrain.

Hence, the behavioural development and change model proposed by "*Involving People Evolving Behavior*" appropriately locate the individual within the larger sociocultural, political, economic and organizational environment. The model is closely related to many contemporary models especially in the area of health promotion (Glanz & Rimer, 1995; McLeroy, et al; 1988; Green & Kreuter, 1991). According to the recommended model, behavior change needs multi- level integrated factors, including timely and relevant information, appropriate cues and motivations, life skills and supportive environment. These essential elements make up the sequence of the book.

Chapter One focuses on various theories and frameworks of behavior change, such as Health Belief Model (HBM), Theory of Reasoned Action and Stages of Growth Theory which are widely used for smoking cessation programmes. Other models discussed include Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, Social Network, Diffusion of Innovation and Community Empowerment. The challenge is when to use the appropriate theory or framework. Problems that affect the lower socio-economic group tend to be multifaceted and interrelated such as ill health, poor diet, unhygienic living conditions, high infant mortality, high maternal mortality, physical abuse, toxin contamination, etc. More case studies on the use of relevant theory

or theories for multilevel and complex issues would enhance the contribution of this chapter as planners need to know when and where to intervene and what type of intervention is likely to be successful.

Chapter Two, entitled "*The age of information*" reviews how principal (sic) development theories assigned different roles and degrees of importance to information. The author's conclusion, as widely known, is that information-based approaches grounded in Modernization Theory is elitist, unidirectional and outdated. It seems to me that the discussion of development theories at the conceptual level in this chapter is somewhat disruptive and at odds with the rest of the chapters which focus on the practical level of programme design and implementation.

In Chapter Three, Neil McKee presents ways of motivating people, either through message positioning, interpersonal channels or edutainment. McKee also recommends the use of social mobilization approach as "partnership" between government and non-governmental organizations to increase people's participation. However the crucial questions of who determines and what degree of freedom does participating organization have are not defined in this chapter.

Communicators will find Chapter Four most useful as the authors have clearly identified and discussed "life skills" needed by young people to handle conflicts and everyday problems. The authors emphasized participatory learning as what is important is the learning process rather than the content itself. Chapter Five wraps up the behavioral development and change model by presenting a comprehensive list of external factors that constrain or support individual behavior choice.

On the whole, the book has presented a useful model for behavior change that takes an ecological rather than a narrow individualistic approach, especially in developing countries where the family and community take precedence over the individual needs. All the chapters are supported by adequate and relevant references which will undoubtedly be of benefit to readers. ■