PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR UNFREEZING ATTITUDES — INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES*

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In hierdie tyd van détente is beter gesindhede tussen rassegroepe in Suid-Afrika van die allergrootste belang, ook vir die bestuurswese. Dr. Dave Limerick ontleed in hierdie artikel enkele praktiese strategieë hoe om beter gesindhede te bewerkstellig en kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat dit nou tyd geword het dat kognitiewe, normatiewe en situasie-gebonde strategieë gebruik word ter ondersteuning van beter verhoudinge tussen die wit en swart bevolkingsgroepe in Suid-Afrika.

"You've got to be taught
to hate and fear
You've got to be taught
From year to year ...
You've got to be taught before its too late
Before you are six or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate
You've got to be carefully taught"

Oscar Hammerstein II
"You've got to be Carefully Taught"

If the man who sets out to search for "practical" techniques of attitude change is looking for *easy* techniques, he is due for disappointment. As Leonard Doob, of Yale, notes:

"To distill guiding principles of a psychological nature from the voluminous literature on social change requires almost foolhardly courage."

(Doob, 1968)

The field is complex, confused, confusing and contradictory. Moreover, in spite of the popularity of the subject, there is a surprising dearth of empirical literature on changing interracial or ethnic attitudes.

On the other hand, the picture is not altogether bleak. Some patterns can be identified in the morass of evidence on attitude modification, and able social scientists like Doob, Bandura, Chin and Benne, Horstein and his colleagues, and a few others, have succeeded in establishing some order in the field. This paper owes much to these authors: it is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the literature — rather, I have attempted to describe and evaluate those strategies which are within the influence-field of personnel managers, and which have some hope of transferability to the South African situation.

A. THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE

It is generally believed that one of the most dramatic and successful techniques for stimulating change is brainwashing. Yet a more sober analysis of the effects of brainwashing reveals that its effects are somewhat limited. First, there is a possibility that what effects do exist are more in the form of temporary psychosis. And second, Schein has argued that even one of the most intensive indoctrination programmes undertaken in modern times — the brainwashing of American prisoners by Chinese during the Korean war — was largely a failure.

If such techniques have limitations, then it should not be surprising that the more mundane interpersonal influence and education strategies which are the currency of every-day life should have strong limitations of their own.

People resist change. For example how would you, my audience, feel if you knew I was giving a lecture to leaders of black workers or to line managers on how to unfreeze *your* attitudes? One sign of the healthy personality is that it is integrated — that the individual has continuity and a sense of identity. But, as Zaleznick and Moment point out

"When we demand that a person change his behaviour and attitudes, we are, in effect, asking him to become someone else."

(Zaleznick and Moment, 1964)

To change in response to external situational demands is threatening enough:

"but to change in response to the demands of other persons is an entirely different matter: it involves an emotional response to who the other person is and what he is doing to the other individual interpersonally."

(Zaleznick and Moment, 1964)

There are, of course, potentialities for change in most people, as well as resistances to it: man is capable of learning and therefore of changing in response to changing circumstances. The change agent therefore operates in the knife edge area between forces for

change and forces for conservatism. His choice of strategy ultimately depends on his evaluation of the nature and intensity of these forces and the natural reinforcements for them which exist in the environment.

The strategies from which the change agent will choose include:

1. Cognitive strategies
2. Normative — re-educative strategies
3. Situational strategies
4. Power — coercive strategies

B. COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

1. The Presentation of Information

Cognitive strategies assume that people can be induced to change their attitudes towards an object by presenting them with new information about it. They operate an intellectual and motivational level: they assume that men are guided by reason and self-interest and that they will rationally choose attitudes which maximize their self-interest.

Research findings on the effects of presenting information show complex and contradictory results: at least three factors, in interaction, can influence the effectiveness of the approach — the nature of the communicator, the content of the communication, and the nature of the recipient. As a basic principle, it would appear that attitude change is governed by anticipated rewards or punishments associated with the message or the message-giver. Thus a prestigious communicator may have some effect on a current attitude. Or a message that uses higher-order conditioning can be effective: for example, a message that associates a certain cigarette with social success may recruit adherents. Anticipated rewards, on the whole, bring greater changes than punishment or depicted failure-one reaction to the latter is merely to avoid the communication.

In the final analysis, however, information presentation is not a particularly effective way of modifying the attitudes or beliefs of individuals. Men will tend to define reality to meet their own wishes, regardless of the information available. Thus, unless it is possible to build continuing rewards into the follow-up of the communication, changes will tend to fade out.

2. Empirical-rational Strategies for Changing Attitudes of an Entire Social System

While cognitive strategies are largely ineffective in changing attitudes of individuals, the diffusion of research results throughout an entire society can have dramatic and lasting results. The strategy is certainly effective in diffusing "thing" technologies (e.g. medicine or agriculture) in society; and Chin and Benne argue that basic research on human affairs, and increased efforts to diffuse the results through public education can have powerful results on social change as well (Chin and Benne, 1972). The key to the success of attitude change at this level seems to be the establishment of strong systems of communication and collaborative exchange between researchers and the various interest groups in the society.

If we conceive of a company as a social system in itself, it would seem that a research-diffusion strategy offers promise of success in changing attitudes. In fact, the survey-feedback strategy, developed by Floyd Mann (Mann, 1957), is a recognized part of many O.D. programmes. Here, too, it would appear that the establishment of communication channels is of primary importance: Bowers and his colleagues have recently demonstrated that survey feedback combined with counselling (and therefore collaborative exchange) is one of the most powerful change strategies available. In fact, this latter emphasis is so important that this strategy may be best classified under "Normative-re-educative" strategies, discussed below.

At this point we can at least argue that there is "no reason why the expert resources of personnel workers ... might not be used" in these strategies (Chin and Benne, 1972). And there seems little reason why the survey technique should not cover interracial problems, tensions and perceptions: there is some evidence that getting more information about one ethnic group reduces prejudice (Berelson and Steiner, 1964). But this effect on its own is limited, and it appears to be essential for each organisation to build normative elements into the strategy by arranging arenas for the discussion of the survey results and for the receipt of counselling from change agents.

3. Model-Changing Strategies

A final cognitive strategy rests on the development and dissemination of new models of organisation which set directions and limits for change efforts in organisational life. Traditional bureaucratic models of organisation provide little thrust towards dealing with interracial attitudes: bureaucracies, with their emphasis on rationality, can operate with competing subgroups and, outside of major social trauma, largely ignore attitudual factors. But bureaucracies are becoming increasingly inappropriate to modern economic conditions which demand flexibility and adaptability. Thus organisation theorists — and managers — are giving increasing attention to developing models of organisations which are adaptable.

Nearly all of these models — variously called 'organic', 'participative' or 'free-form' organisations — rely on shared norms, beliefs and values for coordination, and may stimulate organisational changes in these directions.

Thus we find much current attention in South Africa being paid to the creation of single "job universes" in a search for organisational organic unity. That such models are often Utopian should not deter the change agent; so long as it is convincing:

> "If the image of a potential future is convincing and rationally persuasive to men in the present, the image may become part of the dynamics and motivation of present action."

(Chin and Benne, 1972)

A final cognitive strategy therefore open to personnel executives is the use of courses and seminars on new forms of organisation — particularly at a senior

management level. This will require considerable courage since the strategy confronts traditional, but arbitrary, bureaucratic models which are central to many organisational philosophies.

C. NORMATIVE-REEDUCATIVE STRATEGIES

Normative-reeducative strategies seek changes of attitude through changing not only the rational informational equipment of men, but also the affective emotional properties of attitude objects as well. The techniques of creating change which fall into these strategies are of two kinds.

The first set of techniques relies on classical conditioning or association principles for effecting change. For example, evaluations can be changed by presenting persuasive messages contiguously with appetizing foods, unpleasant odours, and so on. In one study, carried out by Das and Nanda (1963), nonsense syllables were associated with the names of two aboriginal tribes. These nonsense syllables were then associated with favourable and unfavourable attitudes, and it was subsequently found that the subjects developed favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards the tribes themselves. In the natural field higher order associations of a symbolic nature can have even stronger and more widespread effects. Thus the South African government's attempts to improve black-white attitudes by discouraging the use of words like "kaffir" are based on sound evidence, and this is an area well worth focussing upon in the industrial sphere as well.

A related technique is the use of "modelling" — of associating attitude objects with favoured models of behaviour. For example, Dunker found that he could change children's attitudes towards certain foodstuffs by getting them to associate these foodstuffs with preferences held by their heroes. (Dunker, 1938). And Culbertson, in 1957, found that observers who witnessed others expressing favourable attitudes towards integration subsequently became less prejudiced. A whole series of subsequent studies has demonstrated that modelling, in general, can be a powerful modifier of attitudes. Here, again, is a technique well within the grasp of change agents.

The second set of normative techniques relies on the creation of cognitive inconsistency in subjects. Various models of behaviour (the 'congruity' model of Osgood and Tannenbaum, the 'balance' model of Heider, and 'cognitive dissonance' model of Festinger) suggest that there exists within each individual a strong drive for consistency. Thus if the consistency or congruity between various cognitive elements is disrupted, one of the elements — perhaps an attitude — will be changed to reestablish consistency.

An example of a typical study of the use of this technique on race attitudes would be as follows. An individual's attitude towards another race is tested, and the individual is found to be prejudiced. He is then induced into *behaving* in an opposite direction — for example, he is asked to stand in for a lecturer on race integration. The inconsistency between his prejudice and his behaviour produces discomfort, and

the individual attempts to reduce it by changing his beliefs to fit his behaviour — by becoming less prejudiced.

Empirical studies on such techniques have yielded generally conflicting results. But in general it seems that such techniques can be effective under the following conditions:

— the person engages sincerely in the 'different' behaviour, and does not label it as manipulative
— the different behaviour is reinforced by a reward, but not too high a reward, or else the subject will merely excuse his behaviour by referring to the unusual extrinsic incentive. The behaviour must be self-motivated enough to create internal conflict.
— the different behaviour should in itself prove to be rewarding. For example, a prejudiced person who has been induced into mixing with members of a minority group may also find some of the new relationships formed rewarding in themselves. Thus artificial reinforcers should be reduced to allow natural reinforcers to take effect.

The change agent thus has a host of training techniques available to him — role playing, essay writing, simulation exercises etc. — which effect attitudinal change by requiring attitude-discrepant behaviour. But these techniques are sensitive to uncontrolled variables, and need skill in application. Moreover, unless the consequences of the behaviour change are rewarding in themselves, the attitudinal changes are unlikely to endure.

One final strategy deserves attention:— counselling, too, can be effective in attitude change. As a technique it also tends to work through the cognitive dissonance paradigm. Typically, through counselling, the change agent creates dissonance, resolved by a move of attitude in his direction. But this means that the change agent's role is very important: if he can be discredited, then no attitude change will occur. In order to remain credible, therefore, the change agent has to rely on:

a) Expertness: here objective evidence (e.g. a diploma), behavioural evidence (rational-logical behaviour) and reputation are important
b) Trustworthiness: the agent must be seen to be honest, sincere, open, and have a perceived lack of motivation for personal gain
c) Attractiveness: the agent must be seen to be similar and compatible in other respects with the target.

The last two requirements make it very difficult for a personnel manager, who is seen to be in the pay of management and junior to many change targets, and who is "different" from line managers and blacks, to operate as a counsellor. There is thus often a need for him to call in the services of external change agents.

System-wide Normative-re-educative Strategies

As Chin and Benne point out, changes in individuals also involve changes in their roles and relationships.

Thus change theories apply not only to a person, but to a small group, an organisation or a community. In theory, since systems are composed of individuals, any change in an individual will change the system. But as Hornstein and his colleagues point out:

> "In practice, however, the system is often so psychologically distant from the intervention experience that the effects of any individual change may be dissipated."

(Hornstein et al, 1971)

Thus the personnel executive, as change agent, is forced to operate at the level of his total organisation, and, in addition, to concern himself with community-wide changes.

Chin and Benne list a number of steps for inducing change in an organisation:

1. Emphasize the involvement of the client system in working out programmes of change for himself.

2. Assume that the central problems may not be technical, but may require re-education in values, attitudes and norms.

3. The change agent must intervene mutually and collaboratively with the client.

4. Nonconscious elements which impede problem solving must be made conscious.

5. Selective use can be made of the methods and concepts of the behavioural sciences.

These steps can be applied in two broad normative-re-educative strategies:

a) *Improve the problem-solving capacities of the system:* such programmes would include the collection, feedback and interpretation of data about the organisation; the training of managers and workers in improved problem solving (usually in a laboratory situation); and training internal change agents to continue developmental work.

b) *Release and foster growth in the persons who make up the system to be changed:* these programmes would include the use of training programmes designed to facilitate personal confrontation and growth of members in an open, trusting and accepting atmosphere — in other words the use of T-groups, sensitivity groups and encounter groups.

I see little reason why strategies in both subgroups should not be used in the modification of black-white attitudes. Berelson and Steiner conclude that the "balance is particularly favourable to a lessening of prejudice when the ethnic groups meet on personal terms, on a common task with shared interests or tastes that run across ethnic lines and on terms of social and economic equality". (Berelson and Steiner, 1964). The last condition is not met in our society today. But as a study by W.F. Hull (1972) has demonstrated, therapy groups can promote shared interests and tastes across ethnic lines — and problem solving groups can provide the cohesive element of a common task. If such techniques are to succeed, however, social and economic equality must be an accepted, explicit common goal of such groups.

Situational Strategies

A third set of strategies for attitude change which deserve attention are those which focus on the engineering of social and socio-technical situations in order to stimulate change. This set of strategies and those described above are clearly not mutually exclusive. Cognitive strategies and normative-re-educative strategies often involve situational manipulations. But it is worthwhile focussing, albeit briefly in this paper, on such techniques. The organisation analyst who deals with interpersonal processes and attitudes within an organisation soon becomes aware that these attitudes are largely governed by a set of structural, technical and spatial constraints, and that manipulation of these constraints can materially affect attitude.

1 *Technical factors:* Rice and his Tavistock colleagues, Burns and Stalker from Edinburgh University, Joan Woodward in her South East Essex studies and Lawrence and Lorsch from Harvard University have amply demonstrated that technological factors affect interpersonal relations. There is a distinct possibility, then, that by stressing work interdependencies, by changing technological/machine layout, and so on, appropriate black-white attitudes can be developed and fostered.

2. *Structural Factors:* students of organisation design are becoming increasingly aware that certain forms of organisation structure stimulate and allow more or less interaction. It is my impression that many of the structures in use in this country do not facilitate black-white interaction — and, in fact, positively discourage the unfreezing of current stereotypes. South African management urgently needs to experiment with new structural designs to facilitate co-operative black-white relationships.

3. *Spatial Factors*

In two very interesting articles Sommer (1967) and Steele (1971) have argued that the sheer use of space can facilitate interaction, attitudinal change and organisation development. Observations on the use of space can help in diagnosing current problems, and changing spatial proximities can encourage attitudinal change. It can also support attitudinal change programmes: "changing the social architecture of a system while maintaining the old physical setting may be ... futile". (Steele, 1971)

4. *Personnel Management Systems*

Much emphasis is placed, in the literature, on the role of incentives, rewards or reinforcements on attitude change. This places the responsibility for attitude change fairly

in the court of Personnel Managers, who have a great deal of influence over the design of evaluation and reward systems in management. In one recent study in the United States, for example, R.W. Beatty found that even though the management of a company had taken great pains to train and change the attitudes and behaviour of black supervisors in the direction of conventional professional management, these supervisors were still being *evaluated* and appraised on other dimensions (for example, their social behaviour). And E.W. Jones, a black manager, reported in a recent article in the Harvard Business Review, that even though he was exceeding his performance objectives, he was given, surreptitiously, poor performance evaluations.

Studies such as these throw emphasis on the importance of management systems, in general, in reinforcing attitude change: organisations should, in particular, define clearly the actual performance expectations required of *all* members — black and white. Care in the design of such systems is obviously within the capability of management — and it is practical.

Power-Coercive Strategies

We are rather Victorian in our attitude towards power in organisations. Yet the overwhelming evidence suggests that the use of power interplays and sometimes of sheer force or coercion, is one of the most effective strategies of attitude change:

Some social scientists have argued strongly and seriously for the use of coercion in changing attitudes. For example, Nieburg has argued:

> "the threat of violence and the occasional outbreak of real violence — which gives the threat credibility — are essential elements in peaceful social change ..."

(Nieburg, 1962)

He argues, for example, that as long as 'white supremacists' in the United States were organised and powerful, there was little change in black-white attitudes. But increasing degrees of cohesion amongst the negroes ultimately became a real threat, and stimulated social, attitudinal and constitutional changes.

It is difficult to dispute this view. Violence and coercion has obviously led to social and attitudinal change. The use of Gherao, (a technique whereby workers lock up, and sometimes beat up, management) in India, for example, has been associated with dramatic change! And the Natal strikes have led to a great deal of unfreezing of attitudes on black-white issues.

But the purpose of this paper is not to commend such strategies of attitude change. In fact, just the opposite, for the costs of these strategies are high in terms of human suffering and loss of human dignity. And while most change strategies have unanticipated consequences, the consequences of violence are particularly unpredictable. But violence is the last choice of desperate men — and while there is a choice, the

change agent can choose a strategy that maximizes the potential for mutually beneficial relationships. In Morton Deutch's words:

> "The question, I repeat, is not how to eliminate or prevent conflict, but rather, how to make it productive, or minimally, how to prevent it from being destructive"

(Deutsch, 1969)

The use of *power*, however, as opposed to coercion and violence, is a facet of current interrelationships which we cannot simply wish away. As Walton points out, power strategies become inevitable when one group wants to change or preserve the allocation of scarce resources, or when different groups have incompatible preferences for common social systems. Under these circumstances, a group will attempt to change both the behaviour and attitudes of another group by building its own power, by decreasing its dependence on the other group, by threatening the other group, and by biasing and distorting the rival group's perceptions by manipulating uncertainty. (Walton, 1965)

Normative Strategies versus Power Strategies

As Walton points out, power strategies for changing attitudes use techniques which are diametrically opposed to normative strategies. For example, power strategies overstate objectives, build stereotypes, use coercion, threaten, and form coalitions, while normative strategies do the opposite — deemphasize differences, look for accurate perceptions, seek trust, concilliation and inclusion.

Yet the fact of the matter is that many leaders will find themselves wanting to use both strategies i.e. they will want to force a redistribution of resources, or their own social view, and *at the same time* improve attitudes between the groups. This is the precise position in which management and trade union leaders, government leaders and black or white leaders in this country find themselves.

Under these circumstances, Walton suggests leaders will tend to:—

a) sequence these strategies — use a "freeze-thaw" approach. They can remain credible as long as the cycles are not too short.

b) have the contradictory strategies used by different persons in their organisations. The following exerpt from the Financial Mail gives a superb example of unconscious co-operation between black leaders (the setting was a round table conference between black and white leaders on black-white consultation):

> Dladla; ... We must not deceive each other. If the White community does not allow us to share their world with them, then we will grab it. We have no option. The only way we can grab it is to down tools. (a power strategy)

> Bandes; White bosses fear the African trade union movement will topple them

*and take over the government. But
we feel if we move to this political
trend there won't be any movement
left ...*

*We are asking you to communicate
with us so that we can create a
better relationship for everybody
in the country. (a normative
strategy)*

(Financial Mail, July 19, 1974)

c)   eliminate provocative acts which elicit nega-
tive attitudes but which add little to power
strategies.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has great relevance for South Africa. If
we take the longer term viewpoint, it is clear that if
we seek an improvement of intergroup attitudes
through normative strategies now, then the substan-
tive objectives of power strategies are likely to be less
irreconcileable and more likely to be realised at a
later date. And the fact that power strategies have
already been used in labour relations in this country,
in the Natal strikes and since, has produced a great
readiness for attitude change. South Africa is now
ready for the use of cognitive, normative, and
situational strategies in the encouragement, of
mutually supportive black-white attitudes.

But do not believe, because I am addressing a group
of predominantly white managers, that the respon-
sibility for attitude change is purely the white man's
burden. There is a great need for the leaders of this
country, black and white, to confront their influence
responsibilities and encourage attitude change. In
doing so, they should get together and research, plan
and implement change strategies on a collaborative
basis.

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