Information Technology and Communication Function: A Challenge for Behavior

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What I want to consider is: our communicative behavior in a new information technologies (NITs) environment does not correspond to an updated communicative attitude (and perhaps aptitude, also).

The relation between NITs and communication function is examined from the qualitative point of view.

OLD HUMAN COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Factors of NITs generation

One way to analyze the relation between communication function and NITs use in information services (may be possible communication programs?) is to accept, like premise, that factors of NITs generation must be accomplished (and enlarged also) during their operation.

These factors are expressed as values, objectives, and behavior and in our case represent the scenery ahead which the communication is played.

Among these factors are:
- communication power improvement
- international and national defense power
- knowledge power
- competitiveness between regions, countries, organizations and persons
- improvement of education, health and food conditions
- availability of energy resources
- control of environment
- competitiveness and survival of IT production corporations
- enlargement of R&D activities
- risk control
- production and selection of messages
- time wasted in message's transmission

It will be interesting to evaluate if the operation of NITs in information services contribute or not to the accomplishment of these factors. If response is affirmative must be evaluated to determine how NITs are operated and what is the level of added value obtained during operation. If the response is negative will be even more important to examine both background and outcomes of NITs' operation.

Validity of factors

In information services the validity of these factors may be principally tested in two fields: (1) communication process with and within users and (2) communication process within information teamwork.

In the first field we observe:
- exclusive preferences of paper or magnetic support
- difficulties to integrate new information media
- preference of quantity instead quality
- unjustified security or insecurity on media reliability
- continuity of the fee-free syndrome
- opposition to integrate manual and automated modes
- disregard of available media
- cultural inertia

In the second field we observe:

- continuity of the fee-free syndrome
- continuity of the acquisition syndrome (now oriented towards acquisition of NITs)
- reiteration of manual mode strategies in a NITs environment and operation services (isolation syndrome)
- continuity of the large relative weight of technical process (TP)
- opposition to understand TP as communication activity
- continuity of tree-structure based on TP and public services (foundation for isolation syndrome)
- continuity of centralized use of new supports (for example, diskettes)
- continuity of the centralization-decentralization conflict
- relay-race approach in tasks
- lack of software devoted to management of information services

In the background of these behaviors there are psychological and sociological components expressed as values and objectives. From this observation we can conclude: a lack of knowledge and perception on NITs generation process compromises the quality of outcomes received by users.

Restricted Concepts of the Communication Function

Satisfaction of information clients' needs and the fulfillment of team objectives are insufficient parameters to evaluate the quality of information services unless we organize needs in a hierarchical manner and accept the exposure of objectives to change.

In relation to clients needs we must remember: (1) expression of a need is not sometimes the same to its background (mission, objectives, social status, role and so on) and (2) information-document supply is not equivalent to problem-solving (evaluation of the information provided, cost-benefit relation, timing, repackaging).

I feel we early stop our communication function because we usually have (from the moment when user expresses the question) a focal concept of this function.

For example, when I ask someone of the team what is he/she doing, I receive answers like these (media oriented answers):

- I am indexing
- I am loading records in the system
- I am using electronic mail
- I am sending a fax
- I am searching on CD-ROM

All were true answers because persons were performing these tasks but I have found they interpreted means as purposes. May it be possible sometimes to obtain answers of the following type? (purpose oriented answers):

- I am creating ways to access information
- I am resolving a food problem
- I am helping to decision-making process
- I am improving citizens' health
- I am contributing to the future of the organization
Answers of the media oriented type may be interpreted as restricted conceptualization of the communication function. The argumentation that training on innovation, creativity, initiative and entrepreneurship will help us to elaborate answers of the second type is not sufficient if we are not going to relate those training subjects to the appropriate difference between purposes and media.

The exposure of teamwork objectives to change is another condition to evaluate the accomplishment of goals in a more complete manner. We must accept that the information service environment does change and specially the relationships between participants, because objectives, mission, motivations and tasks of these participants change also. This change, sometimes, impacts on the information service in a manner that provokes a reaction to perpetuate the objectives of the service instead to generate a revision of the objectives.

This reaction is, frequently, the expression of the accepted routines. We must remember that objectives are not only rules but desired outcomes determined in relation to changing users' environment. Design of objectives includes flexibility as an objective itself.

TOWARDS INFORMATION TRANSFER CULTURE

Behavior Change

This is the challenge. It consists into identify and delete unupdated communicative behavior and parochial communicative concepts for understanding that a NITs environment has not assured its validity per se. We must unlearn the idolization of equipments and the feeling of security within the NITs environment. As we must unlearn the refuse of NITs, also. Communication is not a commodity of the market and NITs are only bridges towards the communication territory. It is necessary to overcome the literal interpretation of automation. Auto refers to freedom from routines and opportunity of thinking.

Wiener has said on this subject: "Future does not offer a lot of hope to whom wait our mechanical slaves offer us a world where thinking be not necessary."

Not only training in information technology, information marketing and management, user satisfaction and initiative attitudes will allow us to understand that appropriate use of information technology is beyond a technical skill. These subjects must be oriented to release our not adapted behavior in relation to NITs.

Thinking and Operation

Training must be oriented to develop continuous reflective aptitude as foundation to the appropriate operation of new information technologies.

About the reflective aptitude I want to indicate:

- we operate NITs under inertial cultural conditions
- our information tasks within a NITs environment becomes easily routine
- it is necessary a continuous revision of objectives, values and goals in relation to our communication function
- to understand and generate changes in the knowledge transfer and creation
- to understand the social impact of communication models
- contribute to the design of man-machine-knowledge-welfare relationship
Wiener's ideas on communication are a very useful contribution to clarify some aspects of our tasks.

Information professionals must know precisely why society needs us, what is our contribution to the community and what are the values for world improvement within NITs environment.

In the operative field we must consider the factual importance of:

- communication marketing (not only information marketing)
- matrix based practices and
- cross-functional approach

Both last two subjects are of a great importance to understand that our communication behavior must operate as a flexible set of communication functions instead as a sequence on intercommunicated tasks.

Communicaion Territory

We are now in a frontier of our old communication behavior. In this territory we must recognize that communication is not a bit but a knowledge and welfare matter. To leave the territory or to cross the frontier is not the key. To enlarge the territory may be the best alternative to generate communicative unknown conditions (an opportunity to develop creative attitudes and to leave routines). We must learn, if necessary, to overcome NITs instead to carry them as sacred oblation to the altar of technological luxury. Introduce ourselves in the territory of the impossible will help us to reveal how much we ignore about ourselves as NITs managers. I feel it is plenty.

As information authors and mediators we assume the responsibility not only to use but to validate the creation of NITs. We assume the responsibility to transform new information technologies into new communication mindologies. It is the least one could expect.

Evolution or revolution express an option. The just in time attitude is to obtain a mix for both evolution and revolution. Impact of NITs on information services (or on information clients?) has not sufficiently grown up to the level of critical mass.

We assume the challenge today. Better, we have assumed the challenge. Tomorrow, complaints will not be allowed. Tomorrow is today.

REFERENCES