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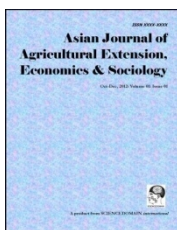
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Effective Application of the Coorientation Communication Model in Disseminating Agricultural Information: A Review

P. C. Ajieh^{1*} and U.N. Uzokwe¹

¹Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension Delta State University, Asaba
Campus, Asaba, Nigeria.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author PCA designed the study and organized the materials. Author UNU managed the literature searches. Both authors edited and approved the work.

Review Article

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ABSTRACT

Co-orientation is a measurement process which contributes to a consensus of views among communicators. Co-orientation analysis yields three measures of consensus: accuracy, congruency and agreement. Accuracy refers to the similarity between one person's estimate of another's perception and other person's actual perception. Congruency compares a person's perception with his or her estimate of another's perception, while agreement is the similarity between two person's perceptions. This paper examines the application of the co-orientation communication model for effective dissemination of agricultural information. A framework for applying the model was suggested and other strategies for effective application of the model were discussed.

Keywords: *Co-orientation; communication model; agricultural information; relational communication; information dissemination.*

*Corresponding author: E-mail: ajieh2002@yahoo.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication includes those situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver with conscious intent to affect the latter's behaviour. Communication is a vital part of personal life and is also important in business, education, agriculture, rural development and any other situation where people meet each other. Unlike message sending, communication requires the response of others. There must be sharing (or correspondence) of meaning for effective communication to take place [1]. Every interpersonal exchange carries two messages which are a "report" and a "command". The report message contains the substance or content of the communication, whereas the command message makes a statement about the relationship. Put differently, the report message addresses what is being talked about and the command message addresses the relationship between the communicators [2]. It is this relationship between communicators that relational communication is concerned with. At the core of relational communication is the assumption that interpersonal communication functions to establish, maintain and change relationships, whereas the relationship in turn cybernetically determines the nature of the interpersonal communication [2].

Relational communication models provide a framework for identifying the relationships between individuals or groups in a communication process. The models acknowledge that communication is a delicate process evolving from the attendance of two participants into a relationship that is more than the sum of its parts. They clearly illustrate the central role of message interpretation and reciprocal perceptions between the parties in a communication process. The best known example of relational communication models is the co-orientation model. Co-orientation is a measurement process which contributes to a consensus of views. Co-orientation analysis yields three measures of consensus: accuracy, congruency and agreement. Accuracy refers to the similarity between one person's estimate of another's perception and other person's actual perception. Congruency compares a person's perception with his or her estimate of another's perception, while agreement is the similarity between two person's perceptions.

A relationship in interpersonal communication has been defined as a set of expectations two parties have for each other's behavior and feelings. It is the connection that exists when: (a) the interactants are aware of each other and take each other into account; (b) There is some exchange of influence and (c) there is some agreement about the nature of the relationship as well as the appropriate behaviours given the nature of the relationship [3]. According to this definition, mutuality of awareness and influence of benefit and behaviour are all parts of a successful relationship. Thus, management of relationship in communication implies the development, maintenance, growth and nurturing of mutual beneficial relationships between individuals or groups in a communication endeavour. Relationships in communication are based not only on the exchange of information but also on interpersonal perceptions. The expectations that form a relationship are the product of our perceptions of other people's behaviour and their feelings. A person's communicative behaviour is largely shaped by his or her perceptions of the relationship with the other communicators. [4] identified four essential dimensions of satisfying interpersonal relationships between communicators. These include: (1) investment; (2) commitment; (3) trust and (4) comfort with relational dialectics.

Investment refers to the time, energy, feelings, effort and other resources given to build the relationship. The perception of equality of investments influences the level of satisfaction one experiences. Commitment is the personal choice to continue a relationship. It adds the elements of responsibility to a relationship by facing inevitable relational difficulties together.

This means problems are viewed as opportunities to mutually solve and strengthen the relationship rather than as an excuse to terminate the relationship. Trust refers to a feeling that relational partners can rely on each other. A high degree of predictability exists because each believes his partner is dependable, reliable, forthright and trustworthy - that is, worthy of being trusted to do what is in the best interest of maintaining their long-term relationship. Each relies on the other to protect the welfare of the relationship [5]. Comfort with relational dialectics involves the numerous opposing forces on relationships which generate tensions and require a delicate balance if relational equilibrium is to be maintained. Extension professionals and farmers can effectively apply these dimensions so as to always strike a balance in their communication endeavours.

2. THE CO-ORIENTATION COMMUNICATION MODEL

The co-orientation model was developed by Chaffee and McLeod as an extension of Newcomb's ABX or psychological model, which discusses the social relations between two people and their orientation to some object. Usually orientation is in the form of attitudes, either positive or negative. According [6], each communicator has a simultaneous co-orientation toward his or her communication partner (usually the level of attraction and feelings toward the partners) and toward the object of communication (the degree of positive or negative attitude about X) in a communication situation between two participants A and B about an object X. This relationship is shown in Fig. 1.

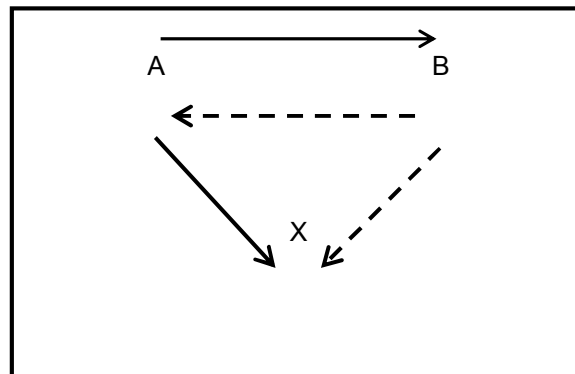


Fig. 1 Newcomb's A-B-X or Psychological Model
 Source: Wilmot, W.W (1987). *Dyadic Communication*, P. 104

Newcomb identified four basic components of this relational system; (1) A's attitude towards X; (2) A's attraction to B; (3) B's attitude toward X and (4) B's attraction to A. (Fig. 1). According to the model, both A and B have natural propensity to balance in their co-orientation toward X and their partner. If for instance, A has a negative attitude toward the use of chemical fertilizer (X) and a very positive attraction toward B, but B has a positive attitude toward the use of chemical fertilizer (X) and toward A, then A will experience an imbalance resulting in a push toward revision of attitudes to regain balance. This "strain toward balance" can be resolved by one or a combination of (1) A decreasing the amount of liking for B; (2) A changing his attitude toward X and (3) A changing B's attitude about X to align with A's. A's actions are dependent on A's own orientations as well as A's perceptions of B's orientations and vice versa for B. Thus both communicators are continually making predictions or estimates of their partner's orientations. A has perceptions of what B is

thinking and feeling, just as B has perceptions of what A is thinking and feeling. Based on this model, [7] concludes that at the very minimum, any thorough index of a dyadic relationship should include the following two items of information: (1) each person's orientation (that is, their attitude toward the object of communication and their attraction toward their communication partner and (2) what each person perceives their partner's orientations to be. It is recommended that extension professionals adopt this approach in communicating agricultural information to farmers.

The key assumption of this communication model is that people's behaviour is not based solely on their private cognitions of the world. Behaviours are the results of people's perceptions of the "orientations" held by others around them. Stated differently, actual cognitions and perceptions of others will influence one's behaviour under certain conditions of interpersonal interactions [8, 9, 10]. The co-orientation model explains the influence which members of a communication situation exert on each other. According to [11], the co-orientation model identifies three critical relationships. These key relationships are agreement, congruency and accuracy (Fig. 2). They greatly determine the success or failure of any communication.

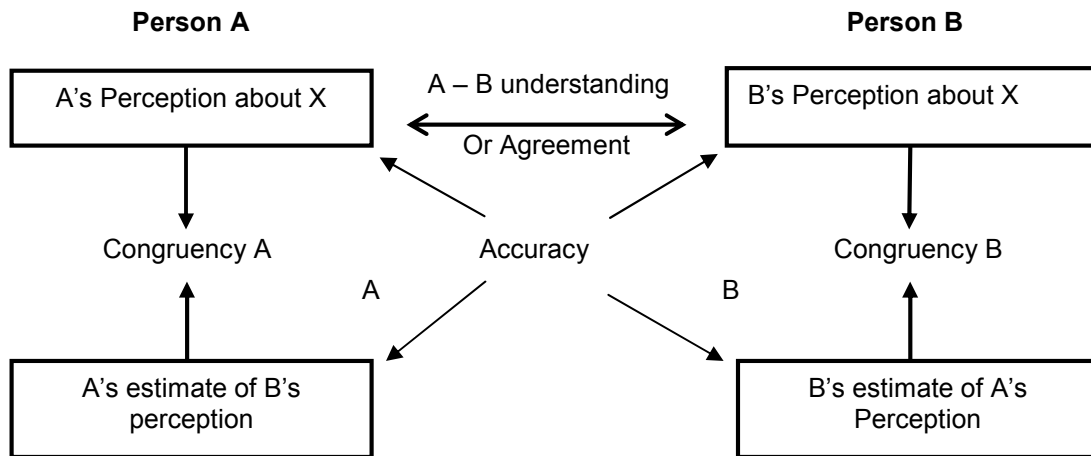


Fig. 2. Relationships in co-orientation

Source: Chaffee, S. H. and McLeod J.M. (1973) *Interpersonal perception and communication*, Pp 483-488

The fundamental relationship in a communication interaction is that of agreement. According to [12,13,9], agreement or cognitive overlap is the degree of similarity of two people cognitions about a common object. In the context of a social system or primary group, agreement is concerned with the extent to which the organizational definition of an issue is congruent with the public's assessment. Agreement refers to the extent that participants in a communication situation have identified and evaluated a common situation or that they each recognize the validity of the other parties concerned. Without a sufficient degree of agreement as to what the situation is all about, it is not possible to begin to formulate a perception of how the other party sees the issue. After achieving agreement on an issue, the congruency and accuracy relationships become relevant. Congruency or perceived agreement compares a person's own orientation with his or her perception of another's orientation. According to [14], congruency compares one's perception with his or her estimate of another person's perception. High congruency or ethnocentrism is established

when one group believes that the other group has similar beliefs or behaves similarly. Conversely, low congruency or polarization implies a lack of common grounds – neither group feels the other has any similar beliefs or behaviours. Accuracy refers to the similarity between one person's estimate of another's cognitions about an object and that other person's actual cognitions about the object. Accuracy is an ideal criterion for evaluating communication effectiveness. [15] contended that accuracy should be the first order of business in initiating communication programmes. The authors stated that "Perfect communication between two people, totally free of constraints, would not necessarily improve agreement and might reduce congruency. If the two are motivated to co-orient, it can facilitate understanding. However, it should always improve accuracy, even to the absolute point where each person knows precisely what the other is thinking. This would be perfect communication in quite a literal sense even though they might disagree and even choose not to co-orient the same things to the same degree.

According to [10], coorientation variables go beyond simply estimating the distance between views held by groups in a communication situation. These variables can be used to identify circumstances such as true consensus, dissensus, false consensus and false conflict. True consensus occurs when both parties know that they share an agreement on their view or the evaluation of an issue. Dissensus occurs when the parties hold conflicting views and they are aware of their differences. False consensus indicates disagreement that is inaccurately perceived as agreement. Finally, false conflict occurs when there is actual agreement that is perceived as a disagreement. Both parties believe they disagree on an issue when in fact they agree. It becomes quite easy to see how communication problems arise.

3. APPLYING THE CO-ORIENTATION MODEL FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

Co-orientation model advises organizations to identify areas where they agree or disagree with their strategic public on certain issues. Coorientation model was originally designed for interpersonal communication but has been extended to mass communication. It has been used in evaluating organizational communication [9]. Co-orientation variables such as agreement, accuracy and congruency can be applied in the dissemination of agricultural information. A framework for applying the principles of co-orientation effectively in analyzing any issue between extension professionals and farmers is suggested in Fig. 3.

The framework demonstrates how the co-orientation model can be used to foster effective communication in the delivery of agricultural information. Co-orientational accuracy and perhaps, agreement can be improved with research in order to express explicitly the similarities and differences between the views of both extension professionals and farmers on agricultural issues. Moreover, interactive processes in which the representatives of the two systems will amend one another's views or definitions to produce a synthesis of views can result in a set of dimensions that will be more accurately perceived and understood by all involved, than making general formulations.

Effective application the co-orientation model also requires that extension organizations regularly conduct systematic study of farmers' views on agricultural innovations. This will yield information about their expectations and improve the information delivery. Similarly, studies of agricultural communities which can reveal the basis for agreement on certain innovations are needed. Thus, agreement can be evaluated by looking at the similarity of extension system's view of an agricultural innovation with that of an agricultural community.

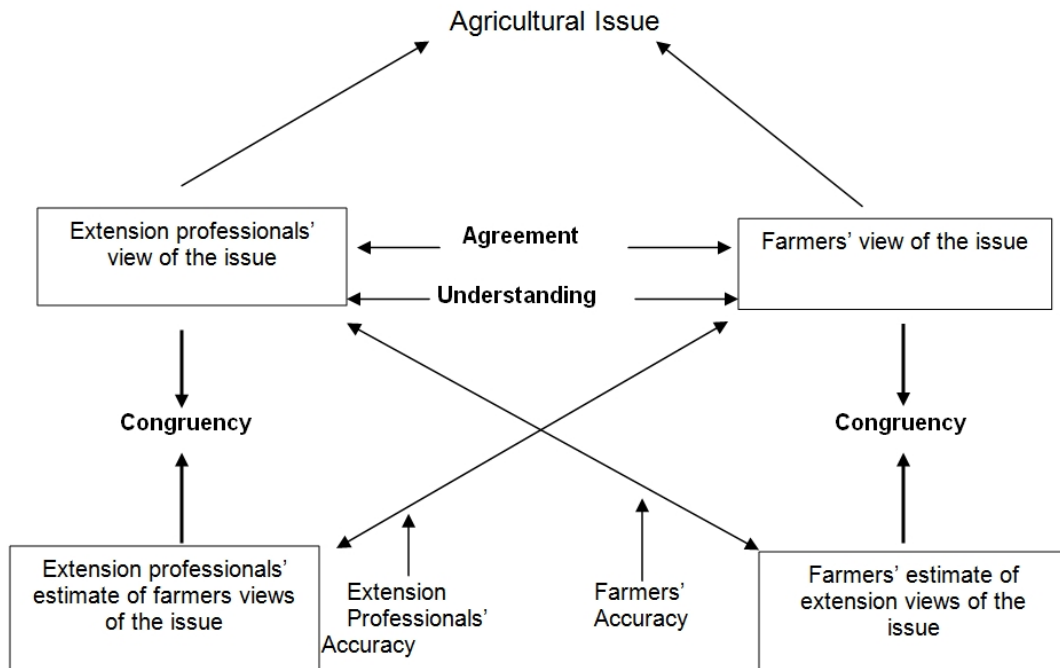


Fig. 3. A framework for applying the co-orientation model in agricultural information delivery

Sources: Adopted from Chaffee, S.H and McLeod J. M. (1973) *Interpersonal Perception and Communication*. American Behavioural Scientist No; 16, pp: 483 - 488

4. CONCLUSION

The co-orientation model provides a framework that clearly illustrates the central role of message interpretation and reciprocal perceptions among the parties in a communication process. The situation becomes more difficult when there is a need for groups to communicate but no efforts are made to uncover and discuss the assumption each is working with.

The co-orientation model is an excellent vehicle for strengthening the communication between participants in communication process. The links between the boxes (in fig. 3) point out the different potential sources for miscommunication and error in a communication situation. In this manner, the co-orientation model addresses the most important issue of communication-understanding. Thus, the co-orientation model can greatly improve agricultural information delivery if properly applied as suggested in this paper.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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