

Communication of Innovations: A Journey with Everett Rogers

Arvind Singhal and James W. Dearing, editors.
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006. ISBN: 0-761-93477-4.

This exceptional collection of ten essays explores the career and contributions of Everett Rogers, one of the leading scholars in the communication discipline. Ev Rogers produced 36 books and several hundred other publications in his prolific career, including five editions examining diffusion of innovations (the second most-cited book in the social sciences). Initially a sociologist, he entered the field of communication by joining the Department of Communication at Michigan State University (MSU) in 1964. As an MSU undergraduate student at the time, this reviewer was fortunate to be introduced to diffusion in Rogers's initial offering of this course; we later overlapped as faculty members at MSU until Rogers moved westward to continue his brilliant career as a communication teacher, researcher, writer, networker, and doctoral adviser at Stanford University, University of Southern California (USC), and the University of New Mexico.

The editors and authors achieve an excellent balance between personal remembrances and conceptually sophisticated expositions pertinent to the scholarly domains of Everett Rogers. The editors deftly insert illustrative vignettes and photos that bring to life the character and scholarship of the prominent researcher, but most of the intellectually vibrant volume shows how Rogers's students and colleagues have extended and applied his ideas to communication, social marketing, development, health promotion, and intercultural communication.

The writers demonstrate that Rogers not only developed and articulated important theoretical perspectives, but he also effectively promoted his ideas and provided guidance in the implementation of numerous worldwide applications ranging from farming to family planning. A central strength of Rogers's diffusion paradigm is the universality of its applicability to a remarkable range of innovative practices. The principles, insights, and examples appearing in the book are directly pertinent to the successful dissemination of programs and recommendations promoting physical activity at both the individual and collective level. The authors identify the strategies for attaining the widespread adoption of complex exercise practices and overcoming barriers to fundamental change in lifestyles and policies needed for a more active populace.

Diffusion theory is revisited in a perceptive assess-

ment by Jim Dearing and Gary Meyer, who delineate Rogers's traditional paradigm and introduce alternative interpretations and conceptualizations of diffusion. They highlight ideas involving creatively active adopters, decentralized diffusion processes, and translational research that addresses gaps between scientific evidence versus real-world practice.

Three of Ev's former doctoral students provide outstanding scholarly contributions. Tom Valente of the USC Keck School of Medicine offers a succinct overview of five types of communication network models pertinent to the diffusion of innovations via interpersonal communication. After describing how Rogers's dissertation study traced opinion-leadership patterns, Valente shows that Rogers's network research played a role in subsequent structural models, tipping points models, dynamic models over time, and interventions models to accelerate change.

Harvard Business School professor Dorothy Leonard characterizes Rogers as an "intellectual Johnny Appleseed" who gathered and disseminated knowledge in a manner embodying the diffusion model. Her chapter addresses several of Rogers's central concepts from an applied business perspective, including the idea that innovations can originate anywhere within the organizational hierarchy via creative abrasion among heterophilous thinkers, knowledge transfer via active learning, knowledge coaches as change agents, and the role of Communities of Practice in horizontal diffusion.

When Ronny Adhikarya came back to graduate school, he was already a highly experienced practitioner who had witnessed the family-planning applications of Rogers's diffusion ideas in two dozen developing countries during the 1970s. Adhikarya later played key roles in the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Bank, where he helped develop and institutionalize the "strategic extension" approach, emphasizing people's participation in designing and implementing programs; his chapter presents a series of detailed models and frameworks for extension campaigns.

The relevance of diffusion concepts to other academic disciplines is represented by two chapters. Philip Kotler, one of the leading scholars in the field of marketing, cites Rogers's work as a profound influence on his ideas related to the "broadening of marketing" to encompass noncommercial applications, particularly the introduction of the "social marketing" perspective. The distinguished social psychologist Albert Bandura presents a conceptual integration of his social cognitive theory and Rogers's diffusion theory, identifying the global influence of key concepts such as vicarious modeled benefits experienced by early adopters and

contrast modeling of positive, negative, and transitional models.

Srinivas Melkote, a critical scholar from Bowling Green, reviews the role of Rogers's diffusion and modernization concepts in the dominant paradigm of communication for development of the 1960s and 1970s, and his subsequent adaptations as new perspectives evolved. Melkote's chapter focuses on empowerment through participation and grassroots organizing to attain equitable and sustainable social change.

It is evident from these chapters that Ev was an engaging storyteller across various settings: large undergraduate classes, graduate seminars, conference presentations, and individual discussions. This led naturally to his interest in Entertainment-Education (E-E), which became a major thrust in the last 15 years of Rogers's career. He focused on E-E for health promotion, examining how popular formats such as soap operas convey information that influences individual behavior and instigates environmental change via social mobilization and policy initiatives. This storytelling approach has attained remarkable success, especially in developing countries. Arvind Singhal tells the story about Ev's role in advancing E-E; three chapter co-authors relate compelling stories about notable Rogers-inspired campaign efforts in East Africa (Kimani Njogu), The Netherlands (Martine Bouman), and Peru (Eliana Elias).

The closing chapter by Ev's wife Corrine Shefner-Rogers provides the most personal characterization of

his life, beginning with his early education in a one-room Iowa country school and his rich experiences on the family farm (including Ev's observation that his father was a late adopter of new farming practices relative to neighboring farmers). The man who would become one of the most-traveled social scientists in the world did not take his first trip outside the county until he was a senior in high school. In later life, his Iowa farm roots were manifested by a continuous penchant for gardening. She also presents interesting examples of Ev's proclivity for storytelling, noting that he was "entertainment-education personified."

Everett Rogers leaves a legacy of an "invisible college" of networks he inspired over the last half century, as richly represented in this tribute volume. These authors have contributed essays that are not only touching but valuable in extending Ev's influence into the future, including useful guidance for the effective promotion of physical activity programs.

No financial conflict of interest was reported by the author of this paper.

Reviewed by Charles Atkin, PhD, Director, Department of Communication, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.
E-mail: atkin@msu.edu

doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2006.06.010