a joint initiative of OneWorld.net and Digital Divide Network

Communication of Innovations-Story of a legendary storyteller

Manish Kumar

Communication of Innovations
A Journey with Ev Rogers
Editors- Arvind Singhal and James W. Dearing

Pages: 272 Price: INR 360
Publishers: Sage Publications India
Published: June 2006

Apart from the fact that the book *Communication of Innovations-A Journey with Ev Rogers* is a tribute to the legendary communicator, lovingly called as Ev, another salient feature is that, as Singhal and Dearing the two editors describe, the book has brought together a cadre of Ev Rogers' collaborators and contemporaries who wrote on topics that not only spiced up Ev's intellectual appetite but in which Ev made seminal and lasting contributions: Diffusion of Innovations (Dearing and Meyer, Chapter 2), Communication Networks in Diffusion (Valente, Chapter 3), Innovation Generation and Technology Transfer (Leonard, Chapter 4), Social Cognitive and Social Diffusion Theories (Bandura, Chapter 4), Social Marketing (Koteler, Chapter 6), Communication and Social Change in Non-Western Contexts (Melkote, Chapter 7), Strategic Extension Campaigns (Adhikarya, Chapter 8), and Entertainment-Education Communication Strategy and Health Promotion (Singhal et al., Chapter 9). The final chapter is by none other than Shefner-Rogers who spent 15 years of her life with Ev as his better half. She vividly sketches Ev's life journey from his modest days as a farm boy in Iowa, through his highly acclaimed professional career, to his final return to the land where his heart belonged, his parental farm land in Iowa.

This book is another milestone in the efforts of Sage Publishers in India. Sage India has published some of the finest books in the field of communication for development for its Indian readers over the last 15 years.

The author's of the different chapters in this book have carved a niche for themselves in their respective fields. Each of them shares about how their thinking and practice was linked and/or influenced by Ev's work and personality as well. What makes each chapter a little more interesting is the way editors introduce the authors of the chapters. The brief personalized account about the authors reflects the strong personal bonding, a quality cherished about Ev. He was a prolific networker and this is book is an example.

In Chapter 1, **Communication of Innovations- A Journey with Ev Rogers**, Dearing and Singhal presents a lively account of Ev's intellectual journey from his graduate days, affinity about historical details, doctoral work, his positivist orientation, his strong relationship with his students and peers, and the intellectual's who made a lasting impact on Ev's thinking. The authors throw light on how his book on Diffusion of Innovations, which proved to be classic and is the second most cited book in social sciences. His work strengthened communication work at many US universities. The chapter also presents a chronological detail of his professional growth and achievements.

In the preface to the 1995 edition of Diffusion of Innovations, Ev wrote "we do not need 'more of the same' diffusion research." Later on Katz (1995) pointed out that the growth of appropriate theory in diffusion research had come to a standstill. Dearing and Meyer in chapter 2, **Revisiting Diffusion Theory**, has made an attempt to respond to the concerns raised by Rogers and Katz. They discuss the traditional understanding about diffusion work and in this background provide a brief account of alternative explanation to diffusion in rhetorical, trading and an evolutionary perspective to diffusion work. They conclude, "pursuing a purposive diffusion-based strategy to translation that has as its objective generalized causal inference (a fidelity of effect) rather than programme fidelity (replication) is a most promising route to effective translation of research-to-practice."

Thomas W.Valente in his chapter (no. 3), **Communication Network Analysis and the Diffusion of Innovations**, provides a cursory review of communication network models developed to understand how innovations diffuse through communication and social networks. He discusses five types of Models. Type 1 describes early models of diffusion which had influence of interpersonal communication. In Type 2 he talks about structural models and elaborates how key bridges or structural characteristic of a whole network affected diffusion. Type 3 models adopt a "critical points" view, proposing that critical times or critical thresholds trigger widespread diffusion. The fourth type of model focuses on dynamic interplay between network position and adoption/diffusion. Valente ends the chapter by describing a fifth type of model that can be used to design interventions that accelerate diffusion of innovations. He concludes, "Rogers provided considerable input to all of these models and was a lifelong proponent of using science to improve the human condition... his data still inform our thinking and his writings an research have provided the foundation needed for us to go forward."

In Chapter 4, **Innovation as a Knowledge Generation and Transfer Process**, Dorothy A. Leonard writes, "Everett Rogers embodied the communication of innovation theory he taught, gathering and diffusing knowledge like an intellectual Johnny Appleseed. He was ahead of his time in understanding the power of personal networks and the role of serendipity in innovation. And most of the other concepts about which he was the acknowledged reigning expert have continued relevance today." The chapter describes innovations as bundles of knowledge, however, focuses heavily on learning processes, that is, how the innovator garners knowledge for the creation of the innovation, and then how the adopter (s) absorb enough knowledge to implement the innovation.

The noted social scientist Albert Bandura remembers Ev Rogers in Chapter 4, **Integrating Social Cognitive and Social Diffusion Theories**. This chapter is a quick insight to the masterly work of Bandura's work immortal work on Social Cognitive Theory and the author focuses on the integration of social cognitive theory with Ev's pioneering theorizing and research on social diffusion of innovations. At the end of the chapter he writes, " Ev Rogers was not only an important contributor to these global applications that integrated social cognitive and social diffusion theory; he and his colleagues also conducted stringent evaluations of the diverse personal and social changes fostered by this approach."

The Marketing Guru, Philip Kotler's marketing thinking and writing was deeply influenced by Ev Rogers. Rogers book on Diffusion of Innovations had guided Kotler's writings on Marketing and remains an integral part of it including the 12th edition of his book, Marketing Management, published in 2005. In Chapter 5, **Social Marketing and the Broadening of Marketing Movement**, Kotler provides and account of the history of the movement known as the broadening of Marketing. At the end of the Chapter, Kotler remarks, "Everett's work on the intricacies of the adoption processes of new products and ideas remains a major cornerstone of our work and those of social marketers around the world."

Srinivas Melkote in his chapter, **Communication and Social Change in Developing Countries** (Chapter 7) reflects on his intellectual journey, which was greatly influenced by Rogers, and reviews the major milestones in the field of communication and development, and especially Ev's pioneering contribution in this area. He briefly discusses the dominant paradigm of development

and the deconstruction of the dominant models of development. He goes on to describe "new" development objectives and role for communication. He goes on to describe "new" development objectives and role for communication. He has provided a brief comparative picture of development communication theories and approaches in the modernization and empowerment framework. In conclusion he mentions, "Empowerment through participation, grassroots organizing, and/or dialogic action may take a long time to mature and achieve significant results…. Achieving empowerment is not an easy task…. However, it is the right thing to do if we are truly interested in appropriate and sustainable social change."

Ronnie Adhikarya considers Ev Rogers as one of the founding fathers of development communication. Ronnie's professional work reflects a distinct impact of Rogers and Ronnie shares about it in the Chapter 8, **Implementing Strategic Extension Campaigns: Applying Best Practices and Lessons Learned from Ev Rogers**. In this chapter Ronnie traces his professional journey, highlighting the influence of Rogers on his work. In this context he describes the development and institutionalization of Strategic Extension Campaigns approach in various developing countries. SEC approach was developed during Ronnie's work for FAO in Italy in the early 1980s. This approach emphasises the importance of people's participation in strategic planning, systematic management and field implementation of agriculture extension and training programmes. In his tribute to Rogers, Ronnie writes, "While Everett Rogers is no longer with us, his legacy-the "invisible college" of networks he developed over the last five decades- is functioning well and will live on." This book is an evidence of what Ronnie says.

According to Arvind Singhal, one of the celebrity students of Ev Rogers, Ev was a terrific storyteller. He had stories for every occasion. Rogers strongly believed and practiced Entertainment-Education. Chapter 9, **Entertainment-Education and Health Promotion: A Cross-Continental Journey** is a testimony to this fact. This chapter has four stories from different continents narrated by four different storytellers. Arvind Singhal, born and brought up in India, writes about his journey with Rogers in the field of Entertainment-Education. Kimani Njogu shares her experiences of working with Rogers in East Africa. Martine Bouman describes about the lessons in E-E collaboration from the Netherlands. The fourth and the last storyteller is Eliana Elias who brings in her experiences from the field of E-E in the Peruvian Amazon.

The students, academicians, practitioners and all those who have read and/or know about Ev Rogers work still do not know have insight to Ev's personal and professional life. What kind of upbringing Ev had in his early life? What became his calling card for the rest of his life? What were his thoughts on sharing knowledge and experiences? Does his life mirror the role models he studied? Was Ev close to his farm roots? Which experience had a transformative effect on Ev? What were the doctrine's that guided his life's work? Answer to these questions could result into a biography of Ev Rogers and it would be appropriate to call Chapter 10, **Everett Rogers Personal Journey: Iowa to Iowa**, as his biography written by the person who knew him far better than we could have known, that is his wife Corinne L. Shefner-Rogers. She was with him much before they got married in 1991 and remained with him till he was alive. Though Rogers is not physically present today, his writings and contributions to the field of communication science would be as relevant in future as they are today.

In summary, this book shows that Rogers work had impacted a wide range of disciplines-communication science, marketing, organizational change, sociology, and social psychology. Pictures and stories about Rogers personal and professional life makes this book a unique one and would definitely inspire students and practitioners to delve further into his life. High on the list of Ev's resources for accomplishing great scholarship were the students he recruited into projects. He earned everyone of is student collaboration by paying close attention to their intellectual and spiritual needs, a quality that is much in demand but is hardly available.

Note: Manish Kumar is a development communication specialist and is currently working as Programme Manager-Knowledge for Development (ICT), with OneWorld South Asia, New Delhi, India.

User comments

[**New comment**]

www.digitalopportunity.org