



## Importance of Opinion Leader in Agricultural Extension

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We can observe that opinion leaders tend to have access to mass media information and external contacts that provide them new ideas from outside. Additionally, the opinion leaders have greater contact with change agents, social participation, higher social status, and more innovativeness. Opinion leaders are used as role models in the adoption of innovations. This can be effective at the social and economic levels of the diffusion process. From the economic perspective of projects' implementation when diffusing an innovation, opinion leaders multiply the efforts of the change agent, by carrying the message to more possible adopters. This translates into effectiveness by achieving more diffusion in less time. At the social level, once opinion leaders have adopted an innovation, that innovation acquires local sponsorship and credibility. Where, Opinion leaders are heterophilous individuals who observe and evaluate innovations proven by innovators. They are considered early adopters of culturally acceptable innovations and generally are opponents of culturally unacceptable ones. Once opinion leaders approve and adopt an innovation, it influences others in the group who also adopt the innovation to maintain a social and economic status among the social system. Leaders are important determinants of rapid and sustained change, as diffusion happens faster when it is initiated by them. They are considered the bridge between farmers and sources of innovations.

Transferring the relevant technologies is the main job of extension personnel. But also, opinion leaders have to play a vital role in dissemination of agricultural information among their followers and other farmers and in a way, are responsible for bringing desirable changes in the community for its overall development. Leadership in rural areas functions amidst of small groups. The human relations approach is also important, as most of the villagers are ignorant, innocent, needy and sensitive. Various writers have tried to define the term 'leadership'. However, still a comprehensive definition for the term does not exist. According to Linderman, 'a leader is an individual whose relations, judgments and feelings are accepted (responded to) by the group, as the bases of belief and action.' In the view of Allport, 'leadership according to our present usage means the direct, face-to-face contact between leader and followers; it is personal social control. The importance of opinion leaders in the diffusion and adoption of improved agricultural practices is described and discussed. Opinion leaders are those individuals who have a greater-than-average share of influence within their community because they modify the opinions of others in an informal manner. Opinion leaders usually conform closely to the norms of their social system. They make use of unbiased and technically accurate sources of information, and they are better equipped than their followers, in terms of knowledge, insight and judgment, to put innovations to practical use. Opinion leaders are usually cosmopolitan in their attitudes. They mix well with

other people, are of relatively high social status and tend to be more innovative than their followers.

The personal influence of opinion leaders is very important in the persuasion stage of the innovation decision process. Opinion leaders are perceived as expert and trustworthy precisely because of their relative objectivity regarding innovations. Indeed, most of their judgments about innovations are negative. One implication of this tendency is that innovations perceived as radical are especially likely to be rejected by opinion leaders and, thus, are better targeted first to innovators who are sources of information for the opinion leaders in question.

### **The Role of Opinion Leaders in Diffusion of Knowledge**

Knowledge management systems are effective when the innovations are pioneered by organizations. Apart from the innovations themselves, they have to be diffused throughout the organization to benefit the employees. The key question here is that when there are thousands of artifacts and documents as part of the knowledge base of an organization, how do rank and file employees sift through them and find out what is relevant and applicable to them as well as what is accurate and a rich source of information. In other words, employees must not waste their time looking for the best possible sources of information and artifacts in the knowledge management system and instead, must have a tool or a ranking system where they can find the most relevant and pertinent articles easily and without great difficulty. This is where the roles of the opinion leaders and the change agents are important as their certification and ranking of the articles would lend credibility and importance to the artifacts. Each organization has certain employees who are known throughout the organization as opinion leaders and change agents and hence, their recommendations carry weight and lend the muchneeded respectability to knowledge.

### **Importance the Working Change Agent with Opinion Leaders**

The extension agent should take great care to develop the qualities mentioned above. His own relationship with local leaders will also be important and he should always try to be available to support and encourage their work. There are four main aspects of working with local leaders which the agent should keep in mind.

- Inform opinion leaders of extension activities and proposals for new programmes, and keep them supplied with extension literature.
- Visit them as often as is necessary - enough to ensure that they are not isolated or left on their own. Try to make the visits regular so that the leader can build them into his own work routine.
- Train the opinion leaders in the aspects of extension activities with which they may be unfamiliar; formal training sessions can be set up at which the leaders will learn about a new practice, how to run a demonstration or how to hold a farmers' meeting.
- Encourage the opinion leaders to take the initiative and to begin to act with some independence. The more they can become recognized and effective, the better chance the extension agent will have of making an impact in the area. An extension agent who has the use of the services of a group of good, efficient opinion leaders has a tremendous additional resource at his disposal and will be in a far better position to get extension work going in that area than if he had to work alone and unsupported.

### **Importance of Rural Leadership**

The utilization of rural leaders is essential because of the following reasons: Extension has a long tradition of using leader in extension work. Extension worker as an outsider may not have complete knowledge about different aspects of village community nor they are supposed to have similar perceptions and feelings about village problems as local people may have.

Thus, there are good reasons to use such people who belong to the community. Leaders by virtue of their influences can convey messages of development more convincingly in the people's language. They can use arguments and styles of presentation most appropriate for the target population. They can also help to get social sanction for development. Besides, they can also serve as mouthpiece of people before extension workers, they can explain elaborately the needs and aspirations of people. Number of extension workers is proportionately far less than required. Thus, use of leader can help to multiply effects of extension work conveniently and convincingly. Leaders can help in enlisting participation of people in programmes of their own development. It is possible to organize people around concrete problems. Leaders can use their influence and skills to bring people together and empower them to take action for their development. Villages in India are still haunted by deep rooted beliefs, customs, superstitions and ignorance which influence development negatively. It calls for different types of efforts to overcome social barriers. Leaders, if positively inclined, can play prominent roles in master minding development in right earnest.

### **Characteristics of Opinion Leaders**

Numerous studies have been conducted attempting to identify opinion leader characteristics. The research is not conclusive, but we have some understanding of the opinion leader's profile. First, opinion leaders have approximately the same social class position as non-leaders, although they may have higher social status within the class, Opinion leaders have approximately the same social-class position as non-leaders, although they may have higher social status within the class. This does not mean that personal influence does not flow across different class lines, but is likely to be infrequent and of a visual nature rather than verbal. Opinion leaders have greater exposure to mass media that are relevant to their area of interest. For example, opinion leaders for women's fashions could be expected to have higher exposure to such magazines as Vogue and Glamour. Similarly, automobile opinion leaders might be expected to read Motor Trend or Hot Rod. Exposure to relevant mass media provides them with information useful in enhancing their leadership potential. Opinion leaders have greater interest and knowledge of the area of influence than do nonleaders. This finding is closely related to their greater media exposure. Of course, knowledge is not a prerequisite for opinion leader influence. Undoubtedly, much influence takes place by those who are ignorant of the topic of conversation. Opinion leaders are more gregarious than nonleaders are. This finding is logical, given that they must interact with those whom they influence. Thus, opinion leaders are generally more sociable or companionable. Opinion leaders have more innovativeness than do nonleaders. This does not mean, however, that they are innovators (the first people to purchase a new item). In fact, innovators and opinion leaders have been found in several studies to have differing characteristics and lifestyles. In the fashion market, for instance, the innovator is seen as an adventurer who is the earliest visual communicator of the newest styles aimed at the mass of fashion consumers." The opinion leader, however, may be characterized more as an "editor" of fashions, who defines and endorses appropriate standards. Opinion leaders are also more familiar with and loyal to group standards and values than are nonleaders. This refers to the fact that opinion leaders are vested with leadership authority by group members, and in order to maintain this position, the individual has to reflect underlying norms and values for that area of consumption leadership. The clothing influential, for instance, cannot be too far ahead of or behind fashion, but must reflect the current norms in clothing.

### **Conclusion**

Opinion leaders play a very important role in the agricultural extension where, Opinion leaders, who are also local farmers, are sufficiently heterophilous to be good sources of new information and advice. They usually enjoy considerable influence on the way other locals

think and behave. Opinion leadership is not a characteristic applicable under all conditions of rural innovation. Some farmers might be opinion leaders in a wider context, and others might have leadership roles restricted to specific issues. Opinion leaders for midsize farms under certain conditions can be useless for smaller operations or under other conditions, and social interaction among those groups can be limited. Separate communication networks might. The importance of opinion leaders does not mean that extension activities should be concentrated exclusively on these people, while forgetting about the remaining farmers.

There will always be a section of the farming community who will be antagonistic towards extension officers and research workers. These farmers seldom make use of publications and relatively few of them will attend meetings and symposia. They will instead turn to other farmers for advice, discarding the extension officer as a man "with no practical experience", whose knowledge is obtained exclusively from books. To help these farmers improve their standards of productivity, the only avenue available is through their opinion leaders.