

Being a good “interface” <Part 6>

Meaning of linking

Linking and interface

In this series, we have considered potentials of using “interface” as a key word. As we have discussed by using different case studies, we can “link” people, entities and things, through “interface”.

Incidentally, while we have focused on “linking” throughout the series, what we first touched upon at the beginning of the series was “separation”. Not knowing each other is a cause for this separation. Therefore, mutual understanding is critical and the role of interface is exactly to support this understanding.

Interface involves people

As we introduced in part 2 “Extension workers, linking farmers and researchers” and part 3 “Linking different organizations”, by connecting individuals, a network of stakeholders is established, invigorating existing organizations and systems. As the case studies showed, the center of linkages is people. It has become evident that it is important to shorten psychological distance by getting to know each other, through establishing networks by linking them thereby enriching human connections.

In order to link effectively

In addition, in order to effectively link people through interface, it is important to know both sides. For instance, in order to prevent separation between farmers and researchers, extension staff who are in between the two sides need to be able to bridge the divide. It is expected that extension staff can link needs that farmers

will face, with research and experiments which can respond to these needs. We also introduced the fact that foreigners (in our case Japanese experts) can play an important role as “glue” to link different organizations.

Empathy for effective communication

We discussed the theme “Interpreters - connecting people with nature” in part 4, and “Linking people and information” in part 5. We discussed the importance of communicating thoughts and feelings within a message and how interpreters need to be able to empathize with others’ viewpoints, understanding what the receivers of information are looking for.

Interface as catalyst

Interaction and exchanges between different people and entities can yield significant benefits. In addition, there is always a possibility that something new is conceived from such interactions.

In the field of chemistry, there are “catalysts” that play an extremely important and interesting role in stimulating reactions. In some ways, development assistance is like chemical reactions caused by exchanges between people. In this sense, functions of interface as catalysts is highly important.

Also in order to ensure that the “chemical reaction” is a good quality one, it is important for the “catalyst” (interface) to be able to make appropriate judgements based on particular circumstances. Furthermore, catalysts themselves need to grow so as to continue to increase quality of chemical reactions into the future.

Case Study	Role as interface	Points to note and future challenges
Extension staff – linking farmers and researchers	Linking needs and problems of farmers and research institutions (researchers).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen human relationships between extension staff and researchers. • Communication skills and trusting relationship with farmers. • Pay attention to extension needs and changes in extension staff’s roles.
Japanese (third party) – linking different organizations	Japanese expert acting as glue between people from different organizations and units cooperates to implement a project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know one another and increasing opportunities for joint action are effective ways to shorten “distance”. • Division of roles among related organizations and strengthening function as organizations.
Interpreter – linking people and nature	Linking people and nature through interpretation as part of environmental education programs etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate messages rather than simply transferring knowledge. • It is necessary to have skills and tools to ensure more smooth communication of messages.
Media – linking people and information	Linking various people through database and PA media such as newsletters and brochures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contents of information and methods of communication (how to process and show the information) are important. • It is necessary to understand intended information recipients’ understanding and have empathy towards what they are looking for.