

ATTITUDE

In our everyday lives, attitudes play a major role in affecting our behavior. They influence how we feel and behave toward others in our decisions. They strongly influence what we decide to do, where we go to school, what job we decide to take, where to live, and whether or not to accept a new way of doing things.

The positions we take towards public issues and policies are also strongly influenced by our attitudes. These attitudes affect how citizens feel about such issue as energy conservation, land use, drugs, environment controls, health care, government safety, and other community issues. Attitudes affect how citizens feel about state, national, and international issues.

In using community action programs to solve issues and implement policies, people are often concerned with promoting and stimulating social change. Among the factors affecting the acceptance or rejection of new community action programs are the attitudes of community members. In some cases, your programs may fail because existing attitudes of community members are not in agreement with the proposed change.

Components of Attitude

Attitude represents the positive or negative mental and neural readiness towards a person, place, thing or event. It consists of three components:

- a) Affective Component (Neural) (Feeling/ Emotion)
- b) Behavioral Component (Readiness) (Response/ Action)
- c) Cognitive Component (Mental) (Belief/ Evaluation)

Affective Component: The affective component is the emotional response (liking/disliking) towards an attitude object. Most of the research place emphasis on the importance of affective components. An individual's attitude towards an object cannot be determined by simply identifying its beliefs about it because emotion works simultaneously with the cognitive process about an attitude object.

The affect (feelings and emotions) and attitude (evaluative judgment based on brand beliefs) streams of research are combined to propose an integrated model of attitude and choice.

Behavioral Component: The behavioral component is a verbal or overt (nonverbal) behavioral tendency by an individual and it consists of actions or observable responses that are the result of an attitude object. It involves person's response (favorable/unfavorable) to do something regarding attitude object. Attitudinal responses are more or less consistent. That is, a series of responses toward a given attitudinal stimulus is likely to show some degree of organizational structure, or predictability.

Cognitive Component: The cognitive component is an evaluation of the entity that constitutes an individual's opinion (belief/disbelief) about the object. Cognitive refers to the thoughts and beliefs an individual has about an attitude object. Belief is information a person has about an object; information that specifically links an object and attribute. The cognitive component is the storage section where an individual organizes the information.

In addition to the affective, cognitive and behavioural components, attitudes also have other properties. Four significant features of attitudes are: Valence (positivity or negativity), Extremeness, Simplicity or Complexity (multiplexity), and Centrality.

Valence (Positivity or Negativity): The valence of an attitude tells us whether an attitude is positive or negative towards the attitude object. Suppose an attitude (say, towards nuclear research) has to be expressed on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Very bad), 2 (Bad), 3 (Neutral — neither good nor bad), and 4 (Good), to 5 (Very good). If an individual rates her/his view towards nuclear research as 4 or 5, this is clearly a positive attitude. This means that the person likes the idea of nuclear research and thinks it is something good. On the other hand, if the rating is 1 or 2, the attitude is negative. This means that the person dislikes the idea of nuclear research, and thinks it is something bad. We also allow for neutral attitudes. In this example, a neutral attitude towards nuclear research would be shown by a rating of 3 on the same scale. A neutral attitude would have neither positive nor negative valence.

Extremeness: The extremeness of an attitude indicates how positive or negative an attitude is. Taking the nuclear research example given above, a rating of 1 is as extreme as a rating of 5 : they are only in the opposite directions (valence). Ratings of 2 and 4 are less extreme. A neutral attitude, of course, is lowest on extremeness.

Simplicity or Complexity (Multiplexity): This feature refers to how many attitudes there are within a broader attitude. Think of an attitude as a family containing several 'member' attitudes. In case of various topics, such as health and world peace, people hold many attitudes instead of single attitude. An attitude system is said to be 'simple' if it contains only one or a few attitudes, and 'complex' if it is made up of many attitudes. Consider the example of attitude towards health and well-being. This attitude system is likely to consist of several 'member' attitudes, such as one's concept of physical and mental health, views about happiness and well-being, and beliefs about how one should achieve health and happiness. By contrast, the attitude towards a particular person is likely to consist of mainly one attitude. The multiple member-attitudes within an attitude system should not be confused with the three components described earlier. Each member attitude that belongs to an attitude system also has A-B-C components.

Centrality: This refers to the role of a particular attitude in the attitude system. An attitude with greater centrality would influence the other attitudes in the system much more than non-central (or peripheral) attitudes would. For example, in the attitude towards world peace, a negative attitude towards high military expenditure may be present as a core or central attitude that influences all other attitudes in the multiple attitude system.

Functional Theory of Attitudes

According to psychologist Daniel Katz and his *Functional Theory of Attitudes*, attitudes facilitate social behaviour; they are functional for the person and are determined by a person's motives

Adjustive Function

This category embraces those attitudes which are utilitarian in origin and intent. Very often the object is some tangible benefit. Often, too, these attitudes are affective associations based upon previous experience. A favourable attitude towards a certain food is based on pleasant memories of the food. This function of attitudes has relevance in the realm of behavioral theory and social group work.

Take, for instance, the matter of 'shaping' behavior. It follows from the nature of the adjustive function of attitudes that the clarity, consistency and nearness of rewards and punishments as they relate to the individual's attitudes and goals are important factors in the acquiring of new utilitarian attitudes. This must be taken into account in shaping new habits.

A further implication for social group work is that if the group worker is in a situation where utilitarian, adjustive attitudes predominate among individuals, the group goals must be such that they will help in the satisfaction of utilitarian needs or in the avoidance of punishments. But punishment can be dysfunctional in promoting attitude change where there is no apparent course of action available to the individual to save him from undesirable consequences. Fear appeals must be linked to delineated courses of action if attitude change

is desired. Furthermore, as the research of Janis and Terwilliger indicates, when a relatively high level of fear is induced by warnings presented in a persuasive communication, the recipients will become motivated to develop psychological resistances to the communication's arguments, conclusions and recommendations

Ego-Defensive Function

This is where attitudes proceed from within the person, and the objects and situation to which they are attached are merely convenient outlets for their expression. Katz gives the example of an individual who projects hostility to a minority in order to protect himself from feelings of inferiority. One common type of ego-defensive function is transference where an attitude adopted towards a person is not based on the reality of the situation. These ego-defensive attitudes stem basically from internal conflicts. One of the difficulties of ego-defensive attitudes is that the usual procedures for changing attitudes and behavior may not cause the individual to modify but may force him to reinforce his defenses, causing him to cling tenaciously to his emotionally held belief. Among the procedures for attempting to change attitudes, Katz includes invoking punishments. This has relevance in the application of behavioral theory to social group work. However, it should be noted that those who advocate the application of behavioral theory most frequently favour a system of rewards rather than punishments.

Value-Expressive Function

These attitudes have the function of giving positive expression to central values and to the type of person an individual conceives himself to be. A man, for instance, may think of himself as an internationalist. Attitudes in keeping with this—favourable attitudes, say, towards other countries—would have a value-expressive function for him. These attitudes may have a double function: they may be a confirmation of self-identity; and they may also help to mold the self-image “closer to the heart's desire.” Favourable attitudes towards a group very often have a value-expressive function. The group gives the individual a sense of identity. Arthur Cohen in writing of the group as an important source of attitude change states, “Many research findings which show that members of a group resist communications

that run counter to the norms and values of the group and accept those sanctioned by it can be interpreted in terms of social approval or disapproval.”

A favourable attitude to the group may be value-expressive insofar as it gives a person of low self-esteem a sense of identity and by the same token opens him to the influence of the group. Katz mentions two conditions which are relevant in changing value expressive attitudes:

1. *Some degree of dissatisfaction -with one's self-image or its associated values, which opens the -way to fundamental attitude change.* This is closely allied to the hypothesis that a person of low self-esteem tends to be more open to change from a person (or group) of high self-esteem.
2. *Dissatisfaction with old attitudes as inappropriate to one's -values.* Clearly, this dissatisfaction can be aroused in a group where members are shown by the worker and group members that present ways of acting conflict with values held.

Knowledge Function

The knowledge function of attitudes has already been discussed briefly when treating of functional and causal analysis of attitudes. According to Katz, an individual seeks knowledge to give meaning to what would otherwise be a chaotic and unorganized universe. As an example of the knowledge function of attitudes Katz cites the findings of Herzog who studied the gratifications which housewives gain by listening to daytime serials on the radio. Herzog found that one of the important reasons why serials were popular was the fact that they were daily sources of information and advice. Discussing patterns of social influence, Cohen draws attention to the role of “opinion leaders”. The attitude of others towards “opinion leaders” is functionally

determined by the need of knowledge. Even more pertinent to social group work is Cohen's discussion of the group's informational function.¹³ Members seek covalidation for their ideas within the group, and they look to the group for knowledge. The group has therefore an effectiveness for influencing the attitudes of its members.

Attitude Formation Model

The starting point in understanding attitudes is the relationship between attitudes and behavior. It is generally understood that a person's attitudes have a primary influence on behavior.

Attitude ————— Behavior

Attitude denotes feelings, beliefs, and tendencies to act toward other persons, groups, ideas, or objects.

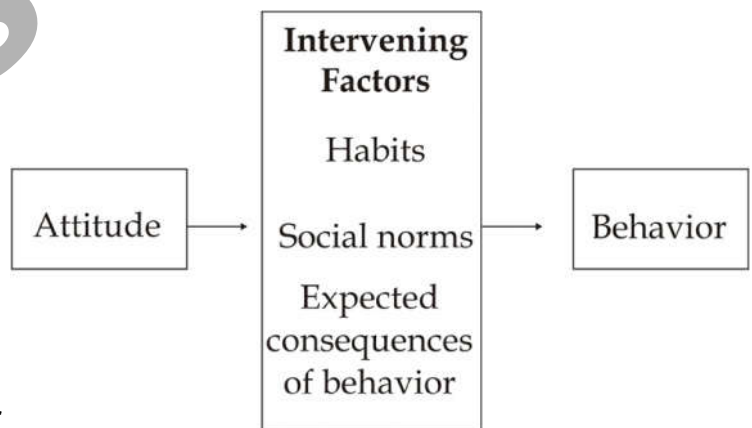
Behaviour denotes any response or reaction of an individual, including not only bodily reactions and movements, but also verbal statements and subjective experiences.

This attitude model suggests that how you feel about some person, object, or idea will influence your behavior toward that object. An attitude against land use planning, for example, may influence a state legislator to vote against a bill proposing the establishment of a state land use policy.

If one's know a person's attitude, then will often be able to make predictions about how that individual will behave. However, it is not uncommon for people to have feelings one way and to behave differently. For example, citizens may have positive feelings toward the city providing more recreational parks and programs, but vote against a bond issue for new recreational facilities because it would raise city taxes.

This difference between what we say and what we do may lead one to raise questions about the relationship between attitudes and behavior. How often have you worked with someone who behaved in a manner entirely contrary to how you expected him or her to act? How often have your predictions of someone's behavior been proven wrong? This has probably happened often enough so that it is clear that the simple relationship suggested between an attitude and behavior needs to be modifies.

It is apparent that there are factors that interview between attitudes and behavior which would cause a person's behavior to be inconsistent with his or her attitudes. These factors include a person's habits, social norms, and the expected consequences of behavior.



Habits: Any regularly repeated action on the part of an individual that is learned and that is observable to others.

Social norms: A standard shared by the members of a social group to which the members are expected to conform, with conformity being enforced by positive and negative sanctions.

Expected consequences of behavior: The evaluation by an individual of what the outcomes of a particular behavior are likely to be.