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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the power and energy needs of a small-to-medium sized (35,000), one industry, midwestern community and how that community overcame the communication obstacles which prevented fulfillment of its energy needs. The paper outlines the background on the communication situation being described, then provides a chronology of the key events followed by a description of the events in the diffusion process, and concludes with an analysis of the entire matter from the initial problem to its final solution. (RB)

POWER FOR THE PEOPLE: THE EFFECTS OF A DIFFUSION CAMPAIGN ON A COMMUNITY

by
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Introduction

As early as 1966, or perhaps even earlier, there were people who were perceptive enough to foresee what has become a sickeningly obvious fact of life in 1974. That 1974 fact of life is that there is an ever-increasing shortage of power on this planet.

This paper will examine the power needs of small-to-medium sized, one industry, mid-western community and how that community went about overcoming the obstacles standing between the need and fulfillment of that need. The paper will first outline the background on the situation being described, then provide a chronology of key events followed by a description of events in the diffusion process and an analysis of the entire process.

The uniqueness of this paper is twofold. First, it described a successful, textbook example of a diffusion campaign which was accomplished by people who knew little or nothing about what a diffusion would have to say on the subject. Secondly, it is a mass communication study with a peculiar twist. Although there are dozens of definitions of mass communications, they all probably say that mass communication is communication from a single source or a few to a relatively unknown mass of people. The uniqueness, then, is that the paper describes a case of a great mass of people communicating to a known few.

Situational Background

The setting for this paper is Midland, Michigan, a town of 35,176 people (1970 census). Midland probably has more than any town its size in the United States. They have beautiful schools and churches, a thriving business district, several public swimming pools, golf courses, and a beautiful fine arts complex most of which are due mainly to the success of a single industry. Midland is the headquarters and main plants of Dow Chemical. So on one hand we have a firm that has been a bit of a local pollutant and at times gives off some unpleasant odors in the area. On the other hand, Dow has either directly or indirectly provided Midland with more outstanding incomes and facilities than any town of its size could hope for.

In 1966 some local businessmen and the owners of Dow Chemical foresaw that there would ultimately be a power and energy shortage which could have a serious effect on local operations. With this in mind and in cooperation with Consumers Power Company, a feasibility study concerning new sources of power was undertaken. The results of the study indicated that nuclear power would be a workable answer. Consumers Power Company already had built a smaller pilot type nuclear power plant on the shore of Lake Michigan near Charlevoix, Michigan.

The federal Atomic Energy Commission also figures heavily in this drama. Although their role is becoming clearer, the original charge to the AEC was a confusing one at best. They were at one at the same time charged with promoting peaceful uses of atomic energy and also with controlling the uses of atomic energy and the issuance of licenses. This sort of conflicting, even antithetical roles naturally caused a great deal of internal and external role confusion for the ACE.

The findings of the feasibility study in Midland recommended the further exploration of atomic power by Consumers and Dow. At this particular point in time, approximately early 1969, the ecology movement was reaching a fever pitch around the country. The movement was reaching almost fetish proportions for some zealots in some situations. So the stage was set in 1969 for some very drawn out and involved men between a power company and a manufacturing firm and the protests of a very vocal group of interveners. On one hand, we have firms with an urgent need and few alternatives at their disposal. On the other hand, we find a super-heated group of people with a different set of priorities. If they understood industrial needs and what the fulfillment of these needs, or the lack of it, might mean to the area, they prioritied all of this much lower than the condition of the local ecological systems.

Chronology of Events

**Key steps in the diffusion process

October 1966.....Feasibility study began. Approximately 27 months passed before anything really happened.

January 1969.....Ecological opposition was raised concerning the planning process by the Saginaw Valley Nuclear Study Committee. They were guided by a sharp, young Chicago attorney as their legal counsel.

July 1969.....Clearing of designated land and other preliminary site work was begun.

August 1970.....Government Committee on Environmental Quality asked for more study on thermal pollutants and considers additional cooling towers over and above the planned cooling.

**October 1970.....The Midland Nuclear Power Committee was formed (a pronuclear power group).

October 30, 1970.....AEC hearing dates in Midland were set.

November 1970.....Official intervention during the upcoming hearings was announced by M. Cherry and the Saginaw Valley Nuclear Study Committee (sometimes known as the Saginaw Interveners).

**November 9, 1970.....The Midland Nuclear Power Committee chartered a plane and flew 48 carefully, but randomily, selected citizens to the Atomic energy headquarters in laboratories in Oakridge, Tennessee. The citizens were exposed to the facts about nuclear power and the scientists, such as Dr. Pollard, who had been with peaceful atomic uses since their inception.

**November 12-24, 1970..The Oakridge people were brought to Midland for a series of nuclear power workshops open to the public.

During these workshops, 17 in number, 450 people heard lectures, became familiar with the language, built nuclear power plant models, handled geiger counters and so on.

December 1970.....AEC hearings began in Midland. Citizens who went to Oakridge filed a position paper with the hearing committee. The committee, which was to be constantly plagued by proceedural difficulties, met for two days and then suspended the hearings for six months.

March 1971.....Data concerning radioactive releases were checked.

June 17, 1971.....Cooling were added to the plans.

June 24, 1971.....Preliminary emergency plans were challenged by the interveners.

July 7, 1971.....Emergency evacuation became a part of the master plan. Now the Mapleton Interveners (from Mapleton, Michigan a nearby town with about 20 families) registered a complaint concerning potential icing and fogging in their area from the cooling ponds. Also a court decision elsewhere makes the AEC responsible for the environment as well as health and safety.

**October 12, 1971.....The big, pro-nuclear power rally planned by the Midland Nuclear Power committee was held at the county fairground, attracted 22 to 25 thousand citizens, and was a huge success.

October 23, 1971.....The plan was refiled with all of the revisions and new facts.

**October 25-28,1971...Midland group went to Washington for meetings with the AEC staff and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Council of Environmental Quality, the Michigan legislators, and the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.

**February 1972.....Midland group went to Washington again, this time with a giant 8 X 20 foot billboard full of signatures.

**April 1972.....AEC report favored the plans for the construction of the nuclear plant in Midland.

May 1972.....Some more intervention hearings were held but Myron Cherry was not present. Many felt that this weakened the interveners case.

**December 1972.....The construction permit for the plant is issued and the Saginaw interveners filed against the issuance of the permit.

**June 1973.....Construction began on the plant.

Description of the Diffusion Process

As one can see from the foregoing chronology, the early days of the attempt to get a nuclear power plant built in Midland were fraught with all sorts of vicissitudes. Interventions, indecisions on the part of the AEC, and some rather haphazard planning were running rampant.

The actual diffusion campaign involved here really began with the formation of the Midland Nuclear Power Committee in October of 1970. The Committee was formed by the local chamber of commerce director but without any actual overt involvement on the part of the chamber. A committee chairman, Reverend Wayne North, was selected and the committee represented the broadest possible community participation. Reverend North is a Presbytarian minister who sought his own training in peace time nuclear power before the committee was even formed, simply because he wanted to be informed.

After raising the necessary funds, the committee chartered an airplane and flew 48 carefully selected citizens to Oakridge, Tennessee for a quick training session at the federal atomic energy headquarters on November 9th. At this point there were at least 48 believers. Then from November 12-24, 1970 there were 17 nuclear energy public workshops held in Midland. Dr. Pollard, the Director of the Oakridge operation, and others from Oakridge came to Midland for these workshops, which deeply involved the participants. They were allowed to ask questions, build nuclear power plant models, handle geiger counters and most of the 450 people attending the workshops came away as quasi-experts who were speaking the language.

With the supporters of nuclear power steadily increasing, plans were started by the committee for a huge pro-nuclear power rally. Buttons stating, "We Need Nuclear Power Now" and bumper stickers with the same message were distributed. There was a public plea for money for the rally and trips to Washington. The money literally poured in basically from a small $1.00 and $5.00 sources, until $30,000 had been raised.

During the rally planning stages there were, however, storm clouds brewing on the other fronts. Intervention and all sorts of "picky" stalling tactics on the part of opposition forces were making the hearings and the quest for nuclear power a nightmare of confusion. During this period Dow quietly pulled a few of its smaller units out of the Midland operation and transferred them to other Dow locations where power was cheaper and more readily available. Finally, when the confusion and opposition reached a peak, the executives of Dow came to the Director of the Chamber of Commerce asking that they drop the plans for the rally. The reason given was, what seemed to be an increasing opposition to the power plant. The Dow people said they were giving up on nuclear power, would not renew their contract with Consumers Power Company, and would simply have to make other plans. It is possible that these "other plans" might not have included the city of Midland so the Chamber people swung into full action on the rally.

It was felt by the Midland Nuclear Power Committee that there was support for the power plant and the rally now began to take shape as an effort to prove a point simultaneously to Dow Chemical, Consumers Power, and the Atomic Energy Commission. The date, October 12, 1971, was set for the rally and plans were finalized with the leadership coming from every part of the community.

On October 12th this community of 31,176 people was alive with excitement as some 22 to 25 thousand of these people swarmed into the county fairgrounds. As the citizens entered through the four entrances they signed their names on 5 X 8 foot panels stationed at each of these entrances. The rally consisted of bands and speeches by civic leaders, state officials, as well as Dow and Consumers officials. There was a personal appearance by Art Linkletter, union officials, atomic energy experts, and state and federal legislators. As the rally reached a definate high the band played the Battle Hymn joined by the crowd singing parodied words from a song sheet. During the song, a truck pulled a giant 8 X 20 foot replica of an AEC license by the grandstand. The license replica was actually the four panels with the 22 to 25 thousand sigatures pieced together. A big finish to an exciting rally which said loud and clear to all concerned - - - - "Midland wants nuclear power and wants it now."

All three target groups for this rally were duly impressed, however, most impressed for the moment seemed to be Dow. The Dow officials said that they had no idea that Midland wanted them and nuclear power that much and that they would stay with the project all the way from that point on.

Following the rally the committee made two trips to Washington on October 25, 1971 and February of 1972 for further hearings. For the February visit they took the giant billboard with them and set it up in the hearing room as a petition.

An April, 1972 AEC report favored plant construction. Despite more late interventions, the construction permit for the plant was issued by the AEC in December of 1972, almost 6 years to the day from when it all began.

Construction began in June of 1973, and a series of reactors will be completed over approximately the next four years. In the meantime, Consumers Power has and will continue to come in about three times per year to update the citizens and provide progress reports.

Analysis

As previously mentioned, the campaign was unique in at least two major ways it provided a textbook example of a successful diffusion campaign without necessarily being based on any textbook information and it was also unique in that it was mass communication from the many to the few.

Mass communication is usually thought of as a comparative handful of people sending a message to a great mass of people simultaneously. It was in this campaign we saw the slow, steady spread of information, with all of the accompanying attitude changes from one person, to a committee to 48 people to 450 peole, until the word eventually reached 22 to 25 thousand people. At this point that mass of 22 to 25 thousand people communicated a single message to a few hierarchical decision-makers. Under the circumstances, there really was no other credible source to effectively transmit this message. It would have had little impact on executives trying to decide whether or not the citizens of the area wanted nuclear power in their area if they heard it from the Director of the Chamber of Commerce and a few businessmen. The word, to be really credible, had to come from the people themselves.

If we examine the credibility research of Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz, for instance, we find that the factors encompassed in source credibility are safety, qualification, dynamism (Berlo et al, 1969). In the situation described herein, the massed citizens at the rally were the source. Applying th source credibility factors outlined by Berlo, et al, we would have to say that the source was a credible one. Due to the educational programs conducted during the campaign, many of thes eople actually were qualified concerning nuclear power. Further, the can be little doubt they were highly qualified concerning what they wanted and what was best for them. The opinion of the citizens was certainly more trustworthy, and therefore safer, than the opinion of the bankers and Chamber of Commerce. Most inportant here perhaps is the dynamism factor. Dynamism may be defined as participatior or activity, both of which were present in abundance throughout the campaign

We can label the campaign a textbook example, not only because it was so successful, but because so much of what a textbook concerning change strategies would recommend actually took place. For instance, the plan was really an operational definition of the conceptual term diffusion. Rogers and Shoemaker defines the concept of diffusion as "the process by which innovations spread to the members of a social system" (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p. 12). The campaign for nuclear power in Midland was certainly a slow, well planned spread of information.

According to Rogers and Shoemaker the steps an individual goes through in the innovation - decision process are knowledge, persuasion, decision and confirmation. (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p. 103). There can be littl doubt that the members of this social system went through these steps. Even the confirmation step is still being repeated from time to time. As pointed out earlier, confirmation continues in Midland as the power company periodically reinforces the beliefs of the citizenry in nuclear power.

Placing the Midland cast of characters into the diffusion paradigm, the director of the Chamber of Commerce would certainly be the change agent. The opinion leaders, whose function it was to spread the information, was first of all the highly credible Rev. North, Chairman of the nuclear power committee, and then the 48 citizens who were taken to Oakridge.

There is, of course, a constant ethical concern in the form of consequences in any diffusion campaign. Consequences may be either functional (desireable) or dysfunctional (undesireable), directly or indirectly related to the change itself, and either manifest (recognized and intended) or latent (unrecognized or unintended) according to Rogers and Shoemaker (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p. 17). There can be even less doubt that ther was, and still is, considerable concern that the consequences of a nuclear power plant must be functional. A great many safety precautions have been taken to insure functional outcomes since the potential dysfunctional outcomes are unpleasant to say the least. At this point it would seem that bot the consequences stemming directly from the power plant as well as the indirect ones will be functional. The manifest consequences have all been scrutinized carefully in the master plan, however, latent consequences will always be a problem in that they are not really controllable.

Now the real uniqueness of this campaign is that when the change agent was confronted with what he had done and the accompanying terminology he seemed to be saying in effect, "What is diffusion?" He had done an outstanding job of strategic communication of an idea important to a community without knowing exactly what he had done from the academic point of view. We must ask ourselves two questions; "How could this happen?", "Are the academics of the situation important?"

In asking ourselves "how" this could happen we must first ask ourselves if it happens with any regularity. If it does, then probably the successful campaigner has some other kind of training similar to formally being introduced to the research. For instance, the traits and abilities necessary to be a successful community organizer are almost identical to those required of a successful salesman. Most successful salesmen known by this author have known how to affectively manage change based mainly on their own experiences. Additionally, we should point out that Rogers defines a change agent as "a professional who influences innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency." (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p.35). Clearly a community organizer and a salesman are both change agents.

Now it is possible that the success of a campaign such as this was accidental, even though it was planned. That is, perhaps the selection of the best -combination of strategies, the timing, and etc. were all a big happy accident. Such things do happen. If this is even remotely possible we have the answer to the question, "Are the academics of the situation important?" It has been said that "a single success proves it can be done. We must therefore find out why we were successful." In other words, the only thing worse failing and not being able to prevent it the next time, is to succeed and not be able to make it happen again on cue. Until we can control change in this way we are unable to predict outcomes and success may be rare indeed and only another happy accident. Scientifically planned change is the only feasible answer to such haphazard controls because it is "a method which self-consciously and experimentally employs social technology to help solve the problems of men and societies "(Bennis, Benne and Orin, 1969, p.2). A knowledgeable, cataloging and control of our planned change efforts is important if we expect to create another campaign as successful as the one described in this paper.

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