UNIT 12  PERSUASION

Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand:

- the meaning of persuasion;
- the significance of persuasion process;
- self awareness in persuasion.

Structure

12.1 Introduction
12.2 Meaning of Persuasion
12.3 Theory of Persuasion
12.4 Importance (Power) of Persuasion
12.5 Process of Persuasion
12.6 How to Persuade
12.7 Self-Awareness and Persuasion
12.8 Summary
12.9 Self-Assessment Questions
12.10 Further Readings

12.1  INTRODUCTION

Persuasion is the process of changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs or behaviour of a person. People respond to persuasive messages in two ways: thoughtfully and mindlessly. When we are in thoughtful mode, the persuasiveness of the message is determined by merits of the message. When we, respond to messages mindlessly, our brains are locked on automatic. We do not have the time, motivation or ability to listen intently. Typically, persuasion is largely dependent upon the attractiveness of the speakers and reaction of the listeners. Persuasion is solely related with communication, learning, awareness and thought.

12.2  MEANING OF PERSUASION

The notions of communication, learning, awareness and thought pervade definitions of persuasion. Betteinhaus defines persuasion as "a conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs or the behaviour of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message". This definition indicates that persuasion is assumed to involve conscious intent on the part of the persuader to affect the receiver of a persuasive message. It involves a selection of a strategy perceived to be most effective and the control of message and environmental variable so as to maximise the likelihood that the strategy will be effective. Much persuasive discourse is indirectly coercive, that is, the persuasive effectiveness of messages often heavily depends on the credibility of threats and the promises preferred by the communicator. For example, if the child perceives that the threatening parent is, for some reason or another, unlikely to suspend the child's allowance, the parent's persuasive messages will have minimum impact on the child's study habits. Persuasion is also valued as an instrument of democracy. The concept of persuasion has a clear
and important focus in the field of marketing; McGuire states it simply as "changing people's attitudes and behaviour through the spoken and written words".

## 12.3 THEORY OF PERSUASION

The theories commonly used to predict persuasive effects are more explicit in their assumptions of the conscious activities of the receiver of a persuasive message. Tedeschi et al. describe the common assumptions of four consistency theories: balance, congruity, psycho-logic and cognitive dissonance. "These theories have in common the treatment of the individual as an internally active processor of information who sorts through and modifies a multitude of cognitive elements in an attempt to achieve some type of cognitive coherence".

Even theories relying on mathematical formulations of persuasion process implicitly assume the conscious control of behaviour. Fishhein and Ajzen argue that persons' behavioural intentions can be predicted by a weighted combination of their attitude toward a behaviour and their perceptions of significant other expectations (subjective norm). In addition, the behavioural intentions are assumed to predict actual behaviour under most conditions.

In providing a behavioural alternative to cognitive theories, Bern implies some degree of cognitive processing. In some cases, individuals are assumed to be aware of their own internal states, while in other situations they must consciously reflect upon external cues to determine their inner states.

While this review of a substantial body of literature is brief, the citations are representative of the trends in the study of persuasion. Both persuader and persuadee are assumed to be conscious and aware of their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours during the persuasion process.

## 12.4 IMPORTANCE (POWER) OF PERSUASION

The power of persuasion, to begin with; is a functional model of powerfully effective, and persuasive communication. It does not matter what domain of skill a person has, this model will improve his or her ability to communicate effectively regardless of the context. Since we cannot separate out communication and persuasion, e.g. they are one and the same from the point that one cannot communicate with another person without at the same time influencing that person, it would be more respectful if the person knew exactly in what direction his or her influence was leading the other persons.

There is more to learning a model than just the installation of the specific strategies used inside that model. There needs to be something that is designed to drive the strategies. There also needs to be an effective, accurate feedback system which is designed specifically for the purpose of knowing where you are in the process of any communication, and in which direction you need to go next. A more complete model will contain synergistic cooperation between all rep-systems, value systems, belief or pre-suppositional foundations. Here is a description of some of the pieces of this model:

1) **Attitude at the level of conviction**

What is your attitude about life? about teaching? about success? Will your current attitude about power of communication support the rest of the model?
2) **Value system**

What are the values out of you choose to operate? If you have a value system which is built upon a win/lose negotiation, then attempt to build in a presupposition which says that what the other person wants in this communication is important, the possibility will exist for some incongruency in the system. The more congruent the more effective system.

3) **Beliefs or Presuppositions**

First we keep our eye on congruency between values and beliefs, then we look at whether the beliefs used in this model actually suppose the strategies/skill sets layered on top of them.

There is no substitute for congruence. Of all of the process that make up this persuasion model, congruence is the most important. Here are some possible presuppositions of this model.

### 12.5 PROCESS OF PERSUASION

In the process of persuasion both the persuader and the receiver of the persuasive message are consciously active. As Bettinghaus writes, "perception of a persuasive message is not a passive process. The receiver is as active in the receiving process as is the source in the transmitting process. The attitudes and beliefs of the receiver mediate the way in which the message will be received and responded to".

1. People are inherently brilliant.
2. People can learn to do anything they want to do easily.
3. Rapport is a natural function of communication which is brought about by honoring the person with whom you are communicating.
4. The goal is in finding out what the other person wants. Then in discovering how you can help that other person reach that goal.
5. When selling a product, targeting people who are already interested in that product makes sense.
6. There is no resistance, only feedback.
7. Communicating effectively is not about being in control but rather about being able to recognise what you are, in fact eliciting with your communication, and having the flexibility to adjust accordingly.

### 12.6 HOW TO PERSUADE

Upon agreeing that individuals are persuaded by symbolic means, the question can be raised as to whether certain types of symbolic strategies should be viewed as typifying the persuasion process, with others being exempted. More specifically, some writers (such as Rowell and Woolbert) have explored the wisdom of distinguishing between convincing and persuading - the so called conviction/persuasion duality. The duality holds that persuasion relies primarily on symbolic strategies, which trigger the emotions of intended persuadees while conviction is accomplished primarily by using strategies rooted in logical proof and which appeal to persuadees reason and intellect. Stated in evaluative terms, conviction derives its force from people's rationality, while persuasion caters to their irrationality.
The phrase "being persuaded" applies to situations where behaviour has been modified by symbolic transactions (messages) which are sometimes, but not always, linked with coercive force (indirectly coercive) and which appeal to the reason and emotions of the person(s) being persuaded.

12.6.1 Being Persuaded: Three Behavioural Outcomes

"Being persuaded" is equated with instances of behavioural conversation, i.e. individuals are persuaded when they have been induced to abandon one set of behaviours and to adopt another. Despite the tendency to equate persuasion with behavioural conversion, it seems useful to distinguish between three different behavioural outcomes commonly served by the persuasion process. Though the three outcomes are not always mutually exclusive, the utility of the distinction rests on the fact that the outcome sought sometimes affects the relative importance of variables contained in the persuasive equation, as well as the probable ease or difficulty with which persuaders may hope to accomplish their goals.

12.6.2 Being Persuaded as a Response-shaping Process

Individuals possess no clearly established pattern of responses to specific environmental stimuli. In such instances, persuasion takes the form of shaping and conditioning particular response patterns to these stimuli. Such persuasive understandings are particularly relevant when dealing with persons who have limited prior learning histories, or with situations where radically new and novel stimuli have been introduced into the environment. It should be emphasised that all instances of response-shaping are not commonly through of as instances of being persuaded. This distinction, while admittedly nebulous and slippery, implies that persuasion is a species of the genoers commonly labeled learning.

12.6.3 Being Persuaded as a Response-reinforcing Process

The response-reinforcing function underscores the fact that "being persuaded" is seldom, if ever a one-message proposition; instead, people are constantly in the process of being persuaded. If an individual clings to an attitude (and the behaviours associated with it) more strongly after exposure to a communication, then persuasion has occurred as surely as if the individual had shifted from one set of responses to another. There are strong grounds for believing that much persuasive communication in our society serves a response-reinforcing function. Nevertheless, there are at least three good reasons for not losing sight of the response-reinforcing dimension of "being persuaded". For practicing communicator, this dimension underscores the importance of keeping old persuasive friends as well as making new ones. In the heart of a political campaign or a fund-raising drive, it may be tempting to center efforts on potential converts at the expense of ignoring those whose prevailing response tendencies already coincide with the intent of the political candidate or the fund raiser. Such a mistake can easily yield low vote counts or depleted treasuries. Turning to the interpersonal sphere, close relationships may be damaged, or even terminated, because the parties take each other for granted in the terminology employed here, fail to send persuasive messages aimed at reinforcing mutually held positive attitudes and mutually performed positive behaviours.

Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that all response-reinforcing strategies and schedules are not destined to be equally effective. Research using cultural truisms (McGuire, 1964, 1969) has demonstrated the low resistance to change which results when behaviours and attitudes rest on a history of nearly 100 per cent positive reinforcement; apparently, too much exclusively behaviour-congruent information is not a good thing. Though studies such as those of
McGuire and Burgoon and his associates (1973, 1974) have been characterised as dealing with the problem of inducing resistance to persuasion, the conceptualisation that has been offered here views this label as a misnomer. Research dealing with the response-reinforcing function of persuasion is research on how to persuade, in a different sense than the popular usage implies, a position that has also recently been espoused by other writers (Burgoon et al., 1978).

12.6.4 Being Persuaded as a Response-changing Process

"Being persuaded" is most typically thought of as a response-changing process. Smokers are persuaded to become non-smokers; automobile drivers are persuaded to walk or use public transportation. Moreover, definitions of persuasion found in most texts emphasise the notion of changing responses (Bettinghas, 1973; Croswhite, 1969). The view of persuasion is of course consistent with the ideological tenets of democratic societies. Problems of social and political changes are problems of persuasion. The public must be induced to change present attitudes and behaviours to compost with the realities of new situations. For instance, the continuing popularity of Dale Carnegie-type courses rests primarily on the following claim: our instruction will motivate you to change your manner of self-presentation (that is, to alter established patterns of social behaviour); this change in turn will cause others to change dramatically their patterns of responding to you (that is others will be persuaded by your changed behaviour to relate to you in different ways). Although these processes are typically treated under such rubrics as interpersonal communication and interpersonal relations, they should be counted as instances of the response changing dimension of "being persuaded".

12.7 SELF-AWARENESS AND PERSUASION

Considerable research has focussed on the reactions of receivers to persuasive messages. Such research has often constructed situations in which subjects were made aware of their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in the experiment. Some other research has been useful for modeling behaviour that is consciously controlled, the psychology of self-awareness would suggest that three questions be pursued, which are discussed below.

(a) To what extent are people in persuasive situations aware of their mental and behavioural responses to persuasive communications? Nisbett and Wilson (1977) provide evidence that subjects may not be aware of mental processes and changes as a result of persuasive messages. Research in the subliminal area suggests that people may not have to be aware of the stimulus in order to react to it (Dixon, 1971).

(b) To what extent do individual differences in self-awareness influence persuasion? Research suggests that high self-monitors are less concerned with inconsistencies between attitudes and behaviours. Interestingly, we might also argue that people may differ in their awareness of such inconsistencies. People who are high in private self-consciousness may discover such inconsistencies, whereas people in private self-consciousness may not. Self-consciousness may provide insight into when either theory might predict persuasive effects.

(c) What situational ones prompt an individual to be self-aware in the persuasion process? A variety of experimental methods seem to increase a person's self-awareness in persuasion experiments. One method that may prompt self-awareness involves recording one's thoughts about a persuasive message.
When a person is required to recall thoughts, write them down and then observe them, we would expect them to be objectively self-aware. Pretty and Calioppo (1977) examined the effects of forewarning people of an impending persuasive message and listing their other thoughts about the message on resistance to attitude change. These authors found that asking forewarned subjects to record their own general thoughts or topic-related thoughts prior to receiving a persuasive message tends to increase counterarguing and subsequent resistance to attitude change.

Roberts and Maccoby (1973) conducted a complex analysis of cognitive reactions to persuasive messages. They found that subjects who listed their thoughts during a communication generated more positive statements about the message, while subjects who listed their thoughts after the message generated more negative statements. Osterhouse and Brockner (1979) suggested that the effect of focusing on one's responses to a persuasive message can be disrupted by distraction. As the level of distraction increased, counterargument production decreased while communication acceptance increased.

Cialdini et al. (1974) discovered that people evaluate a receiver of a message according to the receiver's response to a persuasive message. The persuader tends to attribute greater intelligence to a receiver who changes to a position congruent with the persuader's than if the receiver resists. An observer of the persuasive attempt tends to negatively evaluate a receiver who is easily persuaded even if the observer agrees with the position advocated in the message.

It is important to examine how people respond to persuasive messages when they are self-aware, it is equally important to examine how they respond when they are not self-aware. Indeed, if we could examine the behaviour of people in naturalistic persuasion settings, we might find that they are typically lower in self-awareness than some would expect. One might find that people often comply with a large number of persuasive messages received at work without consciously considering the relevance to beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

12.8 SUMMARY

From this unit, you would have understood the meaning and process of persuasion, how important is persuasion process for a manager in an organisation. The various situations in an organisation like collective bargaining and negotiation, conflict resolution, grievance handling, improving interpersonal relationship depends upon "being persuaded". At the end, we understood the process of persuasion is entirely dependent upon the self-awareness of the persuadee.

12.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What is persuasion? Discuss its significance.
2. Discuss various theories and process of persuasion.
3. Describe the behavioural outcomes of being persuaded.
4. Discuss the relationship between self-awareness and persuasion.

12.10 FURTHER READINGS


