

THE INNOVATION OF RECYCLING

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The process of spread of a given idea, technique, method or practice, over time, via specifiable channels, through a social structure like a school, a neighborhood, a factory or a tribe is called diffusion (Katz et al, 1963). An innovation is a new idea, method or technique. Innovations usually bring changes to the social systems into which they are introduced.

This study considers the recycling of waste materials into art works as an innovation in our social setting. One may consider this statement a bit incongruous with the reality of today's world. This is in view of the fact that several nations of the world (advanced, developing and underdeveloped), have for many years been recycling the waste generated from their environments. In our cities however, the management of waste is a huge health, social and financial challenge. This explains why the writer considers any move towards waste management, especially converting waste to art and by implication, waste to wealth, as an innovation.

Diffusion scholars have enunciated different approaches to the diffusion of innovations. Katz et al (op.cit.) recorded that for a given new idea to diffuse into a given social system, five stages are involved. The stages are awareness stage, interest stage, evaluation stage, trial stage and adoption stage.

During the awareness stage, the person involved becomes aware of the new idea or technique. He sees the idea at work either by practicing it personally or observing its practice by others. From awareness, depending on what happened, interest comes. The individual may have been moved to the point of wanting to obtain more information about the new idea. This interest may lead him into digging out facts that would lead him into the stage of evaluation.

Evaluation is especially important as it leads the subject closer to the point of decision. The result of the evaluation done on the new idea will lead to the next stage - which is trial. Here, the person in question begins to try the new idea or technique supported by the convictions from the earlier-done evaluation. When the trial results are good enough, the last step, according to Katz et al, will follow. It is the stage of adoption. Adoption literally means accepting the new idea and giving it formal approval. Having adopted the idea, practice follows naturally and at this level, the innovation can be said to have diffused into the social structure.

It has been noted that different kinds of innovations require different kinds of adoption units. A new finding in medical science will have medical practitioners as the adoption unit, just like a new agricultural technique will be in the domain of farmers. Relating this to our discourse, recycling waste to art is directly related to the work of the environmentalist, conservator or development professional and the artist. It is really nice to know that from the items that Nigerians throwaway daily, other professional Nigerians, not unskilled scavengers, can make a decent living.

When foresighted people are involved in groundbreaking, development-oriented programmes like 'Art is Everywhere', they are bound to meet hurdles and experience problems. Suffice it to say that these problems are only natural and fit into the processes or stages of diffusion enunciated by Katz and his colleagues as well as other scholars in the area of diffusion of innovations. Let us examine the writings of another set of scholars on the subject of diffusion to drive our point home.

Everett Rogers and Floyd Shoemaker are foremost diffusion scholars. Their work on the diffusion of innovations was a distillation of 1500 publications that dealt with innovations and how they diffuse into the social system. In their 1971 publication, *Diffusion of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, the authors point out that the rate at which people adopt a new idea or practice is dependent on the compatibility of the practice with the people's cultural beliefs. Also affecting the adoption or rejection of an innovation is the individual's reference groups. So do opinion leaders and the use of effective communication. Since 'Art is everywhere' is basically an innovation, it is probably true that cultural beliefs, reference groups, opinion leaders and communication affect the adoption or rejection of its unique offer - 'waste to

art'. Knowing these should put the minds of the organizers of this workshop at rest knowing that as an innovative project, the steps needed for diffusion to take place will be exhausted before full adoption or acceptance by society is possible.

Regarding social change, it is an alteration in the structure and function of a social system. It occurs when the use or rejection of a new idea has an effect. Rogers and Shoemaker contend that change can occur in an individual or in the social system. If it occurs in an individual, it is called diffusion, adoption, modernization, acculturation, learning or socialization. If the change takes place in a social system, it is referred to as development, specialization, integration or adoption. Concerning a social system, it is a collectivity of units that are functionally differentiated and engaged in a joint problem-solving project or common goal. We can therefore claim here that what the managers of 'Waste to Art Project' or 'Art is Everywhere Workshop' want is a change in attitude to waste, both at the individual and the social system levels. It is likely that the diffusion process may be slow, sometimes discouraging, but it will surely keep progressing till full knowledge and change in attitude and behaviour occur.

We must realize that for a change to qualify as an innovation, it must be superior to the one it is replacing; it must be compatible with existing values, experiences and needs; and should not be so complex that it cannot be understood and used.

Waste is understandably something that everyone abhors in our social system. This may explain why, unlike people in Asia and parts of Latin America all of whom live in developing countries, our people see nothing useful in the waste that is thrown away daily. People who scavenge are often regarded as the scum of the earth, deserving pity and sympathy. Based on this social interpretation, it is very difficult to see any good in waste. This should explain why this project must pass through the filter of the diffusion process.

Rogers and Shoemaker supplied four steps in the innovation-diffusion process which are similar to those by Katz et al. The four steps are; knowledge, persuasion, decision and confirmation. This 4-step process is a modification of Katz et al's 5-step process which involves awareness (first knowledge);

interest (gaining further knowledge); evaluation (gaining favourable attitude or otherwise towards the innovation); small-scale trial and then adoption. In specific terms, at the level of 'knowledge', the individual is exposed to the existence of the new idea-like 'waste to art', as well as its advantages. During 'persuasion', a favourable or unfavourable attitude is formed towards the new idea (again in this case, waste to art). When 'decision' takes place, acceptance or rejection of the innovation (waste to art) occurs. At the point of 'confirmation', action is taken by the individual to reinforce the decision taken. The individual also makes effort to do away with all conflicting ideas. This, I think, is the good thing in the workshop series that complement the activities of this 'Art is Everywhere Project'. Until confirmation of adoption of this wonderful project takes place, the propagators of this new idea should not rest.

Let us pause for a moment and imagine what will happen when everyone understands that there is art in waste and therefore wealth in waste. It is as good as saying that Nigerians will literally eat up the dustbins that dot our cities and surprisingly, some rural towns. Since no one is likely to tell another where to find wealth, we can say with confidence that those in this enterprise now are lucky.

It is therefore important that participants perfect the skills they need to affect their societies as well as the environment of the host institution. In the challenges facing the project coordinators, participants and the project itself, just realize, as this paper intends to convey, that the decision to accept a new idea, like Waste to Art, is a mental process which must progress from initial knowledge to a decision to accept or reject. Effort should therefore be made, using all available communication channels, to let the world know what is going on. Communication is an indispensable component of every attempt to cause positive change or development (Ekwelie, 1999; Okunna, 2002). This should therefore be explored and exploited to the hilt. Hard as this may sound and actually be, the chances of success, I daresay, are very high. There should therefore be no retreat.

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