MAINTAINING A PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH IN A HIGHLY TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT. *This paper suggests that, contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to have a "high-tech/high-touch" society. Some of the qualities of a highly technological society are discussed. An attempt is then made to demonstrate a number of compatibilities between person-centered values and the values of a highly technological society. It is suggested, we need not fear that the individual will be depersonalized or demeaned in a continually advancing technological society, but that the individual will find greater freedom of expression and individuality in this rapidly advancing technological society – perhaps greater than in any previous historical era.*

INTRODUCTION

The author suggests that a person-centered approach is congruent with a high level of technology in a society. Futurists such as Toffler (1974, 1980), Naisbitt (1982), and Ellul (1964) seem to at times waiver over this compatibility, but mostly they remain steadfast in their belief that a "high-tech" society is compatible with a "high-touch" society. That is to say, again, that a high level of technology is compatible with a more humanistic society. Rogers (1965, 1980) points out some interesting aspects of both these positions, but definitely comes out in favor of the idea that technology is compatible with a humanistic or person-centered approach. Naisbitt (1982) implies that we should have a balance between our spiritual, physical, social and psychological realities. He indicates that technology can be developed in such a way as to achieve this balance. Other authors take a different view on the nature of the situation between technology and humanistic values (Ornstein, 1991; Ornstein & Ehrlich, 1989; Postman, 1985). These authors feel that technology has a negative impact on the social or more humanistic aspects of society. The attempt here is to present some aspects of both sides of the issue, while maintaining the idea that the person-centered approach is compatible with a high level of technology. An effort will be made to demonstrate how the person-centered approach and a high level of technology are compatible, as well as how they mesh.

Recently we shifted from an industrial to an information or electronic society (Naisbitt, 1982;

Toffler, 1980). The terms information society and electronic society can be used interchangeably with an advanced technological society. In 1956 the number of white-collar workers exceeded the number of blue-collar workers for the first time in history. In 1982, 65 percent of the United States population worked in information jobs: programmers, teachers, clerks, secretaries, accountants, stock brokers, managers, insurance people, bureaucrats, lawyers, bankers and technicians. Only 12 percent of the population in 1982 engaged in manufacturing operations.

Information is perhaps the most important resource today. We mass-produce knowledge and this knowledge is the driving force of our economy. Communication satellites have transformed the world into a global village. From "high-tech" computers to cable television we can see the effects of the information age. Our society today is based on the production and distribution of information. Most Americans spend their time creating, processing, or distributing information. Bell (1976) calls it the *post-industrial society.*

According to Rogers (1980), technological trends profoundly transform our idea of the person and the world the person lives in. Similarly, Naisbitt (1982) says that, "It is important to acknowledge the kind of work we do because we are what we do, and what we do shapes society" (p. 5). Technological trends profoundly transform our idea of the person and the world in which the person lives. The individual is affected by the technological aspects of society, just as the individual is affected by all aspects of the environment. These technological forces cause the individual to espouse certain values.

THE NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

Technological approach. It is common for a society, once it achieves an adequate level of development, to use a technological or scientific approach to accomplish its objectives. In fact a society cannot survive without constantly increasing its level of technology, knowledge and skill, while using a scientific/technological approach to accomplish its objectives. This is because we live in a competitive world. We must have a necessary level of technology and skill in order to protect and maintain our autonomy and freedom as a nation. We generally consider that the higher the level of technology, the better the outcome for the society – technologically, but the worse off the society socially. We must also consider that as we become more highly developed technologically as a society, we assume that the concern of individuals and their psychology will be subordinated to a secondary or tertiary status or role. The concern of the individual will not necessarily be reduced to mass considerations, or relegated to secondary or tertiary status with the development of technology. This certainly would be an unfavorable outcome if it were to occur.

Person-centered approach as primary. It is emphasized here that in moving to a higher level of technology it will not prevent us from having a person-centered approach as primary in the society. We can keep the humanistic, person-centered approach as we become more highly developed technologically. A more highly developed technological society will allow for more freedom and self-expression. Increasing the level of technology will also increase personal choice and diversity. No matter how much society increases its level of technology, the basic drives, wishes, motivations and aspirations of the individual will remain the same (only the quantity and quality to some degree change). These things have basically remained the same over the many centuries of human existence. It is necessary to provide for the development of these basic drives, wishes, motivations and aspirations that individuals have. A higher level of technology will only serve to keep the person at the center of our attention in the society, without changing the basic *modus operandi* of the individual. It will not relegate the person to a secondary or tertiary position in society. Technology does produce some problems for society, but it does not take away personal freedom, personal choice, self-expression or the basic things that person-centered therapy emphasizes (Ellul, 1964; Rogers, 1980, 1965). Some of the things person-centered psychotherapy emphasizes are being real and genuine, accepting, showing non-possessive love, being non-directive, showing involvement, being understanding, having a diversity of values,and

facilitating individuality and freedom to express one's self. All of these things can be compatible with a technological society (Rogers, 1980, 1965). The major role of technology has been to free us from the mundane aspects of our existence: saving us much time and energy. For example, the television gave us the ability to see and hear events happening around the world at the time of their occurrence; the telephone has given us the ability to communicate to anyone at any time, and this has brought about more personal contact between individuals; also, the computer has given us the ability to save time and energy in our daily activities. If used in a responsible manner technology can work to our benefit. Technology allows us, by saving us additional labor, the time to utilize our creative abilities rather than having to perform mechanical type functions. By freeing individuals from mechanical labor, they can be creative to have more accurate symbolizations of their organic experiences.

ARE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY REALLY THE BEST ROAD?

The ultimate question will always be with us: Do the disadvantages of technology outweigh the advantages? There is a darker side to the question of whether technology will facilitate or be congruent with a person-centered approach. Obviously, as with most things, technology has some advantages and some disadvantages concerning society. The author feels that the predominate effect of a higher level of technology on society will be positive and will facilitate the development of the person-centered approach. The most prevalent notion given as a disadvantage is that technology dehumanizes and impersonalizes individuals, reducing them to facts, statistics and figures. Pollution of air and water, deforestation, resource depletion, and environmental deterioration have all been blamed on too rapid a development of technology. Technology does give us the ability to destroy the world, but it is not the ability, just how we use this ability that matters. Ornstein and Ehrlich (1989) indicated that the explosion of technology recently has not been followed by subsequent social change to meet the challenges it has created. They also point out that human inventiveness has caused problems because a person's judgment and ability to deal with the consequences of their creations are exceeded by their ability to create. They further indicated that there is now an incompatibility between the individual's mind and the world people inhabit. This incompatibility affects the relationship of individuals with their society. Ornstein (1991) further suggests that as a result of the way we have evolved, our ability to judge lags behind our ability to create. Changes are taking place much too quickly for the human being to adapt. Technological change occurs so rapidly that it interferes with the natural order of society. Ogburn (as cited by Young and Mack, 1965) indicated that sometimes technology causes too rapid a rate of change, causing the social development of a society to be exceeded by technological growth. This is what Ogburn referred to as a *cultural lag* (Young & Mack, 1965). Technology has been accused of encouraging individuals to be mindless in their approach to life and work. Ornstein and Ehrlich (1989) say that computers and television, for example, cause people to be passive and non-creative. Postman (1985) says that computers are mindless machines that fail to teach individuals to be creative and to think for themselves. Postman (1985) makes the point that with the invention of television, discourse in America has become shriveled and absurd. He agrees that we are in an information age where there is an abundance of information, but adds the idea that this information seems disconnected. The author feels that television isn't negative in general, just some of its programming, and that many video games aren't negative and don't teach violence and destruction. Why can't parents choose the appropriate games for their children? If they did, these problems would not exist. It is felt by the author that television and computers do not have this effect unless they are used irresponsibly. With technology we are challenged to act more responsibly.

Creativity is the highest point in the evolution of consciousness. Technology facilitates the development of this consciousness and creativity. Technology gave us electricity, the telephone, television, computers, and many other time and labor saving devices. Who says that man is happiest when he is having visceral experiences, (e. g., fishing in a trout stream, chopping down trees for fire wood, sleeping under the stars, etc.)? Today's individual has been conditioned and

is capable of actualizing himself in a technological society. It seems that individuals will be able to achieve a more accurate symbolization of their organic experiences when they are allowed to use their full potential to create. Technology gives them the free time to utilize their creativity. Individuals today have a higher level of expectation and have been acclimated to a higher level of technology. They also have new ways of experiencing peace and tranquillity within their inner selves. Again, it is not technology but the use to which we put technology that can create problems for society. If we use technology effectively, we can create a better world for ourselves and our children.

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

So profoundly revolutionary is this new technology we are developing that it challenges all our old assumptions. "Old ways of thinking, old formulas, dogmas, and ideologies, no matter how cherished or how useful in the past, no longer fit the facts. The society is constantly changing. The world that is fast emerging from the clash of new values and technologies, new geopolitical relationships, new life-styles and modes of communication, demands wholly new ideas and analogies, classifications and concepts" (Toffler, 1980, p. 2). We can no longer define this technological society by using old approaches. Though we are experiencing many difficulties, "There are powerful reasons for long-range optimism, even if the transitional years immediately ahead are likely to be stormy and crisis-ridden" (Toffler, 1980, p. 3). With the emerging technology, this civilization can be made more sane, sensible, and sustainable, more decent than any we have ever known. The person-centered approach can remain near the top of the list in terms of priorities.

Moving towards individuality and freedom. Technology moves society away from homogenization. Many problems of our society remain constant and were the same in the pre-industrial era as they are today. During the pre-industrial era individuals fit a homogenized mode. Technology provides an atmosphere for the maintenance of the client's individuality, by helping to promote diversity in all aspects of society. Rather than having everything come in a similar style, everything comes in many different styles and shapes. This can presently be seen in modern architecture, food, and other aspects of the physical environment (Toffler, 1974). Diversity in the physical aspects of society promotes diversity in the social and psychological aspects of society. The more highly diversified a society, the greater the number of varied life styles it promotes (Toffler,1974), and the greater the resultant sense of individuality, freedom, and humanness. "The people of the future will enjoy greater opportunities for self-realization than any group in history" (Toffler, 1974, p. 319). "The new society offers few roots in the sense of truly enduring relationships, but it does offer more varied life niches, more freedom to move in and out of these niches, and more opportunity to create one's own niche, than all earlier societies put together" (Toffler, 1974, p. 320). "The level of personality disorder, neurosis, and just plain psychological distress in our society suggests that it is already difficult for many individuals to create a sensible, integrated, and reasonably stable personal style. Yet there is every evidence that the thrust toward social diversity, paralleling that at the level of goods and culture, is just beginning. We face a tempting and terrifying extension of freedom" (Toffler, 1974, p. 299). Again, we will have greater opportunity in the future for personal choice, diversity, and individuality than at any time previously.

The need for a humanistic science. Science tends to at times be cold, lifeless, and lacking in the fullness of the human experience. "Science cannot make therapists, but it can help therapy: though the scientific finding is at times cold and abstract, it does assist in releasing forces that are warm, personal, and complex; and though science is slow and fumbling, it represents the best road we know to the truth, even in so delicately intricate an area as that of human relationship" (Rogers, 1965, p. xi).

Improving psychotherapy. By using a scientific approach, along with technological knowledge and skill, psychotherapy can be brought out of the realm of the mystical, the intuitive, the

personal, and the undefinable. It is felt that this aspect of science is welcomed by the person-centered approach and will facilitate development, reformulation and change. This is one of the most outstanding possible qualities of the scientific/technological approach (Rogers, 1965). Technology is the most modern totality of methods and rationality arrived at which has absolute efficiency (Ellul, 1964). Technology will make life for individuals more humane or human. It develops the richness and capacities of the human mind and spirit. It produces individuals who are more integrated and whole. The new world of technology prizes the individual as the greatest of our resources. It gives a renewed love and respect for nature. This new technology will enhance rather than exploit persons and nature. It will encourage creativity in individuals (Rogers, 1980). Technology has been viewed as highly impersonal, but we must learn to balance technology with other demands of society.

THE COMPATIBILITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

Technology will promote person-centered therapy because many of the tenets of the person-centered approach are compatible with those of a technological society (see Table 1). This table compares the values of traditional societies, technological societies, and person-centered values. Several compatibilities between person-centered values and those of technological societies include: allowing one to make their own choices, having a diversity of values, promoting self-expression, individuality and freedom, inner directness, being accepting and genuine. The areas of compatibility listed in the table are just a few of the many possibilities, and are by no means exhaustive.

The future of the "high-tech/high-touch" movement. Rogers (1980) discussed the future of this balance between technology and the social, spiritual and psychological aspects of society. He felt that the future would bring about greater compatibility between these elements. In listing the qualities of tomorrow's person, it is believed that Rogers (1980) is indicating that "high-tech" will facilitate these qualities, since he knew that technology would be a factor in tomorrow's world. The individuals of tomorrow's highly technological world, who will have been transformed by this technology, will likely possess: 1.) **Openness**. These persons will have an openness to the world. They will be open to new experiences, to new ways of seeing, new ways of being, new ideas and concepts. They will be open in all aspects of their lives, rather than leading a secretive or double life. 2.) **Desire for authenticity**. These persons will value communication as a mean of telling it the way it is. These individuals will reject hypocrisy, deceit, and double talk of our culture. 3.) **Desire for wholeness**. These persons will not be content with a compartmentalized world – cause and effect, good and evil, black and white, organic and inorganic. They will strive for wholeness of life, with thought, feeling, physical energy, psychic energy, all being integrated in experience. 4.) **The wish for intimacy**. They will seek new forms of closeness, intimacy, and shared purpose. They will seek new forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. 5.) **Process persons**. They will realize that change is the only constant, that things are always changing. They will welcome change and consider it the only way to be vitally alive. 6.) **Caring**. These individuals will be more caring, and eager to be a source of support to others in time of real need. This will be a gentle, subtle, non-moralistic, non-judgmental caring. 7.) **Anti-institutional**. These individuals will reject a formal kind of bureaucracy, and believe that institutions should exist to serve the individual rather than the opposite. 8.) **The authority within**. These persons will be inner-directed rather than other-directed. They will believe in the reality of their own experience, and distrust outside authority. 9) **Attitude toward nature**. A caring for nature rather than a conquest of nature. 10.) **The unimportance of material things**. Money and material things will not be their goal. 11) **A yearning for the spiritual**. A life of inner peace is sought. They wish to find a meaning and purpose in life that is greater than the individual. All of these things are compatible with a person-centered approach as well as a technological society.

Rogers (1980) also listed as one of the qualities of the individual of tomorrow's highly technological world: **Skepticism regarding science and technology**. This distrust is based on

Table 1. Comparison of Values
Trichotomy of Values

Technological Society	Traditional Society	Person-Centered Values
Overchoice (freedom to make choices). Diversity of values.	Consensus, consistency.	Allow to make own choices. Diversity of values. Individual values.
Loneliness, alienation and ineffectuality (unless one belongs to a subculture).	Group solidarity.	A high level of involvement.
Sometimes cannot agree on standards of conduct, language or manners.	Consensus.	Diversity of values.
Overstimulation.	Boredom with bureaucracy.	Appropriate stimulation.
Novel decisions.	Planned decisions.	Spontaneous.
Values constantly shifting.	Discipline and order.	Diversity of values.
Pleasure now.	Conservativeness, sobriety.	Self-expression.
Mobility, transience, change, impermanence, temporary, obsolescence.	Mechanization, dehumanization, automation, sameness.	Individuality, freedom.
Impersonal relationships; Individuals no longer relate to a few people on a personal and intimate basis, but must relate impersonally to many.	Relate to a few people on a personal basis.	Real, genuine, congruent, transparent, accepting, understanding, caring, non-disapproving, non-possessive love, non-directive.
Disaffiliation.	Affiliation.	The wish for intimacy. Involvement.
Inner directedness.	Other directed.	Allow client to guide themselves. Inner directed. Uniqueness of the individual.
Non-organization oriented.	Formal bureaucracy.	Take responsibility for one's own actions.
Individual enrichment, fulfillment, unstructured.	Group Fulfillment.	Desire for wholeness and authenticity.

the fact that science and technology can be used for negative purposes, but technological leaders must use and develop technology in a responsible manner. Rogers (1980) admits that he is not referring to the entire population. These individuals will be able to make the shift to a "high-tech/high-touch" society.

A higher level of technology, if in no other way, will give individuals the time and energy to become more introspective, with the ability to focus on one's creative personal side. By giving us more opportunity for freedom and increasing the options to become our true creative selves, we are thereby released from slavery to the mechanical aspect to our existence. We will no longer

maintain our dependence on our environmental and biological circumstances. This will free and facilitate the individual to be more accurate in symbolizing his or her organic experiences. Technology will help to create a new world of tomorrow. It will create the conditions that will lead us to a more humanistic society. In part, this will occur because we will rebel against the more negative aspects of technology, and bring about a balance between the humanistic and technological aspects of society. This way of viewing and using technology will lead to a richer, freer, and more self-directed kind of life eventually for all individuals. Technology can represent either crisis or opportunity, it simply depends on how it is used, if used correctly we can bring about the perfect balance between "high-tech/high touch."

CONCLUSION

It has been suggested here that it is not necessary to abandon a person-centered approach, while moving towards a more technological society. Many of the values in a highly developed technological society are compatible with a person-centered approach. An attempt has been made to summarily demonstrate the congruence between a technological society and the person-centered approach.

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