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## NATURE AND COMPONENTS OF ATTITUDES

For a few minutes quietly do the following mental exercise. Today, how many times did you tell yourself: "In my opinion..." or others may say so and so, but I feel....?

What you fill in the blanks are called opinions. Now continue the exercise; how important are these opinions to you? The topics of some of these opinions may be only simply ways of thinking, and it does not matter much to us that others agree or disagree with our views. If someone opposes or challenges our views about these topics, we get emotional. We may have made some of these views part of our behaviour. In other words, if our views are not merely



thoughts, but also have emotional and action components, then these views are than 'opinions', they are examples of attitudes.

Attitudes are evaluations of ideas (such as the insanity defense), events (such as surprise parties), objects (such as abstract art) or people (such as sorority members). All definitions of attitudes agree that an attitude is a state of mind, set of views or thoughts, regarding some topic (called the attitude object'), which have an evaluative feature (positive, negative or neutral quality). The thought component is referred to as the cognitive aspect, the emotional component is known as the affective aspect, and the tendency to act is called behavioural (or conative) aspect. These three aspects have been referred to as the A-B-C components (Affective - Behavioural -



Cognitive components) of attitude.

Attitudes have to be distinguished from two other closely related concepts, namely, beliefs and values. Values are attitudes or beliefs that contain a 'should' or 'ought-' aspect, such as moral or ethical values.

Values are formed when a particular belief or attitude becomes an inseparable part of the person's outlook on life. Consequently, values are difficult to change.

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 ~~Core~~ 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. 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). Rating of 2 and 4 are less extreme. A neutral attitude, of course, is lowest on extremeness.

Simplicity or Complexity (Multiplicity):  
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 or world peace, people hold many attitudes instead of single attitude. An attitude system is said to be 'simple' if it contains only one or 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 'members' 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 members-attitudes within an attitude system should ~~not~~ not be confused with the three components described. Each member attitude that belongs to an attitude system also has A-B-C components.

Centrality; This refers to the role of particular attitude in the attitude system. An attitude with greater centrality would influence the other attitudes in the system much more than non-central 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.