

Nelida about water boiling. Their contacts outside the community were limited, and as a result, they saw the technically proficient Nelida with eyes bound by the social horizons and traditional beliefs of Los Molinos. They distrusted this outsider, whom they perceived as a social stranger. Nelida, who was middle class by Los Molinos standards, was able to secure more positive results from housewives whose socioeconomic level and cultural background were more similar to hers. This tendency for more effective communication to occur with those who are more similar to change agents occurs in most diffusion campaigns.

In general Nelida was too "innovation-oriented" and not "client-oriented" enough. Unable to put herself in the role of the village housewives, her attempts at persuasion failed to reach her clients because the message was not suited to their needs. Nelida did not begin where the villagers were; instead she talked to them about germ theory, which they could not (and probably did not need to) understand.

We have cited only some of the factors that produced the diffusion failure with which Nelida is charged. It will be easier to understand the water-boiling case once the remainder of this book has been read. We shall return to discuss lessons learned from the Los Molinos case in future chapters.

## What Is Diffusion?

*Diffusion* is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas. *Communication* is a process in which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. This definition implies that communication is a process of convergence (or divergence) as two or more individuals exchange information in order to move toward each other (or apart) in the meanings that they ascribe to certain events. We think of communication as a two-way process of convergence, rather than as a one-way, linear act in which one individual seeks to transfer a message to another (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). Such a simple conception of human communication may accurately describe certain communication acts or events involved in diffusion, such as when a change agent seeks to persuade a client to adopt an innovation. But when we look at what came before such an event, and at what follows, we often realize that such an event is only one part of a total process in which in-