

FACILITATING ROLE CONCEPT FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT : A THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

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One of the most interesting aspects of organizational theory falls in the area of "change." In the larger context, problems of and planned social changes are somewhat the fast moving areas. All in all, however, it seems to us that when we talk about change, no matter what aspects of change, we tend to agree that people or the individuals must be changed. And this is why a great deal of attempts in terms of strategy, tactics, and models are concentrated on bringing about individual change. Although the individual is a focal point of change effort (Meadows, 1971), it is not easy, after all, to deal directly with changing individual (Etzioni, 1972).

What we argue here is that instead of pushing change forward, we should have a better understanding of how people actually behave in their working situation and see where we can improve their behavior. There are, of course, so many involving variables taking part in working situations that unless we know more about them, it is almost useless to introduce change. The purpose of this paper is to consider the people at work in relation to the role concept and to try to suggest changes in some variables of this mechanism in order to achieve more effective performance of the individuals.

Staff Development Objectives

Before we will suggest or consider the staff development process, we believe that it would be much easier and safer to state what we want to achieve in terms of objectives. So far as objectives are not clearly specified, there is no use to try to create any suggestive programs. In staff development program, we perceive that practical outcomes of the program must be attained. Although it is a kind of change program, staff development is closer to the organizational tasks needed to be done rather than just changes in individuals to be more open and receptive.

In general, staff development has the purpose of training staff so that practice is improved, the policy and program of the agency are carried out more effectively and its clients are better served (Mayer, 1966). The improvement, the more effectiveness, and better services could be considered in terms of the amount or degree of changes. They are, nevertheless, related to the tasks to be performed even though the persons who undertake the tasks usually become the target of change. But attempts to change the individuals are too general and we consider them not to be appropriate in staff development. A brief discussion related to this point will be presented later.

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Setting the purposes or objectives of staff development in the above manner, Mayer (1966) suggests that

The method of staff development naturally derives from its aims and underlying premises. It is not the aim to inculcate expert professional knowledge, or to apply new ideas outside the context of the staff's experience. Beginning where the staff is, it should place its chief focus on the personnel's existing knowledge and skills, building slowly from that place to a level commensurate the tasks to be accomplished. In other words, the method relies on the problems presented in daily practice; it does not reach the theory, but utilizes content derived from the staff's readily available experience (p. 99).

Another aspect of staff development objectives is how such objectives are derived. Our assumption here is that the status quo of the ongoing organization is not satisfactorily working out its task and needs some kind of improvement. To confirm this claim, we think organizational diagnosis should be performed. Throughout this paper, then, we are going to use the role concept as a guide to diagnose the organization and to facilitate this concept for staff development.

Problems of Some Change-Models in Staff Development

Here we would like to point out some problems of a number of change-models in applying them to the staff development. Those models will, one way or the other, create the serious problems of resistance to change. We will begin with Lewin's force-field model of change. Lewin (1947) suggests that the force or the thrust to induce change in individuals or groups, e.g., organizations, will be resisted by the anti-thrust or resistance to change. There is an equilibrium when thrust and antithrust are relatively equal. This model looks good as it determines the resistance to change a priori. And there are obviously two strategies to put the model to work. One is to increase the thrust in order to overcome the anti-thrust; and the other is to try to reduce the anti-thrust first and then introduce the change. The problem is basically generated from the controversy that which one is the better strategy. Other problems also exist. For example, it is almost impossible to cope with the enormous aspects of resistance to change. Moreover, the increase in thrust may have a result in terms of the boomerang-effect: that is, the resistance to change may become stronger. Further, the equilibrium is somewhat very intangible and difficult to determine if it exists at all. To the extent that staff development in a particular organization is immediately needed to be done, we see no advantage to apply this force-field model to it.

Secondly, Bennis *et al.* (1968) suggest a model of the process and mechanisms of change which aim primarily to change the individuals in order to improve interpersonal relationships. In our opinion, it becomes some sorts of a myth in training and development program that anything would be possible if the individuals are more open and receptive, and if the interpersonal relationships are improved. To a certain extent, we do not deny that such idea may facilitate change in organizations. However, there is an important premise in Bennis *et al.*'s model that individuals

to some degree are willing to change. In addition, the model itself is seriously cultural-bound. It has never been proved to date, that it insures the universality of application.

The Bennis *et al* model is outlined as the following:

Stage 1. Unfreezing: creating motivation to change

- Mechanisms: a) Lack of confirmation or disconfirmation
 b) Induction of guilt-anxiety
 c) Creation of psychological safety by reduction of threat or removal of barriers

Stage 2. Changing: developing new responses based on new information

- Mechanisms: a) Cognitive redefinition through
 (1) Identification: information from a single source
 (2) Scanning: information from multiple sources

Stage 3. Refreezing: stabilizing and integrating the changes

- Mechanisms: a) Integrating new responses into personality
 b) Integrating new responses into significant ongoing relationships through reconfirmation (Bennis *et al.*, 1968, p. 339).

Again, we see this model is limited to the improvement of interpersonal relationships. It is inadequate, we think, to be applied to the staff development. If it is needed to be used at all, another model must be included successively.

Thirdly, Leavitt (1965) presents the interrelationship model among technology, structure, task, and people. He argues that any change in either one of these components will result in change in others. And Leavitt also emphasizes that changes in people should come first through the "power-equalization" approach which rests heavily on the ideas of selfimposed and collaborative change (p. 1165). Unfortunately, Leavitt does not show how the "power-equalization" approach could improve task performance which is an important objective of staff development. However, we perceive that Leavitt's model comes closer to what we need in the process of staff development although still insufficient.

Lastly, Kahn *et al.* (1954) create a theoretical model of factors involved in the taking of organizational roles. The only problem of this model as we see it is that it is not built for change or development program. However, we think it is quite useful in understanding the people both the role sender and role receiver at work while they are under the influence of some variables like attributes of the persons, interpersonal factors, organizational factors, role expectations, and role behavior. From this model that we would like to build upon the facilitation of role concept for staff development.

Role Concept in Perspectives

We prefer the term role concept to role theory although the latter has come to be generally known (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). In this section, we would like to explore certain aspects or variables that operate in the role concept. These aspects of the role concept will be essential in applying them to the staff development endeavors.

1. Role enactment. There are many terms used for representing the concept of role enactment, but mostly important is the term "role-taking." In considering the taking of "roles," however, we have to make an agreement about what we mean by "role." Some sociologists use the concept of role to refer to the behavior of an incumbent of a social position (see, for example, Scott, 1970). This way of defining the concept of role focuses attention on how the position holder *does* behave. We do not see this definition adequate since it aims just to explain the phenomena of human behavior in social settings *ex post facto*. Moreover, it does not give any idea about social interaction among position holders.

As a better alternative, we would take the definition given by Gross *et al.* (1958). They propose that a role is a set of expectations or a set of evaluative standards applied to an incumbent of a particular position. This implies how others believe the position holder *should* behave. Defining the role concept in this manner, the role enactment will be the taking of what other people expect the focal person to behave. We will discuss the role expectation in the following section.

The concept of role enactment confirms the notion that human beings never live alone! They have to interact with others in all kinds of social settings. In organizations, people follow some sorts of "evaluative standards" attached to each position that the individual occupies. This type of ongoing social setting is a good example of how roles are enacted to the person; that is, the individual becomes a member of the organization and occupies a particular position in that organization. A set of expectations is applied to the individual once he holds the position. This, of course, will be related to at least three dimensions of role enactment, namely, the number of roles, the involvement in the roles, and the amount of time spent in one role related to the amount of time spent in other roles (Sarbin and Allen, 1968).

A remark should be made here that in any role enactment activity, there is an important prerequisite; that is the role learning. No one can take the role that he has never been exposed to. Research on socialization process shows the importance of role learning in addition to the internalization of norms and attitudes. Therefore, we agree that role learning cannot occur alone but simultaneously with the internalization of norms and attitudes. This is to suggest that prior to the enactment of role, the individual must not only be trained in practical subject matters but has to experience the socialization process as well.

2. Role expectations. Closely related to role enactment in relation to the definition of role concept is the role expectation. Sarbin and Allen (1968) maintain that "role expectations are comprised of the right and privileges, the duties and obligations, of any occupant of a social

position in relation to persons occupying other positions in the social structure" (p. 497). Role expectations, then, are somewhat like the conceptual bridge between social structure, e.g., organizational structure, and role behavior - the way people behave. The units of social structure are positions or statuses. These units are defined, mostly a priori, in terms of actions and qualities expected of the person who at any time occupies the position. Therefore, role expectations give some clues of how that person should behave in holding a position in the social structure.

Role expectations can vary in the degree of their generality or specificity. Some positions like the rank-and-file or the manual workers on the assembly-line places are specifically determined of what, how, and when to do the job, e.g., role behavior. In this case, the role expectations for such positions are very specific. On the contrary, the researchers or the professors undertake roles that composed of quite general role expectations. Somethings have to be done, but no specificity in terms of how or how much is required. Role expectations also vary in their scope or extensiveness, their degree of clarity or uncertainty, and degree of consensus among other persons concerning role expectations. Furthermore, role expectations occur in the context of both the informal social role system and the formal role system (cf. Sarbin and Allen, 1968). Either one of these dimensions of role expectations may result in some kind of problems in role behavior.

An important aspect of role expectations is the capability to induce conformity and, in many cases, to sanction. Once a person enacts or under-takes particular roles, he is, through interactions with others, induced to conform with role expectations so long as he wants to hold the position. In cases of chronic failure to conform to role expectations the person may be removed from the position, particularly if it is an achieved one. Conformity to role expectations may occur even if a person has no strong commitment to a role, because of his sensitivity to the reaction of other persons. The degree of conformity, however, may depend on other variables like personality and interpersonal relationships. We want to elaborate this point later.

3. Role ambiguity. One direct result from incomplete role expectations is what we call role ambiguity. Kahn *et al.* (1964) define role ambiguity as being "a direct function of the discrepancy between the information available to the person and that which required for adequate performance of his role" (p. 73). In other words, we perceive it as the lack of clarity and adequacy of role expectations. This would lead to the poor performance of role behavior. Different sources may contribute to the ambiguity of roles. Those are, for example,

a. **Uncertainty and vagueness of expectations.** In a dyadic interaction, for instance, the role receiver--the one who is supposed to perform the role behavior--is not sure of what types of expectations the role sender relays to him. There may be many expectations that the role receiver cannot differentiate or set up the priority; or, they may be too general that the role receiver can not perceive substantially. In either case, the role receiver is not only frustrated about what should be performed, but he also experiences the stress resulted from his inability to perform the role behavior.

b. **Lack of agreement among occupants of complementary roles.** Here we would like to introduce another concept concerning roles, that is what Merton (1968) calls the "role-set." When a person takes any position, there will be many other positions in relation or in interaction to that position. So if we consider the person who takes a specific position, of course, he is taking a set of expectations enacted to the position as a focal person; other persons who take other positions will also be taking the complementary roles in that particular role-set. Role ambiguity for the focal person is the result of the disagreement among other occupants of those complementary roles. This is also a way to say that the role-set is composed of several roles that are incongruent.

c. **Incongruity between the role performer's own expectations for his role and the role expectations held by those comprising his audience.** This source of role ambiguity may go beyond the boundary of the roleset. We have included the audience into our consideration. The audience generally does not take any position in the sense of structural interaction, but it can more or less have the role expectations relayed to the focal person. Take, for example, parents may be considered as the audience of the school system. They have certain expectations upon the roles of the teachers whereas may be incongruent with what the teachers expect their roles should be. This is another major source of role ambiguity.

d. **Influence of perception of role expectations.** We agree in general that people are different. What contributes to the last source of role ambiguity is that different persons perceive role expectations differently. Therefore, the dimensions of role expectations as we mentioned earlier are not the only threat to the completeness of role performance; but the perception capability of the role performers is also the major threat.

4. **Role conflict.** Another major problem of the role performer resulted from role expectations is generally known as the "role conflict." In this case, there will be more than one role expectation; and, each of them is some ways incompatible with others. The role performer, then, is not clear to himself of which one he should perform. Moreover, in many situations, the role performer can not perform both or more than two roles at a time. The role conflict situation has at least two aspects of the source.

a. **Interrole conflict.** This situation is due to simultaneous occupancy of two or more positions having incompatible role expectations (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). Examples of interrole conflict are many. A frequent illustration is the "man in the middle," such as the foreman in industry. The management expects his role to be of labors' while the labor expects his role to be of management's. It is almost never clear to himself of what role he should perform.

b. **Intrarole conflict.** The situation involves contradictory expectations held by two or more groups of relevant others regarding the same role. For example, Gross *et al.* (1958) found for the role of school superintendent that expectations of school board members sometimes conflict with expectations held by teachers. In this instance conflict is inherent in the occupancy of the

social position of superintendent, because the role behavior expected of the incumbent by one group is contrary to expected behavior according to another group.

Intrarole conflict need not derive only from conflicting expectations held by different groups for the same role; it may result from a single group's holding simultaneous contradictory expectations for one role (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). An example would be in the case that parents may expect their child to work hard in high school in order to be admitted to a good college. At the same time they may urge him to spend more time practicing to be a good athlete.

Other aspects of role concept such as "role location," "role demands," "role skills," and "role strain" may be discussed at length. But that is beyond the purpose of this paper. We have spent some space discussing major aspects of role concept in order to apply them to the process of staff development as we are now turning to.

Modifying a Staff Development Technique

One of the most well known staff development or training technique in general is the "role-playing." The technique is more or less borrowing certain aspects of role concept for training people in order to create some changes or improvement in role performance. It is so structured, however, to simulate the real situation. Harris, Bessent, and McIntyre (1969) maintain that

Role-playing may be defined as a spontaneous dramatization involving one or more persons assuming designated roles in relation to a specified problem in a given situation, but is unrehearsed and not preplanned. The objective is to encourage the fullest possible assumption of roles by the players so that they "act" and "feel" as they might in a real situation (p. 261).

The obvious weakness of role-playing technique is that it is unreal. We are hardly convinced that people will actually, objectively, and reasonably perform their roles in the unreal situation as if they will in the real world. And if they will, the consequent problems of transferring what they behave in the unreal to the real situation will become eminent. We emphasize the problem of unreal situation mainly because it is impossible to resemble the real world in the role-playing situation.

At any rate, we see that this technique of staff development comes closer to what we are going to suggest as a modifying alternative. Instead of creating an unreal dramatization as the role-playing technique suggests, we should look into the actual role performance of the personnel in real world of work. We perceive this to be the only means to produce valid information about role performance. In a sense, those valid information aim to identify problems in role behavior or role performance if any. Additional efforts, of course, will be needed to resolve such problems; that is to say conceptually that sources of role ambiguity and role conflict must be reduced or eliminated.

A Strategy for Staff Development

The modification of role-playing technique for staff development which may be arbitrarily called the "actual role-performing" is based on an assumption that the roles could be better performed if the incumbent of a position has better perception about role expectations relative to that position and all role expectations are also appropriate to that position. It is not quite easy to achieve this assumption although it is not impossible. There will be, then, an appropriate strategy in approaching the situation that can contribute to the success of staff development.

The strategy that is useful in this particular case is what Hornstein *et al.* (1971) categorize as the "data-based strategy." It is the process of approaching the situation in order to get the valid information about what is going on in the system and see if any problems should occur. This strategy is actually similar to the diagnostic process suggested by Levinson (1972). The only difference may be that the data-based strategy is intended to be a force that could bring about change while the diagnostic process aims at only the identification of problems.

The valid information concept fits perfectly with the approach used by Argyris (1970) in suggesting the model of social intervention. He builds upon the three aspects of intervention, namely, the valid information, the freedom of choice, and the commitment to change. We do not agree with Argyris at one point that the social system or the clients should have freedom of choice. At least, we perceive that choice available for change must be one way or the other objectively structured to guarantee the resolution of problems. It should be more obvious about structured choice when we discuss the tactics in implementing this suggested "actual role-performing."

Tactics for implementation. As we have indicated, the strategy to be used for the actual role-performing technique is data-based. Information or data needed will not only be about the roles a person takes, but about related variables as well. Katz and Kahn (1966) maintain that besides the role senders and the focal person, there are three main variables affecting the process of role performance. Those are organizational factors, attributes of the person, and interpersonal factors.

Organizational factors are those variables like size, structure, culture, philosophy, and, more specifically, objectives. Regarding to objectives, it is not only the matter of what and how specific they are, but also the matter of how organizational members perceive them. The perception of organizational objectives will directly affect both role expectations and role behavior. Information concerning such variables must be extensively looked for.

Attributes of the person, either the role senders or the focal person, refer to all those variables which describe the propensity of an individual to behave in certain ways - his motives and values, his defense preferences, his sensitivities and fears (Katz and Kahn, 1966). This comprises what Getzels, Lippman, and Campbell (1968) call the personality of the individual in role taking and role expectations. Of course, the personal data must be secured.

Interpersonal relations affect the role performance because the expectations held for and sent to a focal person depend to some degree on the quality of interpersonal relations between him and the members of his role set. He will also interpret differently the role sendings he receives, depending on his interpersonal relations with the senders. Information that should be sought are those concerning the degree of formal and informal relationships. In addition, power-based interpersonal relations and influence, e.g., reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power (French and Raven, 1968) should be understood through the data collection. Moreover, sources of power usually overlooked are those of lower participants in complex organizations, e.g., attractiveness, effort and interest, location and position, coalitions, and rules (see Mechanic, 1964).

These are the three main areas of information needed in the process of staff development. The next step is to seek more information on actual role sendings and role receiving. This kind of data should show the consensus between role expectations and role behavior; or the disagreement if that would be the case. Once the whole areas of information needed are supplied, it is the crucial step for the tactics of implementing the data based strategy; that is to feed the data back to the client system - all members of the organization.

At this point, there should be some agreements on what are the real problems in role performance of each person in the system. Also when the information fed-back to the clients are matched with the role concept prescribed briefly earlier, the sources of problems will become eminent. Again, we have to look back to Argyris' (1970) suggestion on the last component of his model - the commitment to change. We agree with Argyris that persons in the system must to some degree commit to the process of change. In other words, the present situation does not satisfy the role performers, somethings have to be done in order to reduce those dissatisfaction. And the proper way to do this is to reach some agreement on various role expectations which mainly are derived from perceiving the specific organizational objectives in pretty much the same way. Other variables such as the attributes of the person and the interpersonal relationships need more understanding; but, as may be seen, we do not suggest any change in the last two variables.

To summarize the tactics for implementing actual role-performing technique of staff development, we begin with seeking the full information related to organizational factors' attributes of the individual, interpersonal relationships, role expectations, and role perception. These data provide better understanding of how role behavior or role performance is. Then, feed the data back to the system and attempt to reach agreement on role expectations and role perception. It is obvious that a staff development technique suggested here is not the attempt to change per se; but to crystalize certain aspects of information needed for better role performance.

Evaluation

Most staff development or training techniques usually are taken for granted that it is the good thing to do so. In practice, fewer and fewer attempts are put into the evaluation of the

program. There may be at least two reasons why evaluation is seldom implemented. One is the inadequacy of techniques and instruments for evaluation. The other may be the case that results from evaluative process cannot be reported, usually for political reasons (see, for example, Beals, 1969). At any rate, we think any technique intended to be used in staff development must be accompanied with the process for evaluation. Otherwise, it is so difficult to determine whether or not that technique is worth implementing.

Both Argyris (1970) and Suchman (1967) argue, however, that the evaluation or evaluative research should not be bounded by the rigid experimental research like those undertaken in the laboratory. But certain evidence of change, we perceive, must be secured if the program should work at all. In the actual role-performing technique of staff development, we propose to use the longitudinal quasi-experimental design for evaluation. This design aims mainly to obtain more valid result of the change process than the after-only design which is generally used.

Information collected as in the tactics for implementation process could be regarded as a pre-test data. They concern with the actual situation prior to any attempt to make the agreements on change. A period of time after the agreements have been reached will be needed to allow any role expectation and role perceptions changes. We then collect information on the same variables as we have done earlier. By comparing these two sets of information, we can eventually realize whether or not the technique works, and how good it works.

Specific variables should be taken care of. The comparisons between former and latter information concerning role expectations and role perceptions are very essential in the process of evaluation. The purpose of this particular suggestion is to measure change or adaptation in role expectations and role perceptions or the role enactment and its relations to the role set. Furthermore, we also need to see the differences between the former and latter role performance. In other words, the changes in the results of attempt to develop the staff must be secured.

It should be clear that the evaluative process suggested here aims to achieve results at two levels. One, we would like to see if any of role-taking process or the "style" of doing task improves; and the other, to make sure that the effectiveness of task performance or the final products (results) are improved. We avoid, however, the ethical and resistant problems by not involving in the attempt to change the individuals. We propose just to seek more understanding about the individual's traits and the interpersonal relationships.

Some Evidence in Role Concept Research

As a matter of fact, role concept is not a new idea. It has long been of interest of sociologists, social psychologists, and educationers. Unfortunately, research findings in this area were hardly fed back to the system in order to improve role expectations, role perceptions, and role performance. In this section, we would like to illustrate some useful findings in relation to role concept.

Musgrove and Taylor (1969), in a research report about the way teachers see their job, the way they think other people significantly related to their job see it, and the way these people (particularly parents and pupils) do in fact see it, find that teachers report "inaccurate" perceptions of the expectations which other groups hold of them. They summarize thus:

Teachers in all types of school saw their work primarily in intellectual and moral terms, placing great weight on instruction in subjects and moral training. They placed relatively little emphasis on social objectives in general and least of all on "social advancement" in particular. In no type of school were teachers prepared to see themselves primarily as agents of social mobility. They saw parents as being comparatively indifferent to moral and social training, but placing great weight on instruction and social advancement. Infact, parents in general emphasized the same objectives as teachers: moral training and instruction in subjects, and like teachers, gave comparatively little weight to "social advancement" (p. 63).

This is an example which although the role expectations are the same as the role enactment, but the role perceptions are not agree with role expectations. Information concerning these three aspects of role concept will help clarifying each one's position and, presumably, we could expect better role performance.

Closely related to the above example is the research reported by Biddle *et al.* (1966) about the shared inaccuracies in the role of the teacher. Shared inaccuracy of role attributions, according the Biddle *et al.*, will be said to exist whenever two or more subject persons share mistaken concepts about covert processes characterizing an object person or position. They find that of four groups of subject they study — school officials, teachers (colleagues), parents, and pupils — all of them show different conception about the role of the teacher; and, of course, different from the teacher's perception. It is quite uneasy for the teacher to perform roles with different mistaken expectations. And we believe that such shared inaccuracies should be originated from factors other than the individual differences.

Gross, McEachern, and Mason (1958) report the only way the super-intendent resolves the role conflict resulted from incongruent role expectations from the teachers and the school board is by compromising those expectations. There is no effort to indicate why the role conflict should occur at all in order that it could be resolved reducing the causes.

There are many more researches in this area of role concept. The above three, however, show that there is no utilization of such findings. It seems to us that research in role concept seeks to partly understand only what happen rather than to utilize knowledge gained from it.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed to use an alternative technique for staff development. Instead of using the role-playing technique that has long been perceived as one of the best techniques, we suggest to facilitate the role concept for the purpose. The data-based strategy is appropriate for the "actual role-performing" technique since it will generate needed information about the process of role-taking and other influential variables, mainly, organizational factors, attributes of the person, and interpersonal relations. By means of feeding back the data, some types of agreement could be reached in order to improve the staff's performance which is the main objective of staff development.

Evaluative process is also suggested for the purpose of insuring the result of the effort. And after reviewing some of the research findings, we strongly recommend the utilization of knowledge gained from those research reports. Some of them may not be complete, but as a starting point it's worth pursuing.

For the final words, we assume that it may not be worth it in terms of time, money, and energy to try to change individuals in the process of staff development. Clarifications of every ambiguity, conflict, and perception, e.g., of organizational objectives and roles, should be the satisfaction for immediate staff development.

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