DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 077 134   EA 005 145

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TITLE   Role Conceptualization and Empirical Complexities.
PUB DATE   53
NOTE   10p.; Paper presented at American Sociological
              Society Annual Meeting (Berkeley, California, August
              30-September 1, 1953)

EDRS PRICE   MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS   Administrator Role; *Behavior Patterns; Board of
              Education Role; *Occupations; Performance; Research
              Problems; *Role Conflict; Role Models; Role
              Perception; *Role Theory; Socialization; Speeches;
              *Superintendent Role

ABSTRACT
              Certain problems arose in an attempt to develop a
research design for studying the social role of the school executive.
The study was to examine the degree of consensus on behavioral
expectations for the occupants of this occupational role, the degree
of potential or actual role conflict in this social position, and the
manner in which an occupational role is defined and "learned." Most
existent conceptual role models need to be reformulated to give them
a greater empirical utility. It becomes necessary to develop
conceptual frameworks and analytic categories to handle data that
reveal different numbers and kinds of relevant alters in respect to
different sectors of ego and alter behavior as incumbents of social
positions. This suggests that what is usually viewed as a single role
may require subdivision into a number of sub-roles for the
explanation of the incumbent's behavior. The common practice of
assuming that a particular status or position has associated with it
a set of rights and duties on which there is consensus should,
therefore, be abandoned. (Authors/WM)

ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND EMPIRICAL COMPLEXITIES

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The concept role has wide usage in the literature of the behavioral

sciences. It has been referred to as the central concept of both

sociology and social psychology.[1] It is frequently a pivotal term in the

description and analysis of: (1) the socialization process and personality

development,, (2) the structure and functioning of total societies and

(3) the structure and functioning of sub systems within a total society

such as the family, association, religious and business organization.[2]

It has also been viewed as a relevant concept for the study of the etiology

of pathological behavior.[3]

As part of our inquiry concerning the social role of the school

executive, we were interested in the following questions: (1) To what

extent is there consensus on the behavioral expectations for the

occupants of this occupational role (a) among incumbents of this social

position (superintendents) and (b) among the incumbents of an always

existent counter position (school board member) and (c) between these

two social positions? (2) To what extent does occupancy of this social

position result in potential or actual role conflict for the role

incumbent? (3) How is an occupational role defined and "learned?"

We desired to develop a research design that met the criteria of

(1) relevance to the development of role behavioral theories and (2)

operational utility for the empirical inquiry. In our attempt to meet

these criteria and as a consequence of our inspection of data, we noted

a number of empirical complexities that most existent conceptual role
schemes have not taken into account. This suggests the need for a
theoretical reformulation of at least certain phases of existing role
models or the development of new paradigms with greater empirical
utility.

It is impossible within our time limitations to present a detailed
critique of existent role paradigms or the role conceptualization and
analytical categories we are using in our inquiry. We will, therefore,
only present certain of the important empirical complexities that
cannot be handled by existing role formulations and suggest certain
of their implications for the work of other students of this problem
area.

Empirical Complexities Not Amenable to Handling Under Existing Theoretic Formulations

Most sociological and social psychological role formulations[4] are
concerned with the social system level of analysis. Society is conceived
to be organized into a series of positions or statuses. Associated
with each position is a set of institutionalized expectations regarding
the rights and duties of ego, the position incumbent, and alter, the
occupant of a complementary position. Most attention has been given to
dyadic relationships (e.g., husband - wife). However, in empirical
investigations each of the elements of this model becomes problematic.
Consequently, in our study of the role of the school executive, we are
finding the following ranges of complexity which must be handled
theoretically and operationally: First, we are finding that the expectations

regarding the rights and duties of the incumbent of the superintendency

role must be analyzed in relation to multiple alters in the same counter

role (e.g., three to nine school board members) and in terms of its

relations to multiple counter roles (e.g., the teacher, school board

member, parent). A second complexity occurs since our data reveal

that there may be consensus on a behavioral expectation among one or

more categories of alters (e.g., Board of Aldermen). Third, there may

be agreement on the role incumbent's expected behavior among some

alters in different counter roles and disagreement among the remaining

alters.

Fourth, we are finding that there may be a high degree of consensus

among relevant alters and the role incumbent in certain areas of ego's

expected performance (for example, his duties) and little or no

consensus in other areas (for example, his rights). Fifth, there also

appears to be a high degree of consensus on the functions or purposes

of the social position studied by less consensus on the priority norms

among them or on the appropriate means for accomplishing agreed-upon

purposes. Sixth, there may be a great deal of consensus between ego and

alter or alters in terms of the reciprocal rights and duties tied to

other counter roles. Seventh, each counter role may be relevant to only

certain "sectors" of ego's role. The "sector of relevance" may or may

not coincide for the various counter roles. Eighth, role formulations

are usually structured around a set of expectations regarding reciprocal

rights and duties of ego and alter to each other. We find numerous

expectations regarding duties of a role incumbent to third parties. Thus,

many school board members feel that they have a right to expect the

superintendent to behave in certain fairly well defined ways toward
teachers, students, janitors, parents and so on. In short, conceptual
formulations need to be revised or expanded to take into account
non-recipient alters as well as recipient alters in regard to ego's
obligations. Ninth, there may be consensus between ego and alters
that certain behaviors are desirable or undesirable but there may or
may not be consensus on whether this behavior is mandatory or preferred
or prohibited or simply not preferred.

In short, whereas most "role" theoretic formulations consider only
the rights and duties of a dyadic relationship in a holistic manner, we
are finding that it is necessary to develop a conceptual framework and
analytic categories to handle data which reveal that there are
different numbers and kinds of relevant alters in respect to different
sectors of ego's and alter's behavior as incumbents of social positions.
This suggests that what is usually viewed as a single role may require
subdivision into a number of sub-roles for the explanation of the
incumbents behavior. Preliminary inspection of our data suggests that
for the superintendency position some sectors and some sub-positions
may be institutionalized whereas other sectors and other sub-positions
may not.

Role conflict is viewed usually as a situation in which an individual
recognizes and accepts the legitimacy of two sets of incompatible
obligations tied to separate roles (e.g., occupational and husband role).[5]
The superintendent faced a number of situations of this type. But in
addition to such inter-role conflicts, he faces a number of intra-role

conflict situations. We present here an example of two clear cut types.

Type 1: School board members A,B,C expect him to serve as educational

leader; members D,E,F expect him to serve only as the administrator of

school board policies. Here are two sets of contradictory expectations

from multiple alters in the same position and the superintendent

accepts the legitimacy of both sets of contradictory expectations.

Type 2: The teachers (his subordinates) expect him as superintendent to

maximize the teachers' salary budget item. The school board (his

superiors) expect him to minimize it. In this example, the incumbents

of different counter positions have contradictory expectations for

the incumbent of the same role. We are further finding that the

degree of anxiety and guilt feelings and the severity of sanctions are

variables that are in large part neglected in existing role conflict

models. Certain expectations may be widely held by alters in the

same counter role but these expectations are not in general accepted by

egos as obligations. Such expectations constitute "pressures" (from

the point of view of ego) not legitimized role expectations. We have

also found it necessary to introduce the term role collision to handle

potential role conflict situations which do not result in anxiety feelings

for the role incumbent. It may be necessary to treat the cited examples

of "intra-role" conflict as instances of "sub-role" or "role segment"

conflict.

We also are finding that "roles" may be differentiated on the extent

to which they require other "roles" as prerequisites for in role recruit-

ment and on the basis of the degree to which they can be segregated from

other roles in social behavior (role segregation).

One final complexity. The usual sociological treatment of the process of "role taking" is based on the socialization model, whether "the role" be an age, a sex, a family or an occupational role. Such a formulation assumes that there is a set of clearly defined and "jelled" expectations for the "role" recruit. The complications noted earlier regarding "role" expectations make suspect this assumption, at least as it applies to the superintendency position. We are finding that there are other possibilities regarding how expectations are "learned" or taught and who defines them. For example, (1) In some instances we find that the superintendent (ego) defines what most of the expectations regarding his rights and duties should and will be and the school board (alters) accepts his definitions. (2) In other instances, alters do most of the defining and ego accepts alter's definitions. (3) There is also the possibility that ego may define some and alters other behavior segments of the position of role sectors. (4) Neither ego or alters may have well defined expectations and they may be eventually worked out through a process of trial and error or "jockeying" back and forth. (5) Expectations may be <u>partially</u> learned <u>before</u> position incumbency.

In short, the socialization model is apparently only one of several types of role definitions and role learning processes. The assumption that it is the single mechanism available is untenable for the occupational role we are studying.

Implications

It is impossible within our time limitation to spell out fully the implications of these empirical complexities for the development of role conceptualization. We will emphasize only four points.

(1) The common practice of declaring or assuming that a particular status or position has associated with it a set of rights and duties on which there is consensus should be abandoned. For this common ' practice must be substituted theoretically grounded empirical research designed to answer such questions as: Are certain behavioral segments associated with the position institutionalized and others not?· Is there consensus on expectations by most or all incumbents of all counter positions? Are there variant sub-cultural definitions of the same positions? (2) Theoretical schemes may have to give consideration to the sectors or segments of a social position rather than view it as an indivisible unit. The number of alters in the same social position and the number of relevant positions will have to be treated as variables in theoretical formulations encompassing statuses similar to that of the school superintendent. (3) The socialization model is only one of many paradigms needed to explain the role learning and role definition process. The assumption that the process of role learning applicable to the adoption of age and sex positions is applicable to role taking in other social positions must be empirically examined. (4) Theoretical formulations must be developed that can handle the phenomena of role collision vs. role conflict, intra as well as inter role segregation and integration.

The complications of "role behavior" analysis noted in this paper may be a resultant of certain pecularities of the superintendency position. We strongly suspect, however, that many social positions now viewed as roles will prove to have similar complexities when carefully studied.

It is our feeling that the limitation of existent role paradigms are due in large part to the paucity of empirical investigations which have put these conceptual schemes to the crucial test of their research utility. In our judgment, this is a fundamental criterion for evaluating the worth of theoretical formulations.

Footnotes

[1]Cf. Parsons, Talcott and Edward A. Shils, with the assistance of James Olds, "Values, Motives and Systems of Action," in Parsons and Shils (eds.), _Toward a General Theory of Action_, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951, p. 190; and Theodore M. Newcomb, "Role Concepts in Social Psychology," paper delivered at the 1948 meetings of the American Psychological Association.

[2]Cf. Lionel F. Neiman and James W. Hughes, "The Problem of the Concept of Role--A Re-Survey of the Literature," _Social Forces_, 30, (December, 1951), pp. 141 - 149.

[3]Norman Cameron, "Role Concepts in Behavior Pathology," _American Journal of Sociology_," LV, (March, 1950), pp. 464 - 467.

[4]The principal conceptualizations of "role" are to be found in Parsons, Talcott and Edward A. Shils, _op. cit._; Parsons, Talcott, _The Social System_, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1951; Newcomb, Theodore M., _op. cit._; Newcomb, Theodore M., _Social Psychology_, New York: The Dryden Press, 1950; Linton, Ralph, _The Study of Man_, New York: D. Appleton - Century Company, 1936, esp. Chapter Eight, "Status and Role," pp. 113 - 131; see Neiman and Hughes, _op. cit._ for other role formulations.

[5]On role conflict see Parsons, Talcott, _The Social System_, _op. cit._, esp. pp. 280 - 283; Toby, Jackson, "Some Variables in Role Conflict Analysis," _Social Forces_, 30, (March, 1952), pp. 323 - 327; MacRae, Duncan, "Role Conflict in Formal Organizations," unpublished memorandum of the Laboratory of Social Relations, Harvard University, Stouffer, Samuel A., "An Analysis of Conflicting Social Norms, _American Sociological Review_, 14, (1949), pp. 707 - 717; Stouffer, Samuel A., and Jackson Toby, "Role Conflicts and Personality," _American Journal of Sociology_, 16, (1951), pp. 395 - 406.