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THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
OF ORGANIZATIONS

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SECOND EDITION

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OUTLINE

The Organization as a System of Roles
Definition of Role Behavior
The Process of Role-Sending
The Received Role
The Role Episode
The Context of Role-Taking
Multiple Roles and Multiple Activities

Research on Role-Taking
Role Expectations
The Relationship Between Role Expectations and Response
   Role expectations and role-sending
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The Feedback Effect of Role Behavior on Expectations
Organizational Factors as Determinants of Role Expectations
Personality Factors as Determinants of Role Expectations
Properties of the Focal Person as Mediators
Personality as Affected by Role Behavior
The Significance of Interpersonal Relations in Role-Taking
Role Socialization and Role-Making

Summary
What scientists seek reflects their frame of reference, and each discipline teaches its own. To the outsider the divisions and subdivisions of other fields are likely to appear minor and the differences among them trivial. To the dweller within each specialized area, however, the boundaries are important and the differences may be irreconcilable. Certainly psychologists and sociologists have strung a good deal of intellectual barbed wire along the boundary between their disciplines, with each group implying that there is something slightly suspect if not superfluous about the level of explanation the other has chosen for its own. On top of this ideological fence sit the social psychologists, striving to look as comfortable as the metaphor will allow. All too often they ease their pain by avoiding the synthesis of sociological and psychological levels of discourse that should be the hallmark of their hyphenated trade.

To the extent that choice of concepts can contribute to so complex a synthesis, the concept of role is singularly promising. It is the summation of the requirements with which the system confronts the individual member; it is the example most frequently given when one asks for a concept uniquely social-psychological and, for a concept in the vocabulary of a young science, it has a long history. Park wrote, as early as 1926, that “everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. . . It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves” (p. 37). Mead (1934) used role to explain the origins of social behavior and Moreno (1934), as a concept in psychotherapy. Linton (1936) gave it a central place in anthropology; Newcomb made it the key concept in his theoretical approach to social psychology (Newcomb, 1951; Newcomb, Turner, and Converse, 1965). Parsons (1951) and Merton (1957) consider it essential to understanding social action and social structure. It has been argued (Nieman and Hughes, 1951) that the literature of role is more distinguished for conceptual promise than research fulfillment. Subsequent reviews, however, in both sociology and psychology show a large and still-growing body of empirical work.¹

We have given the role concept a central place in our theory of organizations. We have defined human organizations as role systems (Chapter 3), and the effectiveness of such systems will be discussed (Chapters 8 and 12) in terms of the allocation of tasks to roles and in terms of the motivation to fulfill the requirements of those roles. It remains for this chapter to link the organizational and individual levels by making explicit the social-psychological processes by which organizational roles are defined and role behavior is evoked in the ongo-

¹See for example, Rocheblave-Spenle, 1962; Turner, 1956; Biddle and Thomas, 1966; Van Maanen, 1976; Graen, 1976; Sarbin and Allen, 1968.
ing organization. More specifically, we will review briefly the implications of viewing the organization as a system of roles. We will consider role-sending as a continuing cyclical process by means of which each person is socialized into a particular organizational role, informed about the acceptability of his or her behavior in relation to the requirements of that role, and corrected as necessary. We will examine some of the properties of the organization that determine the nature of specific roles. Finally, we will consider the extent to which the process of role-taking is modified by enduring properties of personality and interpersonal relations.

THE ORGANIZATION AS A SYSTEM OF ROLES

In defining human organizations as open systems of roles, we emphasized two cardinal facts: the contrived nature of human organizations, and the unique properties of a structure consisting of acts or events rather than unchanging physical components (Chapter 3). There are, of course, many ramifications of these facts. It follows, for example, that human organizations attain constancy and stability in terms of the patterned recurrence of such acts rather than in terms of the persons who perform them.

Indeed, one of the chief strengths of formal organization is its constancy under conditions of persistent turnover of personnel. It follows also that, since the units of organization are not linked physically, they must be linked psychologically. Because the organization consists of the patterned and motivated acts of human beings, it will continue to exist only so long as the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, habits, and expectations of human beings evoke the required motivation and behavior. In short, each behavioral element in the pattern is to a large extent caused and secured by the others. These facts in turn imply that human organizations are characterized by a paradoxical combination of durability and fragility. They remain intact only so long as the psychological cement holds, and yet their intactness and longevity is independent of the life-span of any and all organizational members. There is a variability and flexibility to these social contrivances that free them from the biological cycle of birth, growth, and death.

The emphasis on interdependent acts as the substance of organization is reminiscent of symbiotic relationships, as we observed earlier (Chapter 3). Formal organizations, however, involve no symbiosis in

the strict sense of that term; it is not instinct and immediate biological gratification that motivates role behavior in organizations. Rather, it is a process of learning the expectations of others, accepting them, and fulfilling them—primarily for the extrinsic rewards of membership, although many other motives enter into the taking of organizational roles. There is intrinsic satisfaction in the skillful and successful meshing of our own efforts with those of others, in meeting their expectations as they meet ours, especially if the process affords the expression of valued abilities or the acquisition of new ones.

When we observe an organization in motion, its systemic nature is immediately visible, especially if we think in terms of the organizational throughput. That characteristic transformation of material or energy, and the associated functions required to sustain it, informs the pattern of human acts that we observe. And we have only to look beyond the buildings and grounds, and the individuals present, to see that what literally is organized are acts—the behaviors of people acting on materials, acting on machines, but above all interacting with each other.

Such behaviors are neither disembodied nor anonymous; they are enacted by individuals. Moreover, in any organization we can locate each individual in the total set of ongoing relationships and behaviors comprised by the organization. The key concept for doing this is office, by which is meant a particular point in organizational space; space in turn is defined in terms of a structure of interrelated offices and the pattern of activities associated with them. Office is essentially a relational concept, defining each position in terms of its relationship to others and to the system as a whole. Associated with each office is a set of activities or expected behaviors. These activities constitute the role to be performed, at least approximately, by any person who occupies that office.

Each office in an organization is directly related to certain others, less directly to still others, and only remotely related to some offices in the organization. The closeness of such relationships is defined by the work flow and technology of the organization, and by the lines of authority (managerial subsystem).

Consider the office of press foreman in a factory manufacturing external trim parts for automobiles. The offices most directly related to that of the press foreman might include the general foreman of the trim department and the superintendent of sheet-metal operations. From these offices emanate the work assignments to the office of press foreman, and to these offices the foreman turns for approval of work done. Also directly related to the office of press foreman might be that of the stock foreman, whose section provides sheet-metal blanks for the presses, the inspector who must pass or reject the completed stamp-
ings, the shipping foreman whose section receives and packages the stampings, and, let us say, 14 press operators whose work the press foreman directs. Imagine the organization spread out like a vast fish net, in which each knot represents an office and each string a functional relationship between offices. If we pick up the net by seizing any office, the offices to which it is directly attached are immediately seen. Thus the office of press foreman is directly attached to 19 others—general foreman, superintendent, stock foreman, inspector, shipping foreman, and 14 press operators. These nineteen offices make up the role-set (Merton, 1957) for the office of press foreman.

Similarly, each member of an organization is directly associated with a relatively small number of others, usually the occupants of offices adjacent in the work-flow structure or in the hierarchy of authority. They constitute the member's role-set and typically include the immediate supervisor (and perhaps the supervisor's immediate supervisor), the subordinates, and certain members of the same or other departments with whom the member must work closely. These offices are defined into the member’s role set by virtue of the work-flow, technology, and authority structure of the organization.

**Definition of Role Behavior**

Generically, role behavior refers to the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome. The set of interdependent behaviors comprise a social system or subsystem, a stable collective pattern in which people play their parts.

When we abstract some of the essential persisting features from the specific acts comprising role behavior we speak of roles. For example, we can speak of the role of the quarterback on a football team in general terms of play selection without specifying the particular signals he barks to his teammates or the specific plays with which they respond. This general description applies to roles both within and outside formal organizations. The various members of the family interact in consistent ways in their roles as father, mother, son, daughter, husband, and wife. In formal organizations many of the functionally specific behaviors comprising the system are specified in written and coded presentations. Moreover, in formal organizations the roles people play are more a function of the social setting than of their own personality characteristics. The basic criterion, then, for studying role behavior is to identify the relevant social system or subsystem and locate the recurring events that fit together in converting some input into an output. This can be done by ascertaining the role expectations of a given set of related offices, since such expectations are main elements in maintaining the role system and inducing the required role behavior.
The Process of Role-Sending

All members of a person's role-set depend on that person's performance in some fashion; they are rewarded by it, judged in terms of it, or require it to perform their own tasks. Because they have a stake in that person's performance, they develop beliefs and attitudes about what he or she should and should not do as part of the role. Such prescriptions and proscriptions held by members of a role-set are designated **role expectations**; in the aggregate they define the role, the behaviors expected of the person who holds it. The role expectations held for a certain person by a member of his or her role-set will reflect that member's conception of the office and its requirements, modified in some degree by the member's impressions of the abilities and personality of the officeholder.

The content of role expectations consists mainly of preferences with respect to specific acts, things the person should do or avoid doing. But role expectations may also refer to personal characteristics or style, ideas about what the person should be, should think, or should believe. Role expectations are by no means restricted to the job description as it might be given by the head of the organization or prepared by some specialist in personnel work, although these individuals are likely to be influential members of the role-sets of many persons in the organization. Moreover, people well up in the organizational hierarchy also exercise an indirect effect on the roles of others through decisions about the choice of products, technology, and formal division of labor.

The mention of influence raises additional issues of definition and theory. Role expectations for a given office (and its occupant) exist in the minds of members of its role-set and represent standards in terms of which they evaluate the occupant's performance. The expectations do not remain in the minds of members of the role-set, however. They tend to be communicated or "sent" to the focal person. Moreover, the numerous acts that make up the process of role-sending are not merely informational. They are attempts at influence, directed at the focal person and intended to bring about conformity to the expectations of the senders. Some of these influence attempts (for example, those from superiors) may be directed toward the accomplishment of formally specified responsibilities and objectives of office. Others (perhaps from peers or subordinates) may be directed toward making life easier or more pleasant for the senders themselves, in ways unrelated or even contrary to official requirements.

The term **focal person** is used to refer to any individual whose role or office is under consideration. In referring to role expectations as sent to the focal person we are following the formulation of Rommetveit (1954). He refers to members of a role-set as role senders, and to their communicated expectations as the **sent role**.
The messages of role-sending are of many kinds—instructions about preferred behaviors and behaviors to be avoided, information about rewards and penalties contingent on role performance, and evaluations of current performance in relation to role expectations. The statements of role-sending may be specifically behavioral—"As the completed parts come from your machine, you must put them immediately on the overhead rack"—or they may refer to some less tangible matter—"You won't get along here if you think you're too good for the rest of us." In the former case, the focal person knows exactly what he or she must do to meet expectations. In the latter case, the expectation-satisfying behavior must be inferred, as the role sender inferred the objectionable attitude.

As a communicative and influential process, acts of role-sending can be characterized in terms of any of the dimensions appropriate to the measurement of communication and influence. Some of the more important ones proposed by Gross, Mason, and McEachern (1958) include sign (prescriptive or proscriptive), magnitude (strength of the influence attempt), specificity (extent to which the expected behaviors are made concrete and detailed), intensity (extent to which the focal person is allowed freedom of choice in complying or refusing compliance), and range of conditions under which compliance is intended. As our treatment of power, communication, and leadership implies, our interest in the role-sending process centers upon magnitude or strength of the influence attempt. We are interested also in the psychological basis of influence on which different acts of role-sending depend. Every attempt at influence implies consequences for compliance or noncompliance. In organizations, as we have seen, these commonly take the form of rewards or sanctions—gratifications or deprivations that a role sender might arrange for the focal person, depending on that person's having conformed to the sender's expectations.

The concept of legitimacy, and its acceptance by organizational members, makes the actual use of negative sanctions infrequent in many organizations. (See Chapter 10 for discussion of this concept.) Members obey because the source of the command is legitimate and its form and subject matter are appropriate to the source. All three—source, form, and substance—are thus congruent with the member's own concept of organizational membership and role requirements. The availability and visibility of extrinsic rewards and sanctions are important, nevertheless. The sanctions may be seldom used, perhaps seldom promised or threatened, but they are important. Even in the least punitive of organizations, the enactment of a role within the limits of tolerance of the role-set is a condition for holding the associated office. The person who fails utterly to meet the expectations of the role is thus confronted with the most logical of sanctions, removal from office. One
can think of exceptions, in which the nonperforming office-holder continues to hold the office by reason of some personal claim, ownership or nepotism or seniority too great to be denied. But the rule is more important than the exceptions; bureaucratic organizations are systems of achieved rather than ascribed roles, and one validates possession of an office by enactment of the associated role.

Thus, each individual in an organization acts in relation to and in response to the expectations of the members of a role-set, not because those expectations constitute some mentalistic field of forces but because they are expressed in explicit behavioral ways. The expression need not be continuous; human memory can be long, and adults in our society have graduated from a lengthy period of training and socialization in organizational role-taking. They have learned a quality and technique of role readiness that lets them anticipate many of the role expectations of others with few cues. As a result, they learn new roles quickly, absorbing a great deal of role-sending during the early days of their occupancy and retaining much of it without repetition. When the behavior of the focal person is thus appropriate and compliant in the eyes of the role senders, they and their expectations may be quite inconspicuous. But let a person stop performing within the range of such acceptability, and there will immediately become visible the membership of the role set, the expectations which they hold, and the means of enforcement at their disposal.

The Received Role

To understand the response of any member of an organization to the complex pattern of role-sending addressed specifically to him or her, we must regard the organization from the vantage point of that person’s office. When we do so, we see that the members of the role-set for that office, and the influential pressures which they direct to its occupant as a focal person, are part of that person’s objective environment. To consider the compliance of the focal person with the sent role or the deviations from it, however, takes us immediately beyond the objective organization and environment. Each individual responds to the organization in terms of his or her perceptions of it, a subjective or psychological “organization” that may differ in various ways from the actual organization.

Thus for each person in an organization there is not only a sent role, consisting of the influential and communicative acts of the appropriate role-set; there is also a received role, consisting of that person’s perceptions and cognitions of what was sent. How closely the received role corresponds to the sent role is an empirical question for each focal person and set of role-senders, and will depend on properties of the senders, the focal person, the substantive content of the sent expectations, the clarity of the communication, and the like.
It is the sent role by means of which the organization communicates to each of its members the do's and don'ts associated with his or her office. It is the received role, however, that is the immediate influence on each member's behavior and the immediate source of his or her motivation for role performance. Each sent expectation can be regarded as arousing in the focal person a motivational force of some magnitude and direction. This is not to say that these motivational forces are identical in magnitude and direction with the sent influence attempts that evoked them. Messages may be misunderstood or defensively distorted.

Furthermore, when sent-role expectations are seen by the focal person as illegitimate or coercive, they may arouse strong resistance forces that lead to outcomes different from or even opposite to the expected behavior. It is such processes, repeated for many persons over long periods of time, that produce the persistent component of unintended effects in organizational behavior. Pressures to increase production sometimes result in slowdowns. Moreover, every person is subject to a variety of psychological forces in addition to those stimulated by pressures from the role-set in the work situation. Role-sendings from that set are only a partial determinant of the person's behavior on the job.

Additional sources of influence in role-taking are the objective, impersonal properties of the situation itself. The taking of roles may be aided by the nature of the task and the previous experience of the individual with respect to similar tasks. The soldier in combat seeks cover when under fire not so much because of the expectations of members of his role-set as because of the demands of the situation. The worker on the assembly line tightens the bolt on the passing car both because he has been told that it is his job and because the structuring of his work situation is a constant reminder of what he is supposed to do. People can be conditioned to play their roles by cues other than those of the communicated expectations from other system members. Nevertheless, in most organizations, role behavior is largely dependent on role-sending.

In addition to the motivational forces aroused by sent expectations and other cues, there are important internal sources of motivation for role performance. For example, there is the intrinsic satisfaction derived from the content of the role. The concert pianist has many motives that encourage performance; one of them is probably the intrinsic psychological return from exercising a hard-won and valued skill. But there is, in addition to intrinsic satisfaction in expressing
valued abilities, another kind of "own force" important in the motivation of role behavior. In a sense each person is a "self-sender," that is, a role-sender to him or herself. Each individual has a conception of the office he or she occupies, and a set of attitudes and beliefs about what should and should not be done by an occupant of that office. Each individual has some awareness of the behaviors that will meet the responsibilities of that office, contribute to the accomplishment of organizational objectives, and further his or her own interests. A person may even have had a major part in determining the formal responsibilities of his or her office, especially if it is a line or staff position well up in the hierarchy.

Moreover, some of the persisting motives of the individual are likely to include the sector of organizational behavior. Through a long process of socialization and formal training within the organization and in the larger culture of which both person and organization are parts, the individual will have acquired a set of values and expectations about his or her own behavior and abilities, about the nature of human organizations and the conditions for membership in them. In short, as Miller (1962), Dai (1955), and others have observed, the person has an occupational self-identity and is motivated to behave in ways that affirm and enhance its valued attributes. The individual comes to the job in a state of what we have previously referred to as role-readiness, a state that includes the acceptance of legitimate authority and compliance with its requests, a compliance that for many people extends to acts that they do not understand and that may violate many of their own values. Milgram's finding (1965) that two-thirds of the adult subjects in an experiment obeyed an instruction to administer what they believed to be electrical shocks of several hundred volts to groaning and protesting victims only highlights the phenomenon of compliance in role behavior.

That phenomenon is frequently underestimated, perhaps because of biases inherent both in everyday organizational life and in organizational research. The meeting of expectations is by definition expected and requires no corrective action. It is therefore likely to go unremarked by formal leaders and unobserved by research workers. Managers and research workers, for their own respective reasons, share an interest in deviant organizational behavior. Admittedly, deviance, both as failure and as inspired success, can teach us a great deal. But the dominant defining property of human organizations is the recurrence of expected behavior patterns, and that recurrence reflects individual compliance with the expectations of organizational roles.

The Role Episode

Our description of role-sending and role-receiving has been based on four concepts: role expectations, which are evaluative standards
applied to the behavior of any person who occupies a given organizational office or position; sent-role, which consists of communications stemming from role expectations and sent by members of the role-set as attempts to influence the focal person; received role, which is the focal person's perception of the role-sendings so addressed, including the reflexive role expectations that the focal person "sends" to himself or herself; and role behavior, which is the response of the focal person to the complex of information and influence thus received.

These four concepts can be thought of as constituting a sequence or role episode. The first two, role expectations and sent role, involve motivations, cognitions, and behavior of the members of the role-set; the latter two, received role and role behavior, have to do with the cognitions, motivations, and behavior of the focal person.

To list the concepts in this order emphasizes one direction of causality—the influence of role expectations on role behavior. There is also a feedback loop; the degree to which a person's behavior conforms to the expectations of the role-set at one point in time will affect the state of those expectations at the next moment. If the response of the focal person is a hostile counterattack, the role-senders are apt to think and behave in ways quite different than if the focal person were submissively compliant. If the focal person complies partially under pressure, they may increase the pressure; if he or she is obviously overcome with tension and anxiety, they may "lay off." In sum, the role episode is abstracted from a process that is cyclic and ongoing: the response of the focal person feeds back to each sender in ways that alter or reinforce that sender's expectations and subsequent role-sending. The current role-sendings of each member of the set depend on that member's evaluations of the response to his or her last sendings, and thus a new episode begins.

The Context of Role-Taking

Role sending and role behavior are thus seen as events in an ongoing and interdependent cyclical process. That process does not occur in isolation; it is itself shaped by several additional or contextual factors—individual, interpersonal, and organizational. The role episode and its context are shown in Figure 7-1. Arrow 1 represents the process of role-sending, and Arrow 2 the process of feedback by which role-senders estimate the degree of compliance with their previous communications and prepare to initiate another cycle. The role episode is thus at the core of the figure, Boxes A to D and the connecting arrows 1 and 2.

The circles in Figure 7-1 represent the context in which such episodes occur: relatively enduring states of the organization, the person, and the interpersonal relations between focal person and role-senders. Such enduring properties are for the most part abstractions and
generalizations based upon recurrent events and behaviors. For example, characterizing a relationship as supportive means simply that the parties to the relationship have behaved in a supportive manner toward one another on a sufficient number of occasions so that we feel justified in inferring supportiveness as a quality of the relationship. Such repetitions and patterns of events provide the basis and context within which each new occurrence can best be understood.

To a considerable extent the role expectations held by the members of a role-set—the prescriptions and proscriptions associated with a particular office—are determined by the broader organizational context. The technology of the organization, the structure of its subsystems, its formal policies, and its rewards and penalties dictate in large degree the content of a given office. What the occupant of that office is supposed to do, with and for whom, is given by these and other properties of the organization itself. Although human beings are doing the “supposing” and rewarding, the structural properties of organization are sufficiently stable so that they can be treated as independent of the particular persons in the role-set. For such properties as size, number of echelons, and rate of growth, the justifiable abstraction of organizational properties from individual behavior is even more obvious. The organizational circle (E) in Figure 7-1 represents the set of such variables. Some of them characterize the organization as a whole; others describe some part of it. Arrow 3 asserts a casual relationship between certain organizational variables and the role expectations held about and sent to a particular position.
Enduring attributes of the person (circle F) refer to all those variables that describe the propensity of an individual to behave in certain ways—his or her motives and values, defense preferences, sensitivities, and fears. Such factors affect the role episode in several ways. First, some traits of the person tend to evoke or facilitate certain evaluations and behaviors from role-senders (arrow 4). Second, the same sent-role can be experienced differently by different people; that is, personality factors act as conditioning variables in the relationship between the role as sent and the role as received and responded to (arrow 5). Finally, we propose that role behavior has effects on personality (arrow 6). This is simply the hypothesis that we become what we do, and in a sense we un-become what we do not do. The person who is required to play a subservient role, for example, cannot do so over an extended time without consequent changes in personality. Most abilities atrophy if unexercised.

As Figure 7-1 indicates, interpersonal relations (circle G) fulfill functions parallel to those already described for attributes of the person. The expectations held for and sent to a focal person at a particular time depend to some degree on the quality of the interpersonal relationship already existing between that person and the members of his or her role-set (arrow 7). The focal person will also interpret differently the sent expectations of the role set, depending on his or her continuing interpersonal relations with the senders (arrow 8). Praise and blame have one set of meanings when they come from a trusted source, another when they stem from untrusted sources. Finally, the behavior of the focal person feeds back to and has effects on his or her interpersonal relations with members of the role set (arrow 9). If the focal person suddenly and persistently refuses to comply with their role-sendings, we would predict not only an immediate change in their evaluation of the role behavior itself (arrow 2), but an enduring change in their liking for the focal person (arrow 9).

**Multiple Roles and Multiple Activities**

The process of organizational role-taking is simplest when a role consists of only one activity, is located in a single subsystem of the organization, and relates to a role-set all of whose members are in the same organizational subsystem. It can become more complex, however, in several ways: by the addition of activities, subsystem involvements, and role-senders, and in rare circumstances the addition of other organizational roles to be enacted by the same focal person. The first of these requires little explanation. Every activity added to a role constitutes a kind of complexification, although there is ample evidence (Katzell, Yankelovich, and others, 1975; Quinn and Shepard, 1974) that most people who enact work roles with few activities prefer some additional complexity.
Roles also become more complex when they require the focal person to be simultaneously involved in two or more subsystems, since each is likely to have its own priorities and to some degree its own subculture. The crossing of subsystem boundaries may be physically required of the focal persons themselves or it may consist in the coordination of persons whose roles are located in different organizational subsystems. The professor who spends half-time in a teaching department and half-time in a research unit of the same university quickly discovers the added complexity of additional subsystem involvements. But the academic vice-president who must somehow respond to the heads of both units will have made that discovery long since.

The role complexification and the expansion of role-sets that come with involvement in two or more subsystems exemplify processes that occur as well across system boundaries. The role-set of a sales clerk is likely to include customers, especially "regular" customers. The role-set of a purchasing agent is likely to include suppliers as well as the heads of the intraorganizational departments that pay for and use the supplies. Moreover, the members of a person's work role-set—his or her role-senders for the work role—may include people who are not themselves members of the work organization or any of its subsystems. When people are asked to name members of their role-sets—those persons whose expectations about how the job shall be done represent a continuing source of influence—the responses sometimes include friends and union officers, husbands and wives.

The inclusion of multiple activities and multiple subsystem involvements is increasingly evident as we move up the hierarchy in most large organizations. The first-line supervisor, for example, is of course responsible for the quantity and quality of production in the immediate task force of which he or she is the formal leader, but is likely also to train new workers, perhaps to plan work for the unit as a whole, to negotiate with the supervisors of adjacent units, and the like. In addition, the supervisor takes direction from the next higher level of management and perhaps represents the interests of his or her own work group to that level. The supervisor is thus a member of two subsystems—the managerial structure and the unit supervised. The conflicts inherent in this dual membership have given rise to a literature of their own, beginning with Roethlisberger's (1945) vivid characterization of the foreman as "master and victim of double-talk."

The diverse demands of such subsystem involvements can be thought of as two subroles, which together constitute the role of foreman. Members of middle management are likely to be similarly involved in the crossing of subsystem boundaries—in relations with the various productive, procurement, and marketing units, for example. And as Mann and Dent (1954) and Likert (1961) have pointed out, people at every supervisory level in the hierarchy (except for the very
top) are members of groups at two hierarchical levels—one at which they supervise and one at which they are supervised. The boundary between the rank-and-file and the managerial structure, however, has a unique significance and poses unique problems for first-level supervisors, who must somehow reconcile the demands of their two subroles.

It is possible for one person to hold more than one office, and thus enact two or more work roles in the same or related organizations. The Dean of the Graduate School may also be the University Vice-President for Research. The Premier of the Soviet Union may also be the Secretary of the Communist Party. The professor who divides his or her time between a teaching department and a research institute may have two titles, two offices, and perhaps two different salary rates.

Whether such enactments are designated as the person’s holding two quite separate roles and offices, or as the fusion of two previously separate roles into a single new office and subroles, is a matter of organizational choice. It is interesting, however, that we generally regard the holding of multiple offices in an organization as indicating something amiss or at least in transition: a seizure of power, as when a dictator picks up for himself the portfolios of several cabinet ministers; a lack of qualified people; or an inadequacy in the formal organizational plan. There is less tendency, however, to be critical of the same basic process of multiplying the roles played by a single person when all of them are tied as subroles to a single office. The essential dilemma is that there is no escape from the coordinative needs resulting from specialized subsystems and fractionated jobs.

We have suggested that the simplest organizational arrangement occurs when one activity defines role and office. In fact, a general trend in organizations is to move toward such simplification and to fractionate many jobs into their component activities. The more such role specialization develops at one level, however, the greater the need for coordination at a higher level. Thus, the very organization that follows the simplified arrangement of one activity, one role, and one subsystem for its assembly-line workers must adopt a more complex plan for higher offices, multiplying their activities and subsystem involvements. The many specialized subsystems must be interrelated and hence offices created in which these various substructures intersect. In short, the less the coordinative demand within roles, the greater the demand for some means of coordination between roles. That means usually the creation of a new coordinative office.

**RESEARCH ON ROLE-TAKING**

The research evidence for this model of role-taking in organizations is irregular in quality and relevance. It is, however, substantial in
quantity and gaining in other respects. These tendencies are especially characteristic of the last decade, and give some support to the advocates of role as a concept particularly useful for the study of human behavior in organizations.

An elementary assumption in such research is that the occupants of different roles show characteristic and distinctive attitudes, values, and behaviors. That assumption has been part of human experience and folk wisdom for time beyond recollection, and it has been well-documented in the organizational context over a period of thirty years. Officers are more favorable toward army life than enlisted men (Stouffer et al., 1949). Foreman are more favorable toward the employing company than are workers, and stewards are more favorable toward the union (Jacobson, in Guetzkow, 1951).

Moreover, role-related patterns are not only characteristic of attitudes and values, but of perceptions. Mann found differences of 60 percentage points between supervisors' perception that they "always or almost always get their subordinates' ideas in the solution of job problems" and the perceptions of the subordinates that they were so consulted (Likert, 1961). Tannenbaum (1968) reports sizable differences in perceptions of control in organizations, with rank-and-file members typically wanting more and seeing themselves as having less than those at more advantaged locations in the hierarchy want for them or perceive them to have (Tannenbaum, 1968). Such differences are so well-established and so consistent across organizations and across industrial societies that there is little purpose to citing additional examples.

Nor is there great purpose to enlarging the stock of such data. These role-descriptive findings, important in their time, lend themselves to either of two interpretations, or more likely to both: one can argue that the role shapes the attitudes and perceptions of the individual or that the individual is selected for goodness of fit to the role requirements. Organizations make a sustained effort, in fact, to do both these things, and both have become important fields of applied psychology—training and selection (Guion, 1976; Hinrichs, 1976). Our concern, however, is with the dynamic processes of role-sending, enactment, and evaluation that begin after the formalities of selection and training have taken place.

Role expectations
The idea of role as a set of expected activities associated with the occupancy of a given position assumes substantial agreement among the relevant people as to what those activities are. Research on role conflict has investigated deficiencies in that agreement, but the dominant fact is the expectational agreement rather than the deficiencies.
Such agreement has been demonstrated for many roles, social and organizational, for many organizations, and for a number of cultures. Moreover, it has been demonstrated by means of different research techniques. Sarbin and Jones (1956) present such data for the role of daughter, using a 200-word checklist to identify the role expectations. Thomas, Polansky, and Kounin (1955) describe similar results for the role of social worker, with expectational agreement measured by means of sentence-completion procedures. Sherwood (1958), using an essay task to generate data, reported significant agreement on the role expectations for Bantu clerks.

Even research that has concentrated on problems of role conflict shows agreement as the modal pattern among members of the role-set. Agreement is characteristically less than complete, however, and other forms of expectational inadequacy are also common. Such variance in expectation patterns constitutes the first element in the model of role-taking presented earlier in this chapter. We now examine the empirical evidence for that model, following in sequence the categories of relationships identified by number in Figure 7-1.

**The Relationship Between Role Expectations and Response (Arrow 1).**

As Figure 7-1 suggests, a sequence of three relationships is involved in the linkage of role expectations to role performance. There is the relationship between the expectations held by members of the role set and the expectations as actually sent to the focal person, the relationship between those sent by the set and those received by the focal person, and the relationship between the expectations so received and the subsequent response (both as role performance and side effects). The empirical research on roles was not designed to provide explicit tests of this sequence, however, and the evidence for its several links is uneven. We will review it in the order suggested above, and then consider the research on various inadequacies in organizational role-sending and role-taking.

**Role Expectations and Role-Sending**

It is often assumed that all role expectations are communicated from role-senders to the focal person, a proposition more distinguished for its convenience than its plausibility. The concepts of organizational research reflect many such assumptions and many subsequently discovered intrusive realities—formal versus informal organization (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939); official versus operative and operational goals (March and Simon, 1958); espoused managerial theories versus theories-in-action (Argyris, 1975). Little is yet known of how role expectations as actually sent compare to expectations in the minds of the role-set.
We do know that a great deal of communication goes on in the course of getting work done in organizations—communication by means of gestures and the manipulation of objects as well as by the written and spoken word—and we know that much of the flow of communication falls within the definition of role-sending. Horsfall and Arensberg (1949) reported 20.9 acts of communication per worker per hour among 28 shoe workers, Miller (1958) 19.3 acts among 23 glass workers, Stieber (1956) 16 acts among German steel workers. Such rates are affected by technology, pacing, spatial arrangements, and the like, but the main facts are clear: communication among work-related peers is sustained and frequent. Communication between supervisors and workers is also frequent; Turner (1955), Walker (1956), and Meissner (1976) show the same modal response in widely disparate industries—"between twice a day and under once an hour." Meissner (1976) presents these data in detail.

**Sending and Receiving**

In an organizational society, people acquire a kind of general expertise in the taking of organizational roles, a process that has been more studied in the laboratory than in organizations. Sarbin and Williams (1953) conducted a laboratory experiment that demonstrated something of the expertise that people acquire in receiving and understanding communications from role-senders. The subjects of the experiment listened to 38 sentences, each conveying some role expectation; their task was to determine the age, sex, and role of the sender, the intended receiver, and the action or role behavior that was being requested. Performance of the experimental subjects was so accurate that the resulting distributions showed the typical J-curve of conforming behavior. Cline and Richards (1960) reached similar conclusions from quite different experiments, as did Orne (Orne, 1959; Orne and Scheibe, 1964).

General expertise in such matters does not imply unfailing congruence between sent and received roles in organizations. Messages may be misunderstood or defensively distorted. High expectations may be comfortably scaled down by the focal person. Moreover the agreement between sent and received roles may be spuriously high in the laboratory situation because the motivations to defend or distort are relatively weak. Kraut (1965), in a study of salesagents and managers in 151 offices, obtained estimates in dollars of the amount of sales that the manager expected of each salesagent, the amount that each agent thought the manager expected, and the amount that the salesagent considered appropriate. Kraut took the difference between the manager's actual expectations and the salesagent's own standard of appropriateness as a measure of objective role conflict. The subjective role
conflict was measured in terms of the difference between the agent’s own standard and the manager’s expectations as perceived by that salesagent. There was a strong tendency for agents to underestimate the expectations of managers, and thus the amount of the conflict. On the average, subjective conflict was about half as large as objective conflict.

Such discrepancies are more common among low performers than high, either because better performance makes defense unnecessary or because a more accurate receiving of expectations induces higher performance. For our present purposes, the significant fact is the gap itself; the role as received cannot be assumed identical with that sent.

**Expectations and Performance**

One’s work provides evidence for the power of role expectations, as well as expertise in role enactment. Subjects instructed to simulate hypnosis do so well enough to deceive expert observers, a fact that suggests completeness and potency of role-sending as well as skill in role-taking. Other research on experimenter-subject relationships has demonstrated the power of the experimenter’s role-sending in opposition to the other cues available to the subject. Subjects have experienced sensory deprivation when there was none, discriminated nonexistent differences, and the like.

Milgram’s (1965) well-known experiments on obedience to authority, in which many subjects administered what they believed to be painful or dangerous electric shock to other subjects, often in contradiction to their own expressed values, are perhaps the most dramatic examples of the power of this sort of role-sending (see Chapter 10). Gage (1953) was perhaps closer to the realities of organizational role-sending in comparing the accuracy with which behavior could be predicted from knowledge of role expectations with prediction from knowledge of individual idiosyncrasies. Role expectations provided the better predictive base.

General evidence for the power of role-sending lies all around us in the patterned behavior of organizational life itself. All forms of role-sending are not equally effective, however, nor are they equal with respect to undesirable side effects. Research on role-sending in organizations has thus far concentrated more on side effects than main effects (that is, role enactment per se), and more on particular inadequacies in the expectational pattern and sending process (conflict, ambiguity, overload) than on constructive elements. Least research has been done on the important question of what kinds of role-sending evoke most effective performance and fewest undesirable side effects, although it could be argued that this question is included in some more comprehensive lines of research, organizational and nonorganizational. Likert (1961, 1967), for example, proposes the principle of supportive
relationships as underlying effective supervision, but implies that it is equally applicable to peer relationships. Skinner (1948, 1971) proposes the principle of reinforcement and its embodiment in operant conditioning as sovereign in human behavior, including organizational design and management.

We need research, however, at the level of specific role sending and enactment. An example is the experimental work of Luchins and Luchins (1966), in which subjects were required to learn a social role by means of several different kinds of role sending. Learning was much more efficient when an overall description of the role and its requirements was provided than when expectations were communicated step by step without such a survey. Consistent with this was their finding that an opportunity to observe and imitate successful role enactment was conducive to rapid and effective learning. Replication and extension in organizational settings would be welcome.

Role Conflict
We define role conflict as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult. Such conflicts may be differentiated regarding the degree of mutual interference; in the extreme case compliance with one excludes absolutely compliance with the other. They may also be differentiated in terms of the importance of the interference, the number of role-senders whose expectations are affected, and the like. Role conflict is typically envisaged as a disagreement between two or more role-senders, but two or more expectations of the same role-sender may be in conflict, and conflict can occur between expectations of the role-set and those of the focal person for himself or herself. Conflict may also be generated between two or more roles held by the same person—for example, the role of worker and mother—although the study of such inter-role conflicts takes us outside the immediate boundaries of the organization.

Empirical research on role conflict has tended to choose roles for which some polarization of differences among role-senders seemed likely, and has then demonstrated that such differences existed and were stressful for the persons involved, especially the focal person. Among the studies that fit this description are some that concentrated on the role of industrial foreman, industrial superintendent, staff officer, elective official, military chaplain, scientist, salesperson, military officer, minor government official, teacher, and manager. In every occupational category, such conflicts were associated with negative psychological responses on the part of the focal persons.

Little research has been done on the effects of role conflict on members of the role set, but one would predict strain and hostility there
as well, moderated by the visibility of the focal person's behavior and the focal person's coping strategy, among other factors. Bible and his colleagues (Bible and Brown, 1963; Bible and McComas, 1963), in a study of teachers, investigated the side effects of role conflict on the role set and found that consensus among members of the set regarding the focal role was associated with satisfaction among them as well as with the satisfaction of the focal person (teacher).

Studies of role conflict that utilize objective or independent criterion measures are also less common than they should be, although there are implications that role conflict leads to decrements in performance. Getzels and Guba (1954) found role conflict to be associated with reduced teaching effectiveness in nine air force training schools, and Bible and McComas (1963) reported similar findings for teacher effectiveness in other settings. Role conflict has also been studied in relation to various measures of physiological strain. (This research is summarized briefly in Chapter 17; for more extensive reviews see Kahn and Quinn, 1970; McLean, 1970, 1974.)

Data on the incidence and prevalence of role conflict are difficult to interpret. Most studies include only small and unrepresentative populations and depend wholly on self-reported measures. Moreover, different methods of measurement have given substantially different results. All agree, however, that the experience of role conflict in the work situation is widespread. In a nationwide study of male wage and salary workers, Kahn and his colleagues (1964) found nearly half to be working under conditions of noticeable conflict. Forty-eight percent reported that from time to time they were caught between two sets of people who wanted different things from them, and 15 percent reported this to be a frequent and serious problem. Thirty-nine percent reported being bothered by their inability to satisfy the conflicting demands of their various role-senders. The hierarchical and depersonalized nature of large-scale organization is also reflected in these data: 88 percent of all role conflicts reportedly involved pressures from above, and in 57 percent of these cases the spontaneous description of the source of the pressure was given in such impersonal terms as "the company" or "management."

Quinn and his colleagues (1974), using a card-sorting technique with two national samples of adults, report results of slightly lesser magnitude: in 1969 31 percent of all employed people reported themselves as subject to (not free from) "the conflicting demands that other people make" in the work situation; in 1973 the corresponding figure was 43 percent. Studies of more limited populations (Kahn, 1974; French and Caplan, 1973) have reported substantially higher proportions among administrators, scientists, and engineers in certain agencies of the government.
Role Ambiguity

In its prototypical form, role ambiguity simply means uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do. But there may be uncertainty as well about many other aspects of a role, including the membership of the role-set, the ends to be served by role enactment, and the evaluation of present role behavior.

Research on the consequences of role ambiguity has discovered some side effects similar to those for role conflict—low job satisfaction and high tension—and some that seem more specific to the ambiguity experience—low self-confidence and a sense of futility (Kahn et al., 1964). There is also substantial evidence that role ambiguity reduces the effectiveness of performance: Cohen (1959) reports that the accomplishment of experimental tasks is reduced when instructions are unclear, and Smith (1957) found similar effects when “nonsending role-senders” (silent unidentified stooges) were introduced into an experimental situation. Weitz (1957) found ambiguity of role expectations was related to turnover in a variety of jobs. Torrance (1954) found that ambiguity of role allocation and definition in air force crews under stress was a significant factor in survival.

Such research began with the assumption that ambiguity frustrates the human need for clarity or structure in the environment, accordingly regarded it as a stressor, and sought evidence of resulting strain and performance decrement. The findings are consistent with this approach, but they do not imply that maximum specificity is maximally desirable in organizational life. The preference of most people for general rather than close supervision, autonomy in pacing their work, and choice in the method of doing it argue against the simplistic assumption that ambiguity is an unmitigated evil. Jackson (1960) and Hollander (1964) have demonstrated that some degree of ambiguity—“acceptable ranges of role expectations”—facilitates the management of role conflict. We need research on different aspects and ranges of role ambiguity as they affect role enactment and the well-being of focal persons.

Little can be said about the prevalence of role ambiguity. National samples over a ten-year period report percentages of employed persons experiencing substantial role ambiguity as ranging from 11 to 35. Studies of more limited populations have produced higher proportions: French and Caplan (1973) obtained reports of role ambiguity from 60 percent of the men employed by a government agency, although an agency with a conspicuously difficult and complex mission. And Graen (1976) found that 80 percent of the administrative recruits to a service arm of a public university did not know “what the supervisor wanted,” even after nine months in role. We conclude only that role ambiguity is a significant organizational problem by any count and
measure yet taken, that its incidence varies widely, and that for some populations and organizations it is the modal condition.

The Feedback Effect of Role Behavior on the Expectations of Role-Senders (Arrow 2).

The model of role-taking that we have proposed is cyclical, and consists of two core processes or components. One is role-sending; the other is the feedback of information about role enactment from the focal person to members of the role-set. Such feedback in turn influences the next cycle of role-sending, and so the process continues. Research to study this hypothesized process adequately would be longitudinal in design in order to show how the performance of the focal person in successive cycles of role-sending and response leads to modifications of the expectations and role-sendings of the members of the set. Such research has yet to be done, but some data on the feedback component in role-taking are available.

A series of experiments by Adams and his colleagues (Adams, 1976; Wall, 1972; Wall and Adams, 1974) identifies at least two kinds of information used by role-senders in evaluating role enactment of the focal person: success (making or losing money, for example) and conformity to instructions and directives from the role-set. The effects of these two kinds of information were essentially additive, although there were some unique effects. Either deviation of the focal person from prescribed methods or failure in outcome (loss of money) resulted in subsequent more intensive monitoring by members of the set. Members of the role-set also made inferences about the focal person's loyalty on the basis of both kinds of information, although a conforming "loser" was rated higher on loyalty than a nonconforming "winner." Losers, however, tended not to be chosen by the role-set for further (hypothetical) missions.

The implication is that unsuccessful enactment of a role compels some action, corrective or compensatory, by the role-set. The usual assumption is that failure to enact the sent role is unintentional and that dismissal or corrective action by the role set is unwanted by the focal person. This need not be the case; the focal person may want to leave the role or, more often, to induce changes in it.

Goffman (1961) has proposed the concept of role distance or "distanting" as a process by which a focal person makes manifest his or her unwillingness to enact a certain role or role component, and thus confronts the role-set with the necessity of taking some alternative action. One such action is reallocation of the functions within the role set. Perry, Silber, and Bloch (1956) describe such reallocation within families when a child takes over functions usually belonging to one or another parent. It would be useful to know whether reallocation occurs
mainly when the faulty performer must nevertheless be kept within the set, as in the family, or whether reallocation within role-sets is common in the organizational situation as well.

The finding that deficient role performance leads to increased monitoring by the role set is plausible, as an alternative to removal of the focal person. It is consistent with the earlier finding (Stouffer and Toby, 1951) that close observation by members of the role-set does in fact lead to increased conformity by the focal person. It is not consistent, however, with the finding by Kahn and his colleagues (1964) that rigidity on the part of the focal person was associated with reduced intentions on the part of the role-set to bring about change.

It is likely that members of role-sets make sophisticated judgments about different kinds of performance deficiencies and their amenability to different role-sendings. Roy (1952, 1955), for example, described the refusal of role-sets to teach required skills until the focal persons had shown themselves to be "trustworthy." Finally, the feedback arrow reminds us that the focal person is not merely the passive recipient of role-sending, but to greater or lesser degree modifies the role and the expectations of the role-set by the manner of role enactment. Graen (1976) refers to the cycles of role-sending and feedback as role-making, and argues that the feedback loop (arrow 2) has received inadequate attention. He emphasizes the proactive behavior of the focal person in defining or negotiating the expectations to which he or she will subsequently be held. The negotiation occurs mainly during the early weeks of role occupancy, and is described as consisting of three phases—initial confrontation, working through, and integrating. Longitudinal studies of office workers (Graen, Orris, and Johnson, 1973) and managers (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975) confirm this early negotiating process between focal person and role set.

Organizational Factors as Determinants of Role Expectations (Arrow 3).

This category of findings reminds us that role expectations and the process of role-sending do not arise as spontaneous and idiosyncratic expressions on the part of role-senders nor as simple responses to some previous behavior of the focal person to whom the expectations were sent. Such factors serve only to mediate the major determinants of role-sending, which are to be found in the systemic properties of the organization as a whole, the subsystem in which the role-senders are located, and the particular position occupied by each.

The study of organizational effects, however, requires multiorganizational designs. These are difficult, relatively expensive, and still rare. The most ambitious and tenacious effort along these lines has been that of Pugh and his colleagues (Pugh et al., 1963; Payne and
Pugh, 1976), who in an extensive series of field studies in Britain and the United States are attempting to specify the effects of what they call organizational context (purpose, size, ownership, etc.) and organizational structure (structuring of role activities, etc.) on the immediate environment (task and social) of the individual. The effects of size on role structure and enactment are better documented than other links in this scheme, although even size effects are not uniform in all studies. Payne and Pugh (1976) report six multiplant studies conducted in three countries, all of which found substantial correlations (.34 to .80) between organizational size and role differentiation (the extent to which the organizational task was divided into specialized roles). Role differentiation was in turn correlated with the specificity of role definitions and expectations. Finally, size is associated with various measures of individual role behavior and well-being. Kahn et al. (1964) report an almost linear relationship between organizational size and the amount of reported role conflict and tension in the organization. Porter and Lawler (1965), summarizing the available research on organizational structure and job behavior, report that as size increases, so do tardiness, reported sickness, and turnover.

Other investigators report results generally consistent with these, but modified to some extent by other factors. Thus, Hall and Tittle (1966) find modest positive correlations between size and six dimensions of bureaucratization chosen to operationalize Weberian theory. Blau and Schoenherr (1971), in a study of 53 government agencies, find that structural differentiation increases with organizational size, but at a decelerating rate; the relationship is curvilinear. This finding of curvilinearity is consistent with earlier evidence that the number of administrative and coordinative roles increases with organizational size, but the proportion of such roles decreases (Terrien and Mills; 1955; Anderson and Warkov, 1961; Haas, Hall, and Johnson, 1963).

The greater differentiation and structuring that comes with size does not imply greater consensus. On the contrary, size is associated with reduced consensus about role expectations in school systems, service agencies, hospitals, and industries.

Few studies are sufficiently intensive to explain these relationships, although Barker's findings (Barker, 1963; Barker and Gump, 1964) that students in small schools have greater opportunity for role elaboration and choice, and enact roles of greater variety, are suggestive. We need research that deals simultaneously with organizational size, organizational shape, and subunit size, at least. And we need organizational models that make explicit the properties of organizations as such, in distinction to groups and other organizational components. Such organizational properties will include normative as well as structural characteristics.

Kahn and his colleagues (1964) identified five dimensions of nor-
mative expectations that appeared to be characteristic of organizations as systems rather than of individual persons or roles. These included the extent to which one is expected to obey rules and follow orders, the extent to which supervisors are expected to show personal interest in and nurture their subordinates, the closeness or generality with which supervision is to be accomplished, the extent to which all relationships are conducted according to general [universalistic] standards, and the extent to which organization members are expected to strive strenuously for achievement and advancement. Little empirical work has been done to replicate or refute these findings, however.

We have more evidence linking role expectations to position within the organizational structure than to the properties of the structure as a whole. Location in vertical (hierarchical) terms and location in terms of nearness to an organizational boundary have been studied as factors affecting role expectations, role behavior, and psychological tension. The Kahn study (1964) found positions deep within the organizational structure to be relatively conflict-free; positions located near the skin or boundary of the organization were likely to be conflict-ridden. Jobs involving labor negotiations, purchasing, selling, or otherwise representing the organization to the public were subjected to greater stress. Living near an intraorganization boundary—for example, serving as liaison between two or more departments—revealed many of the same effects but to a lesser degree. Adams (1976) and others (Organ, 1970; Miles, 1976) have replicated these findings experimentally and extended them in a number of ways, including the specification of subsystem and system properties that reduce or intensify the stressfulness of boundary positions. These suborganizational properties include the visibility of the boundary role to members of the role-set, and such related characteristics as physical separation, whether created by physical distance or legal rules (as in closed-session bargaining). In general, boundary persons who were less closely observed deviated more from organizational norms and experienced less tension in the role.

Among the organizational norms that affect the experience and behavior of the boundary person is the organizational norm of "short-term maximizing" versus "longer-term optimizing." Holmes (1971) found in laboratory experiments that the norm of longer term optimization, which gave the boundary person greater flexibility, also produced more agreements between the boundary person and his or her extraorganizational antagonists, and produced greater net returns to the organization over time. Replication of this research in the field situation would be particularly useful.

Relationships between hierarchical position and role-taking experience are less consistent. Increases in hierarchical position are associated with increasingly positive perceptions of role and organiza-
tion (Schneider; 1972; Payne and Mansfield, 1973; Gorman and Malloy, 1972), but the rewards of advancement in the hierarchy are many and the interpretation of such findings is correspondingly difficult. Responsibility in the usual sense of the term certainly increases in linear fashion with hierarchical ascent, but symptoms of strain do not. Nor is the often heard assertion that the lowest levels of supervision are subjected to the greatest conflict always borne out. Kahn et al. (1964) report a curvilinear relationship in which the maximum of conflict occurs at the upper middle levels of management. Supervisory responsibility, both direct and indirect, is associated with conflict among role senders with respect to the appropriate style and requirements of the role.

The significant principle reflected by all these specific data is that characteristics of the organization as a whole, of its subsystems, and of the location of particular positions act to determine the expectations that role-senders will hold and communicate to the occupant of a particular job. The holding and sending of such expectations is personal and direct; their content is nevertheless shaped by systemic factors.

**Personality Factors as Determinants of Role Expectations (Arrow 4)**

The influence of personality on role-sending is one of those undeniable facts of organizational life that nevertheless awaits measurement and documentation. Anyone who has worked under a number of different bosses has become a student of such personality differences; anyone who has supervised a number of subordinates has discovered how differently they respond to uniform tasks and supervisory behavior. Results of research undertaken thus far can be summarized in terms of four patterns of findings, perhaps best presented as hypotheses: that roles tend to attract people who are suited to them, that role expectations are modified by the characteristics of focal persons in various ways, that much role conflict can be understood as conflict between the expectations of the role set and the properties of the focal person, and that properties of the focal person may be a source of stress for the individual independent of the expectations of the role-set.

The tendency of persons to choose roles and organizations that fit their needs and abilities is confounded with three other mechanisms that make for such goodness of fit—selection by others (as contrasted to self-selection), adaptation and socialization in role, and role modification by the focal persons themselves. The gross tendency toward goodness of fit seems clear, however, especially in academic settings. Hutchins and Nonneman (1966) found a strong association between student personality and academic climate in 28 medical schools. Schools with "encapsulated" training climates tended to have students low in needs for achievement, autonomy, and aggression, but high in needs for order, abasement, and nurturance. Medical schools with
training programs more reliant on intrinsic motivation had students with opposite need patterns. Similar findings were reported by Stern (1970) and by Astin (1964) for colleges, and by George and Bishop (1971) for public schools.

The tendency of role-sets to moderate or raise their expectations according to the attributes of the focal person is more obvious in practice than demonstrated in research. Hage and Aiken, in a study of 16 welfare agencies, reported that agencies with higher proportions of professionally trained people showed less requirement for strict rule observation, and more participation of employees in decision-making. But the dynamics of these relationships were not documented at the level of role-expectations and role-sending. Kahn and his coauthors (1964) reported a more complex pattern in the industrial context. They found that people who were flexible rather than rigid were subjected to greater pressures to change by their role-senders. The behavior of role-senders toward extremely rigid focal persons seemed to reflect a judgment of futility and acceptance and the abandonment of continuing attempts to influence behavior in the direction of ideal performance.

Role expectations and role-sending were also related to the achievement orientation of the focal person. The greater the achievement orientation, especially when such orientation took on a cast of neurotic striving, the more likely were role-senders to apply increased pressures to change the style of the focal person. We have emphasized in theory the importance of the focal person's own attributes in setting reflexive role expectations—expectations like any others in substance, but unique in that they are "sent" from the focal person to himself or herself. There is evidence that people often have the sense of responding to the role expectations of others against their own "better judgment." Forty-five percent of the employed adults in a national sample (Kahn et al., 1964) acknowledged such behavior. At the same time, the values, judgment, and explicit reflexive expectations of focal persons are a major source of role conflict.

Finally, the attributes of the focal person may lead to the setting of reflexive role expectations that are not sources of conflict within the role-set, but are causes of strain or conflict for the individual. Mueller (1965), for example, found that the overload of university professors was self-induced, at least in the opinion of the professors themselves and of their spouses.

Properties of the Focal Person as Mediators Between Role Expectations and Response
(Arrow 5)

The empirical evidence for the mediating influence of enduring properties of the focal person (including demographic, experiential,
and personality characteristics) has been accumulating for decades, and the general proposition is beyond question. One could regard the whole literature of personnel selection as a continuing attempt to identify those personal attributes that enhance the enactment of specific roles. Studies cast more explicitly in terms of role theory have emphasized three kinds of attributes as heightening or reducing the quality of role enactment and the vulnerability of the focal person to its various side effects: values, personality characteristics, and a postulated general aptitude for role-taking.

The first of these emphases came early in research on organizational roles. Stouffer and Toby (1951), in an experiment based on Stouffer's earlier work (1949), found that the chosen behaviors indicated by their experimental subjects in hypothetical situations of role conflict tended to express the predisposition of subjects to the norms of universalism or particularism. Jacobson and his colleagues in the same year (1951) found that the conflict experience of foremen was higher among those who had previously served as stewards, presumably because they had internalized the values of the earlier role. Gross and his colleagues (1958) utilized attributes best described as value-orientations with some success in predicting the conflict-resolving behavior of school superintendents in four hypothetical situations, involving hiring and promotion, time allocation, salary recommendations for teachers, and budget recommendations. The personality predictor was based on a categorization of the superintendents as moralists, moral-expedients, or expedients—according to their predisposition to emphasize legitimacy or sanctions in response to a series of test items. Smelser (1961) conducted laboratory experiments to show the moderating effects of personality in relation to specific role demands. He constructed roles requiring dominant and submissive behavior patterns in a two-person cooperative task, and tested subjects independently for dominance and submissiveness. Role enactment was then measured for all possible pairings. As predicted, the assignment of congruence (dominant person in dominant role; submissive person in submissive role) maximized role enactment; the reverse assignment minimized it, and the mixed situations fell between these extremes. This pattern was clearest in the initial trials, and became less sharp thereafter, presumably because processes of learning and "role-making" diluted the personality effect.

Much of the work on personality as a moderating factor in role-taking has been concerned with factors that handicap performance under stressful conditions. Inappropriate cognitive patterns (Lazarus, 1966) have been studied in these terms, as has rigidity, anxiety, intelligence (lack of it), and need for achievement (beyond what the role allows). This work is summarized in Kahn and Quinn (1970) and
McGrath (1976). Finally, there is an early research effort, intermittently revived, to demonstrate a generalized aptitude for role-taking, irrespective of specific role requirements, goodness of fit between person and role, or stressfulness of role demands. Sarbin and various colleagues (Sarbin and Allen, 1968) engaged in a series of laboratory experiments showing that the ability of individuals to respond appropriately to role expectations was a function of various personality attributes. The ability to perceive accurately demands of a role was related to a measure of neuroticism based on self-description. Role-taking ability was also related, apparently via the capacity to empathize, to such dimensions as equalitarianism-authoritarianism, and flexibility-rigidity. Extreme inability to take roles was manifested by schizophrenics and psychopaths, a finding consistent with Gough's (1948) earlier theory of psychopathy. He proposed that the characteristic problem of the psychopath is inability to empathize, that is to respond in the focal role as if the person understood and felt the forces to which the role-senders were subjected. Such an interpretation of psychopathy was given some support by Baker's (1954) small comparative study of psychopathic and nonpsychopathic prisoners. Questioning these subjects in terms that others used in appraising and describing them, Baker found that the psychopaths had significantly greater difficulty recognizing in themselves the ascribed traits. The evidence seems clear for some threshold ability of interpersonal perception as necessary for role enactment, but thereafter the shape of the function and the relevance of other variables are in doubt.

**Personality as Affected by Role Behavior**

*(Arrow 6)*

Psychologists tend to treat the characteristics of adult personality as relatively fixed, having been formed during earlier years of life and by earlier experiences. We believe that personality is essentially the product of social interaction, and that the process of personality formation therefore continues throughout life. The empirical evidence for this dynamic process is admittedly thin; few studies show unambiguous effects of role experience and behavior on personality.

The association of role and personality, on the other hand, has been long established. Waller (1932) noted the attributes of pedantry and officiousness among school teachers (in the days when teachers could dare to be either), and Merton's (1940) observation of impersonality and compulsiveness among long-time bureaucrats gave title to a now well-known personality syndrome. More unambiguous findings for the effect of the role came later. Gough and Peterson (1953) found that deficiencies in role performance led to an increasing inability to see oneself in objective terms and to identify with the views of others.
In an extended experiment involving the manipulation of the level of decision-making in a large clerical operation, Tannenbaum (1957) showed that both the autonomous and the hierarchical conditions produced significant changes in personality. The personality changes were in the direction of increasing congruence between role and person.

Lieberman's (1956) study remains in many respects the clearest demonstration of change in the person caused by changes in role. He was able to measure the perceptions and attitudes of employees in two appliance plants three times during a period of three years: once when all were rank-and-file workers, a year later when 23 had become foremen and 35 had been elected stewards, and two years later still when about half of the new foremen and stewards had reverted to nonsupervisory jobs and half had continued in their new roles.

In their rank-and-file days, there were not significant differences between future foremen and future stewards, although both groups were more ambitious, more critical, and less unquestioningly loyal to the company than were the workers destined to become neither foremen nor stewards. On becoming foremen, Lieberman's subjects tended to report more favorably about the company as a place to work, to be more favorable in their perceptions of top management, and to endorse the principle of incentive pay. Those who became union stewards became, according to their responses, more favorable toward unions in general, toward the top officers of their own union, and toward the principle of seniority rather than ability as a basis for wage payments. Those foremen and stewards who subsequently returned to the worker role tended also to revert to the perceptions and attitudes of workers; those who remained as foremen and stewards showed more sharply as time passed the kinds of differences described above. Mean differences between future foremen and future stewards on the numerous scales used were less than one percentage point at the time when all subjects were workers; 48 percent between the foremen and stewards after one year in role, and 62 percent after three years in role.

Even these data, however, leave unsupported many of the linkages stipulated in the model. Lieberman's data argue strongly for a causal relationship between the offices individuals occupy in an organization (foreman, steward) and expressed attitudes on job-relevant matters. Whether the characteristic changes in attitude are brought about because of the causal sequence of different role expectations, the sending of these expectations as attempts at influence, the receiving of such communications, and subsequent response to them remains untested by Lieberman's research. Moreover, the interpretation of the criterion variables is not easy. Almost certainly there were changes in attitude, but were there changes of deeper kinds in values and person-
ality? If so, were they manifest in other roles, as well as at work? And did they show greater stability than the more obviously job-related attitudes?

Merton (1957) concluded his exposition of bureaucratic structure and personality with a plea for "studies of religious, educational, military, economic, and political bureaucracies dealing with the interdependence of social organization and personality formation . . . ." The conclusion remains appropriate today.

The Significance of Interpersonal Relations in Role-Taking (Arrows 7, 8, and 9)

In theory, enduring properties of the interpersonal relationship between a focal person and members of the role-set enter into the process of role-sending and response in ways analogous to enduring properties of the person. That is to say, we expect that the interpersonal relations between focal person and role-senders will help to determine their role expectations, will intervene between sent-role and received role, and will in turn be affected by the role behavior of the focal person.

There are few data to support or to challenge such predictions. Cohen (1969), in an experimental study testing the effects of ambiguity on role enactment, found that task and instructional ambiguity not only had the expected decremental effect on performance but also tended to impair interpersonal relationships among those involved. A field study of the labor force (Kahn et al., 1964) produced similar findings, especially when the ambiguous expectations of the role-set were expressed in evaluative rather than prescriptive terms. Wall (1972) found that boundary role persons (salespersons) in a laboratory experiment were considered less loyal when they lost money in the experimental task than when they gained, and less trustworthy when they deviated from the sent-role (irrespective of their success) than when they complied. Wall's findings refer unequivocally to the effect of role behavior on interpersonal relations (arrow 9). The other research cited does not allow us to differentiate between the effects of role behavior and those of role expectations on interpersonal relations in the role-set.

The evidence is somewhat richer for the moderating effect of interpersonal relations in the role sequence (arrow 8), both in positive and negative terms. Cobb (1976) has reviewed completely and persuasively the effects of interpersonal support on role response under conditions of externally imposed stress. The buffering effect of interpersonal support is highly significant, especially in reducing symptoms of strain and physical debility. Gross and his co-authors (1958) had found earlier that members of school boards (as focal persons) met the expectations of the school superintendent (as role-sender) more fully when they felt
liking, admiration, and respect for the person. Kahn et al. (1964) found a general tendency for close interpersonal relationships to intensify the effects of role conflict on the focal person. And Organ (1970) found that distrust by members of the role-set had the effect of heightening the conformance of the focal person to their role expectations. In short, every investigation that has sought such interaction effects appears to have found them, but the effects are widely assorted.

The implication is that interpersonal relations enter into the role sequence in many ways, and that hypotheses of a general form—interaction, buffering, or intensification—will have to be replaced by more specific predictions. Adams (1976) provides an example of such a hypothetical sequence in his interpretation of findings to date regarding the behavior of boundary role persons. He proposes that an initial decrement in trust leads to increased closeness of monitoring and evaluation by role-senders (arrow 7), that closer monitoring under conditions of reduced trust induces more stereotypic conformity to role expectations (arrow 8), that such rigid enactment of the role evokes opposition from people outside the organization and therefore produces less successful outcomes, and that reduction in successful enactment leads to reduced trust (arrow 9). In a series of experiments, Adams and his colleagues have demonstrated each of these links (Strickland, 1958; Organ, 1970; Frey and Adams, 1972; Gruder, 1968; Wall, 1972). It remains to combine them in a single research design, replicate the laboratory findings under field conditions, and extend them beyond the special case of boundary roles.

Role Socialization and Role-Making

Most research on the taking of organizational roles either studies the ongoing role relationships in organizations or creates brief encounters in the laboratory. In the former case the accommodation of person to role and the shaping of role to person has already occurred, and in the latter case there is usually neither time nor motive for such efforts to take place. The open system view of organizations would treat the entry of a person into an ongoing organization as a new intersection of two existing systems, with the area of intersection characterized by cycles of behavior that in some respects continue the previous history of each system and in some respects are unique products of their coming together. Thus, the person who enters an organization and takes a job to replace someone who has retired, resigned, or been dismissed encounters a role-set and an array of role expectations ready made. But the new job-holder also has a history and an ongoing life, a set of expectations about jobs in general and even perhaps the particular job, a pattern of motives and beliefs about work roles, and an array of other roles and obligations.
Assuming that this particular person-in-role intersection is to continue, some accommodation must be reached. The process of accommodation between person and organization, which continues for the duration of the organizational membership but is concentrated in its early phases, can be partitioned into two aspects: the socialization of the person and the modification of the role. There is less research on either aspect than is needed, in spite of an earlier sociological interest in occupational socialization (Hughes, 1958), but each has been the subject of a recent review (Van Maanen, 1976; Graen, 1976).

The methods by which organizations socialize individuals include selection, training, apprenticeship, debasement experiments, anticipatory socialization, and what is sometimes referred to as "trial-and-error" (Caplow, 1964; Porter, Lawler, and Hackman, 1975). In terms of our model of role-taking, the last of these is the most relevant. It is simply a specific instance of what Brim (1966) defines as the general process of adult socialization: "the manner in which an individual learns the behavior appropriate to his position in a group, through interaction with others who hold normative beliefs about what his role should be and who reward or punish him for correct or incorrect actions." Empirical research on socialization into work roles makes two main points—the importance of early socialization experiences in the role, and the stressfulness of the process. Berlew and Hall (1966), for example, found that the performance of managers in several industries depended significantly on experiences during the first year, especially with respect to the challenge of the job. Their general finding is consistent with others, in positions from executive offices to jail cells (Schein, 1965; Denhart, 1968; Vroom and Deci, 1971). Moreover, the early period on a job is often regarded as conditional on both sides, and is marked by a large number of employees quitting and being dismissed (Saleh, Lee, and Prien, 1965; Graen, 1976).

The mutuality of the early accommodation process is described by Graen, Orris, and Johnson (1973) in a longitudinal study of eight departments of a large public university. Over a six-month period they obtained repeated measures from new focal persons in clerical and secretarial positions and from their supervisors. Measures included the supervisors' preferred enactment of the role, and their perceptions of actual enactment, the focal persons' own preferred enactment, and their perceptions of supervisors' preferences. The main findings are convergence over the six-month period, with the process of convergence gradual and asymmetrical. The amount of convergence varies for individual pairs, however, and is much greater for focal persons whose initial stance was role-acceptance. Research on the stresses of socialization have emphasized disillusionment (Graen, Orris, and Johnson, 1973; Vroom and Deci, 1971) and symptoms of strain (McGrath, 1970). The major antidote or preventative for both would
appear to be advance opportunities for observance of role enactment, trial, and the like.

The concept of role-making as the other side of the socialization coin is both old and new. It is new as a label, and as a proposed post-bureaucratic response to organizational transience and rapid change; it is familiar as role elaboration, altercasting, and the creation of microsocial systems (Goffman, 1961). Any role can be thought of as including not only a set of prescribed (and proscribed) behaviors, but also an area of option in which the occupant can exercise choice with respect to activities, methods, and style. A focal person’s exercise of such options is to some extent personal and unique, and constitutes that person’s elaboration of the role. The area available for elaboration varies with the role, particularly its position in the organizational hierarchy; hierarchical ascent confers a relatively greater area for role elaboration, a fact universally recognized by the excitement that attends succession of heads of state or heads of major organizations.

Goffman (1961) has emphasized the fact that every taking of a role requires complementary adjustments by members of the role set. He proposes that the attainment of mutual adjustment by each focal person and role set constitutes a microsocial system with certain idiosyncratic properties, and yet merged with the macrosystem that represents the more general requirements of the role. The success of the focal person in bringing about such complementary adjustments to the process of his or her own socialization appears to depend on two elements of behavior—giving evidence of successful enactment and showing actively a desired area of latitude (Zifler, 1965; Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975).

We would predict that initial indications of successful enactment are essential to establish trust within the role set, and reassurance that their own interdependent role performance will not be handicapped. But proactive behavior by the focal person would nevertheless be necessary to establish the range or latitude within which role elaboration will be tolerated: it is inevitably a negotiated boundary. In sum, the empirical evidence of recent years, some of it developed in response to the model of role-taking we have proposed and some developed in wholly other frameworks, is generally compatible with the model and has done much to fill its empty conceptual categories with the data of organizational reality.

**SUMMARY**

The concept of role is proposed as the major means for linking the individual and organizational levels of research and theory; it is at once the building block of social systems and the summation of
the requirements with which such systems confront their members as individuals. Each person in an organization is linked to some set of other members by virtue of the functional requirements of the system that are heavily implemented through the expectations those members have of the person; he or she is the focal person for that set. An organization can be viewed as consisting of a number of such sets, one for each person in the organization.

The process by which the expectations of members of a role-set are linked to the behavior of the focal person for that set is described in terms of role episodes. The role episode in turn consists of a sequence of events involving members of a role-set and the focal person. The sequence begins with the role expectations held by members of the set for the focal person; these are activities that they require of the person to perform their own roles or to maintain their own satisfactions. The next step in the role episode is the sending of these expectations from the members of the set to the focal person, the communication of role requirements in terms intended to influence his or her behavior.

With the communication of role expectations from role-set to focal person, the first half of the role episode is completed. The second half has to do with the perceptions and behavior of the focal person. He or she receives, with greater or lesser distortion, the role expectations sent. It is the received role that is the immediate source of influence and motivation of behavior (insofar as it is influenced by members of the role-set). Finally, the focal person acts; he or she behaves in role, showing some combination of compliance and non-compliance with the expectations of the role-set. Members observe and evaluate the person's behavior in relation to their expectations and needs, and thus the cycle moves into another episode.

Several complications are considered in connection with the treatment of organizational role in these terms. One role may involve many activities; multiple roles may be incorporated in a single office, that is, intended for performance by a single individual. Moreover, one person may hold a number of offices. Each of these elaborations adds its own complications to the simple situation in which a single recurrent activity comprises a role, which in turn comprises an office occupied by a person without additional organizational commitments.

Three oversimplifications of the role episode are considered: the fact that organizational life is continuous rather than made up of discrete episodes, the fact that members of a role set are often in disagreement among themselves with respect to what the focal person should do, and the fact that the role episode occurs within and is shaped by a matrix of organizational influences.
Research evidence for the relationships specified by the framework of the role episode has been accumulating and puts some flesh upon the bones of the skeletal model of role-taking. For example, studies agree that role conflict in work situations is widespread and a nationwide survey found nearly half of the male population to be working under conditions of noticeable conflict. Such conflict is often associated with anxiety, tension, and reduced effectiveness.

Finally, role-making or the elaboration of the role by the individual, as the other side of the socialization coin, is greatly restricted by hierarchical level. It also is dependent on initial indicators of successful enactment to establish trust within the role-set.