
UNIT 7 CHANGING NATURE OF ROLES

Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to understand:

- 1 the concept of role, the need and significance of roles,
- 1 the various approaches to role definition, and
- 1 the factors leading to changes required in role description.

Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Role Description
- 7.3 Kinds of Roles
- 7.4 Need for Role Descriptions
- 7.5 Uses of Role Descriptions
- 7.6 Changing Roles: Approaches
- 7.7 The Changing World of Work
- 7.8 Factors Contributing to Role Changes
- 7.9 Role Expectations
- 7.10 Summary
- 7.11 Self-Assessment Questions
- 7.12 Further Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of role and changes taking place in roles can best be understood in the context of the expectations an organisation has with its employees.

An organisation can be described as the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common objective through division of labour, hierarchy of authority and accountability. Such a description highlights the following ingredients of organisations:

1. Organisations are rational entities. This means that they have clearly defined goals and most economic means to achieve these goals. Rationality demands maximisation of returns on minimum investment.
2. Organisational goals must be equally understood, shared, and subscribed to by all the employees in the organisation.
3. A single person does not make an organisation. It requires a minimum of two or more persons to fulfil the requirements of coordination.
4. One person cannot do all the roles of the organisation; hence these have to be done through division of labour and function. Each individual has a clearly defined responsibility that is non-overlapping. Along with responsibility comes the authority to complete the role.
5. For every individual in the organisation there is an immediate supervisor. Subordinates are accountable to their immediate supervisor. This is true for all the levels in the hierarchy except the very top-level employee who does not have a structurally defined supervisor and the very bottom level employee who does not have subordinates.

Given this general description of organisation, roles that are clearly defined play a significant part in accomplishing the goals of the organisation. Roles can be seen in a variety of ways.

Role and Role Dynamics

A role is a set of expectations associated with a job or a position. When roles are unclear or complicated performance problem can occur. Role ambiguity occurs when some one is uncertain about what is expected of him or her. To do any job; the people need know what is expected of them. Role clarity is important for every member of the group, but that is more important for new members. Role ambiguity creates problems and the whole efforts is either wasted or of appreciated.

Expecting too much or too little may create problem. Role overload occurs when too much is expected and individual feels overloaded with work/responsibility. Role underload occurs when too little is expected and the individual feels underutilized therefore, a balanced and realistic role load is expected.

Role–conflict occurs when a person is unable to meet the expectations of others. The individual understands what needs to be done but for some reasons can not comply. The resulting tension can reduce job satisfaction, affects both work performance and the relationship with other groups members. The Common forms of role conflict are:

1. intra sender role-conflicting which occurs when the same person sends conflicting expectations.
2. inter sender role-conflict occurs when different people send conflicting expectations.
3. Person–Job–conflict-occurs when one’s personal values & needs come into conflict with role expectations.
4. inter role conflict occurs when the expectations of two or more roles held by the same individual becomes incompatible–such as conflict between work & family demands.

One way of managing role-dynamics in any group or work setting is the role-negotiation. This is the process through which individual negotiat to clarify the role expectation each holds for the other.

7.2 ROLE DESCRIPTION

Well-written role descriptions define the work of the organisation and its reasons for existence as an employer of human resources. Moreover, they define and help quantify the relative importance of work, what each position contributes to a process and the organisation as a whole. This definition illustrates an important point regarding role descriptions. Used in today’s work environment, they describe not only what the role is all about but also how it contributes to the work of the organisation. They describe the nature of the work to be done by stating the purpose and main responsibilities. They may also include information on the type of person who is best suited to perform the job. Role descriptions are a valuable resource. They have the potential to be a useful organisational tools, however, to realize their potential they must be properly monitored. There are two main types of role descriptions, the generic or general and the specific or individual.

Generic role descriptions are written in broadly stated general terms without identifying specific responsibilities, requirements, purpose and relationships. Some organisations use generic role descriptions for the same level within an organisation. For particular positions an additional duty statement may be developed.

Specific role descriptions provide information on all essential responsibilities assigned to the person performing the role. They are usually quite detailed and comprehensive.

Following are some of the important ingredients of roles:

1. A role description must be accurate but not a minutely detailed list of an employees tasks and duties.
2. Role descriptions are meant to be a guide only staff must not interpret them rigidly or role descriptions become a barrier to success they are just a 'map' that shows direction.
3. Roles may indicate the authority that the employee must be provided to accomplish the role expectations.
4. Roles may also specify the areas of accountability.
5. Roles accomplishment or otherwise may become the basis for rewarding or reprimanding the employees.

7.3 KINDS OF ROLES

In the late 1960s, a graduate student at MIT, Henry Mintzberg, undertook a careful study of five executives to determine what they did in their jobs. Based on his observations of these executives, Mintzberg concluded that they perform ten highly different but interrelated roles, or sets of behaviours, attributable to their roles. These ten roles can be grouped as being primarily concerned with interpersonal relationship, the transfer of information, and decision-making. The three groups and specific roles within each of the groups are given below:

1. **INTERPERSONAL**– Following three roles are included in this group:
 - a) **Figurehead:** Symbolic head, required to perform a number of routine duties of a legal or social nature;
 - b) **Leader:** Responsible for the motivation and direction of subordinates, and
 - c) **Liaison:** Maintains a network of outside contacts who provide favours and information.
2. **INFORMATIONAL**– Following three roles are included in this group:
 - a) **Monitor:** Receives wide variety of information; serves as nerve center of internal and external information of the organisation;
 - b) **Disseminator:** Transmits information received from outsiders or from other subordinates to members of the organisation, and
 - c) **Spokesperson:** Transmits the information to outsiders on organisational plans, policies, actions, and results; serves as experts on organization's industry.
3. **DECISIONAL**– Following four roles are included in this group:
 - a) **Entrepreneur:** Searches organisation and its environment for opportunities and initiates projects to bring about change;
 - b) **Disturbance handler:** Responsible for corrective action when organization faces important, unexpected disturbances;
 - c) **Resource allocator:** Making or approving significant organisational decisions, and
 - d) **Negotiator:** Responsible for representing the organisation at major

7.4 NEED FOR ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

An accurate and detailed role description is increasingly becoming a crucial component of the effective use of valuable human resources in libraries and other organisations. It is needed because of the following reasons:

1. The primary function of a role description is as a communication tool. It effectively communicates a great deal of information about a role, especially between the manager and employee.
2. When employees have a road map to success they often perform much better and that translates into continued business growth for the organisation.
3. They include reporting relationships; skill requirements; major responsibilities; where the role fits into the organisation and what is required of the position. This allows them to use the information in relation to many human resource functions such as recruitment, induction, training and performance management.
4. Well-written role descriptions also provide information to prospective employees about organisational expectations of a particular role. This aids in attracting and retaining employees who know about the culture of the organisation and what is expected of them.

7.5 USES OF ROLE DESCRIPTIONS

Role descriptions have the potential to be used for a number of human resource functions. Some of these are given below:

1. **Selection and recruitment:** Role descriptions may be used to advertise roles, screen applicants, develop questions for the role interview and identify essential and desirable criteria.
2. **Induction and orientation:** Role descriptions provide a good introduction and overview of the role, which enables the employee to understand what the organization expects of them.
3. Role descriptions allow the employee to see where they fit into the *big picture* of the organisation, and how their role contributes to the organisation.
4. Role descriptions may identify initial training requirements for a new employee. If they are included in a performance management system they may be used as an aid in identifying training to improve performance or additional training needed as a result of changing responsibilities.
5. Role descriptions are the foundation of an effective performance management system and are used in conducting performance reviews or role evaluations.
6. A study of role descriptions can help employees determine what qualifications, experience and skills are needed to apply for different positions within the organisation. This information can then be used in career planning or development.

Additionally they can be used for the following purposes:

1. Orienting new employees on what their subordinates and bosses do
2. Analysing work flows and methods
3. Mentoring the employees
4. Dealing with industrial relations
5. Job restructuring
6. Organisational and personal goal setting

7. Conducting an organisational audit
8. Defining or reviewing organisational structure
9. Measuring accurate salary administration
10. Quickly preparing substitute workers or temporary help.

7.6 CHANGING ROLES: APPROACHES

Of late there has been an attempt to examine role in different manner. Much of this thinking has been the result of new light being shed on changing management practices: Some of these attempts are presented below:

1. ***Skill Behaviour Matrix:*** British Petroleum replaced role descriptions with a matrix reflecting skills and behaviour. This matrix focuses on skills and behaviours rather than individual roles. Each skill matrix describes steps in the career ladder, from the lowest to the highest, along the vertical axis. The horizontal axis describes the skills and competencies that are required for each step. It is argued that skill matrices differ significantly from role descriptions. They specify roles and levels of performance rather than roles in a box. Through this system managers know what to expect of their employees and employees know what the organisation expects of them.
2. ***Configuration Matrix:*** Another approach looks at the role descriptions by defining roles in terms of a 'contribution matrix'. This matrix identifies team outputs and contribution made by each member within a team. Agreed outputs are written along the vertical axis and team members names along the horizontal axis. Under each output the processes and contributions made by each team member are listed. The output is then assigned to the person who has the overall responsibility. Following are some of the advantages of this approach:
 1. It focuses on the whole department rather than the individual role,
 2. It incorporates team involvement,
 3. It can be used to show use of resources, and
 4. It is a good vehicle to identify improvement opportunities.
3. ***Other Approaches:*** Besides these approaches the shifts in some of the traditional role responsibilities to more recent descriptions are presented below:
 1. There is a shift, from description of duties to description of responsibilities. Duties represent the methods by which the responsibility areas are accomplished. Responsibilities are like mini-roles that must be done to get the total role successfully completed. In a fast changing work environment, responsibility areas generally remain constant whereas, duties change constantly with advances in technology and improvements in processes. Focusing on duties make it difficult to keep a role description current and does not represent the true nature of the role to be performed. When focusing on responsibilities it is important that these relate to meeting organisational objectives.
 2. The focus is on what the person is required to do and implies looking at the role from an inside out approach. However, when focusing on the end results it implies looking at the role from an outside-in approach. Focusing on end results helps employees understand why the work is important. Knowing the results also allows employees to discover new ways to accomplish results thus encouraging initiative and creativity.
 3. In the past, the department wrote role descriptions with little or no input from the employee actually doing the role. Today's role descriptions are usually written by the affected employees and managers. The department

now provides a consulting role in the development of role descriptions and their role is to show managers how to define roles. This approach provides a more accurate role description, as it is the employees and managers who have the best insight into the role and are aware of the responsibilities and results expected. Employee involvement in describing their roles also creates ownership.

4. Role is not meant to list every duty an employee performs. However, in the past many roles included statements such as and other duties and responsibilities that may be required on either a temporary or permanent basis. This allowed managers to change duties or add duties without discussing this with employees. In today's organisation role are marketed differently in that they are promoted to staff as a role profile outlining the main responsibilities, not all the duties that need to be performed. Changes to these responsibilities are discussed between the manager and employee.
5. If roles are to be used as a career development tool they need to be available for all staff within an organisation. Some organisations make them available on-line through their intranet. This often was not the case in the past where roles were only available to the person doing the role, their manager and senior management.
6. Traditional roles were often described in a way that implied complete independence from other positions within the organisation and were very individualistic in nature. It was not quite clear how a particular role is related to other positions and processes within the organisation. This type of description encourages independent rather than group action. Today roles need to reflect the interdependence of processes and people within the organisation. If the organisation is based on teams and employees are expected to work together to accomplish objectives and goals, this needs to be reflected in the roles.
7. Roles were often only reviewed when a role became vacant or new duties were added. In today's work environment roles are incorporated into the organisations performance management system in order to ensure they are reviewed regularly with the employee. This maintains currency, accuracy, relevance and usefulness of the role description.
8. It was stated that roles are not a work schedule, however, in the past many indicated how much time is spent on different tasks. In today's work environment time percentages or frequency have been replaced with performance measures or indicators, which provide a clearer indication of what is expected from the role.

7.7 THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

When considering a career action one needs to assess the changes occurring at the workplace. Most employment environments are changing from what they have been once. Here are some of the implications of these changes for roles and careers.

1. Previously future was some what predictable. Today there is less certainty and more ambiguity in roles.
2. Earlier there was a move to a specific job. Now the focus is on matching one self to work contents based on one's values.
3. In the past there was an attempt to carry predetermined tasks. Today there are frequent changes in the task and greater focus on teams working.

4. There was a time of stability in work situation. Today the needs of the organisations are continuously changing.
5. Traditionally having one job title was the requirement. Now there is a range of roles and a person may perform many functions.
6. In the past employees joined one occupational stream and retired from the same. Today, organisations are insisting on transferring skills into many work fields.
7. Previously change was avoided. Today change is embraced.
8. Earlier career success was defined by others. Today the worthwhileness of the job is realised by individual employee himself/ herself.

7.8 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ROLE CHANGES

Given the changed scenario there is a need to change and / or modify the roles. Some of the major factors contributing to the need for change are technology, information processing, competition, changing gender profile of workforce and changing culture.

1. Technology upgradation

Technology continues to advance rapidly offering wider choices. There are very sophisticated machines that provide rapid output with zero defects. Manual work has been replaced by automation. Not only this machine upgradation is taking place at a very fast pace, and hence there is an urgent need to upgrade the skill level of the employees. They need to be continuously sent for training programmes to keep them updated. How many people in accounts still count on fingers, though their roles have changed to using computers for accounts purposes.

2. Information Technology

Today much of the focus is on Internet and World Wide Web Information technology has brought a revolution in access, storage and retrieval of information. Electronic mail is making it easier to seek guidance and advice from specialists around the world. Transition from printed information to electronic publicity has resulted in multimedia information service. None of these applications of information technology can be achieved without trainers and users having the appropriate skills. It will therefore be vital not only to develop program to improve the skills of users, but ensure that the information professional has the skills to be able to change roles. With the availability of high-speed networks, new services and applications, training becomes an even more urgent issue.

On top of this there is a need for improvement of information and knowledge handling in the “ subject content”. Content is king, without quality data any system is devoid of use.

3. Competition

With the globalization and creating a world without border competition has become the force to reckon with. It has given boost to consumer preferences, better product quality expectations, and reliable service. Just about 20 years ago, there were only 2-3 models of cars. Today we have as many as 30-35 models available in the easiest possible way. Business executive cannot afford to live in their own world and sell whatever they produce. It is a buyers market now. They have to get out from the comforts of their offices, identify customers’ preferences and satisfy them before they loose out in the competition.

4. Women in work

Taking care of others is the primary role of women. Traditionally, women have

tended the home. It was their duty, honour, and obligation to devote themselves to the young, the sick, and the elderly. Women were raised to be “good wives and wise mothers,” and still are. Yet there is a quiet revolution going on. Women make up 40 percent of the labour force. More than half of all the married women work. Management positions held by women in India have doubled as compared to ten years ago. Though this figure still represents only about 1 percent of all management positions, as opposed to over 10 percent, as is the case in the United States. In addition, women are shedding their traditionally subordinate roles and using the courts to assert their rights. If one goes by the number of women students in professional courses, their number in workforce is going to increase. Hence some of the traditional roles have to be modified to suits the requirements of female workforce.

Activity A

List out the factors contributing to role changes in your organisation or any organisation you are acquainted with.

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Activity B

What kinds of roles do you feel that are more useful in any organisation. List out the defferent approaches to roles followed in your organisation or any organisation you are familiar with.

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7.9 ROLE EXPECTATIONS

Some of the emerging role expectations are presented below:

1. Top leaders and managers must serve as learning roles models by sharing their own learning goals and by encouraging others to learn. They should also recognize the need for individual learning for all levels of employees.
2. Individual employees have to accept responsibility for their own careers and their own personal learning. They should not wait to be taught nor expect the organisation to provide career paths.
3. Learning and personal growth must be actively encouraged and rewarded. There must be incentives for individuals to stretch their abilities.
4. The “not invented here” syndrome should not practiced by individuals. There should be constant scanning of the internal and external environment for new ideas and trends that will lead to improvement.
5. Employees must be held accountable for their performance and excellence must be rewarded.
6. Procedures and policies must be in place to ensure on going and timely reevaluation of changing job skill and requirements. Roles and job require-

ments must be examined regularly to accurately reflect the work being performed or skills required.

7.10 SUMMARY

The concept of role can better be understood in the context of the expectations an organisation has with its employees. A single person does not make an organisation, it requires two or more persons to fulfil the requirements of coordination. One person cannot do all the roles of the organisation. Each individual has a clearly defined responsibility which is completely different from others, along with responsibility comes the authority to complete the role. Each role has its written descriptions define the work of the organisation and its reasons for existence as an employer of human resources.

There are different kinds of roles, these are Interpersonal, Informational and Decisional. These roles can be grouped as being primarily concerned with interpersonal relationship.

The role of description is needed as a communication tool; it effectively communicates a great deal of information about a role, especially between the manager and employee. Role descriptions have the potential to be used for selection and recruitment, induction and orientation, analysing work flows and methods, job structuring, etc.

Roles will be changing from time to time according to prevailing situation. There is a shift from description of duties to description of responsibilities; when considering a career action one needs to assess the changes occurring at the work place. Most employment environments are changing from what they have been once. Some of the major factors contributing to the need for change are: technology, information processing, competition, changing gender profile of workforce and changing culture. Roles and job requirements must be examined regularly to accurately reflect the work being performed or skills required.

7.11 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the various approaches to role definition.
2. Describe the factors leading to changes required in role descriptions.
3. Define role description and explain the uses of role descriptions.

7.12 FURTHER READINGS

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