

INTERPERSONAL VALUES AND  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EXECUTIVES

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by

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Executive development is a rather general term which applies to many kinds of learning presumably aimed at increasing managerial competence. The learning may involve cognitive and intellectual skills which are easily modified through traditional classroom lecture and discussion techniques. In recent years, however, executives have become concerned about change and development at deeper levels of the personality and have begun to claim that the development of greater creativity, or of the increased ability to adapt to change, are appropriate goals for executive development. This paper examines this deeper level of personal change among personnel as an objective of executive development.

Management theorists such as Likert and McGregor are among the chief architects of this current trend; they have suggested that the leader or administrator should view the personal growth and development of subordinates as a part of his routine duties.<sup>1</sup> Miles refers to the trend as the "human resources" model of leadership and suggests that:

the manager's basic task is to create an environment in which his subordinates can contribute their full range of talents to the accomplishment of organizational goals. He must attempt to uncover and tap the creative resources of his subordinates.<sup>2</sup>

Other goals similar to creativity which are subsumed under human resource development programs include self-actualization, improved potential for adaptation, and increased ability to test reality, all of which contribute to deep personal growth and

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<sup>1</sup>See Rensis Likert, The Human Organization (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967) and Douglas McGregor, The Professional Manager (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Miles, "Human Relations or Human Resources," Harvard Business Review, July-August, 1965, p. 151.

the development of competence--as opposed to mere conformity with external standards and little internal change in the individual.

In a sense these goals are similar to those prescribed for the counselor, the psychotherapist, or the psychiatrist. The difference is that the psychotherapist deals with "unstable" persons, whereas the leader or administrator is working with "normal" persons but in a rapidly changing or "unstable" environment. Several authors have pointed to the need for improved adaptability among normal persons under conditions of rapid social and technological change.<sup>3</sup> Thus the administrator's role of facilitating personal development and adaptation will become even more critical in a future characterized by an increasing rate of change.

A fundamental question the leader must ask is what the conditions are which facilitate personal growth and improved adaptability among subordinates. Since leadership can be viewed as a special kind of interpersonal relationship, it is appropriate to start by looking at the nature of growth-promoting interpersonal relations. Carl Rogers has pioneered in the study of effective interpersonal relations and suggests that when our relationships achieve certain characteristics, then the other person will experience the capacity for growth, change, and personal development.<sup>4</sup>

The following important characteristics of growth-promoting interpersonal relations are drawn primarily from Rogers' work:

1. Genuineness. Inherent in genuineness is a congruence between feelings and communication--the capacity to be what one really feels instead of presenting

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<sup>3</sup> See Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, 1970) and Warren Bennis, Changing Organizations (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).

a facade. This capacity implies a high degree of self-awareness, since many feelings are held at subconscious and unconscious levels. Feelings are communicated in such nonverbal ways as facial expressions, gestures, and body posture. When there is a disparity between what we are communicating verbally and nonverbally we usually appear to others to lack genuineness. This incongruence evokes distrust, confusion, and defensiveness in the other party. Carl Rogers notes:

It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him. I have found this to be true even when the attitudes I feel are not attitudes with which I am pleased, or attitudes which seem conducive to a good relationship.<sup>5</sup>

2. Positive regard for the individual. This characteristic implies a basic acceptance of another person as a separate, unique individual who has self-worth regardless of his acts or attitudes. We might reject the deed, but if we are concerned about growth-facilitating human relationships we cannot reject the person. We must be willing to allow the individual to feel and act the way he is, regardless of how contradictory his or her present behavior is compared to past behavior and feelings. It is under these conditions that the individual begins to feel safe, to experience a desire to experiment, to take risks, and to develop at deeper personality levels.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was reported to have always left his colleagues, staff, and subordinates a "back door" for getting out of any embarrassing conflict or failure. On one level this was his way of allowing people to "save face," but at another level it belied his concern for the individual's self worth. Spiritual and moral leaders of all ages have stressed the importance of the positive regard of another person as a precursor to personal growth; in the last two decades science has joined with religion in validating this relation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Rogers, On Becoming a Person, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup>Carl Rogers, "The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Psychotherapeutic Personality Change," Journal of Consulting Psychology, XXI (1957), 95-103.

3. Continuing desire to understand the other person. The desire to understand or empathize with the other person is the third factor which stimulates constructive personal change. Empathic understanding necessitates seeing the world from the other person's eyes and having the capacity to feel what the other person is feeling at the moment. This third factor has a kind of multiplying effect on the second; acceptance or positive regard means much more when understanding is also present. Being understood and accepted has a considerably larger impact in the direction of constructive change than simply being accepted or understood.

These three elements in human relationships are obviously not easily or quickly obtainable; nor are they equivalent to the sentimental prescriptions of some human relations "experts" who suggest that all one has to do is be nice to people and some miracle in human development will result. On the other hand, the payoff to the organization of trying to foster these conditions may be much larger than is commonly assumed. Rogers hypothesizes:

If the administrator, or military or industrial leader, creates such a climate within his organization, then his staff will become more self-responsible, more creative, better able to adapt to new problems, more basically cooperative.<sup>7</sup>

The three attitudinal conditions represent an ideal which is rarely, if ever, achieved in practice. Part of the reason they are rarely attained is that their creation is burdened with a multitude of dilemmas, particularly for the administrator in the traditional organization. Perhaps some of the most intractable dilemmas flow from our value orientation toward other people. Three values in particular in our interpersonal framework seem to hinder growth and development: manipulation, attribution, and evaluation.<sup>8</sup> Each of these values is considered good and even necessary.

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<sup>7</sup>Rogers, On Becoming a Person, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Chris Argyris of Harvard University has been instrumental in the articulation of these three factors as interpersonal values. For a good discussion of the influence of values on interpersonal competence see his book, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin-Dorsey, 1962).

Manipulation is the use of subtle or explicit coercion to get others to behave as we wish. We all feel that unless we use an "iron fist in a velvet glove" we will lose control of our subordinates or colleagues. Manipulation contradicts genuineness because we must sometimes behave in ways we do not feel are right and claim to feel one way when in fact we feel another. Manipulation leads to closedness and bluffing; genuineness leads to openness, transparency, and "telling it like it is." The administrator might respond that manipulation is necessary because everyone else operates that way, that the world is Machiavellian, and that openness invites exploitation. Unfortunately, this argument is both accurate and realistic; when one is in the jungle, one operates according to its rules. Hence one of the very conditions which is likely to lead to growth in the human side of the organization is risky to create.

A manipulative or Machiavellian orientation toward persons also opposes the second growth-producing condition--positive regard for the individual. No one likes to feel or admit that he is being manipulated. One of the primary implications of manipulation is that a person is not capable enough or responsible enough to perform adequately without outside coercion. It is understandably difficult to maintain feelings of self-worth and value when someone else is implicitly or explicitly suggesting that we cannot be relied upon for responsible work. Manipulation is sufficient evidence that we are not so positively regarded by the other person as we may have thought.

A second interpersonal value which retards personal growth is attribution. We observe others and then attribute certain qualities to them which may or may not be accurate. We observe someone whose speech is slow and attribute to him the quality of "inefficiency," or we meet someone who makes quick decisions and we decide that he is "authoritarian." What is more dangerous is that once an

attribution is made, we may not go back to check its accuracy. Our mind may refuse to take in future evidence which contradicts our original opinion of a person. Once we develop a "perceptual set" regarding another person, we close our minds to additional data. This stereotyping process is a necessary function of the psyche in order to organize confusing reality. Unfortunately, if attribution dominates mental processes it obstructs effective human relationships because it prevents us from knowing, understanding, and empathizing with each other. Thus it directly opposes the establishment of empathy with an individual, an element which is so crucial to growth-promoting relationships.

The third value, evaluation, also inhibits personal growth. The administrator's immediate question is: how can organizations possibly survive if people are not evaluated? Evaluation is such a pervasive factor in our cultural, organizational, and family life that its absence is unthinkable. From our earliest experiences we are labeled as "good" or "bad," we have "passed" or "failed," we are "moral" or "immoral." It is hardly realistic to expect organizations to discard evaluation. Commenting on the role of evaluative judgments, however, Rogers says:

I believe they have a certain social usefulness to institutions and organizations such as schools and professions. Like everyone else, I find myself all too often making such evaluations. But, in my experience, they do not make for personal growth and hence I do not believe they are a part of a helping relationship.<sup>9</sup>

External evaluations are inherently threatening and may operate to retard growth by inhibiting experimentation and risk taking--which are central to the growth process. An evaluative atmosphere also biases a person's behavior.

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers, On Becoming a Person, pp. 54-55.

If a person is not free to fail, he may never attain an innovative orientation toward work and life. Commenting on organizational factors affecting creativity, Franz Alexander notes: "It is obvious that creative activity requires freedom from coercion, every form of coercion, no matter whether the coercion stems from other persons (authorities), from traditional beliefs, or from prevailing value systems."<sup>10</sup>

Thus the values which influence our interpersonal behavior lead to regression instead of growth and adaptation. It is fortunate that these three retarding effects do not operate perfectly in any individual, and in fact most persons establish growth-promoting relationships with some people. The dilemmas are real, and rapid changes in our interpersonal values will not come easily since we usually acquire our value orientation through deep-seated childhood experiences in our families and other institutions. Change is not impossible, however.

American business and industry are at the forefront of efforts focusing on organizational change and have used sensitivity training, leadership training through the grid approach, and other human resource development programs extensively. Such trends have led to much optimism in some quarters regarding the possibilities for human development in work organizations. It is appropriate to conclude with a quote from Carl Rogers regarding the nature of industrial human relations in the future. He observes:

....of all of the institutions of present-day American life, industry is perhaps best prepared to meet the year 2000. I am not speaking of its technical ability. I am speaking of the vision it is acquiring in regard to the importance of persons, of interpersonal relationships, and of open communication.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Franz Alexander, "Observations on Organization Factors Affecting Creativity" in The Creative Organization, ed. by Gary Steiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 238.

<sup>11</sup>Carl Rogers, "Interpersonal Relationships: U.S.A. 2000," Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, IV, No. 3 (1968), p. 278.