

# Understanding individuals and society

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How do we understand the relationship between individuals and the wider society they inhabit?

In the opinion of renowned social experts like Edgar Schein it is believed that socialisation is what moulds the relationship between individuals and the society they live in. Evidence is accumulating that socialisation may be one of the best explanations for why individuals behave the way they do in society. Socialisation starts with the initial contact between a mother and her new, born child. After infancy the social group is then widened to other members of the immediate family and then finally peers, friends and work mates, play influential roles. Of particular interest is Schein's idea that organisations themselves also contribute to socialisation, by changing attitudes, values and behaviours.

How do our assumptions influence the way in which we understand people and society?

Our assumptions influence the way in which we understand people and society, because when we assume something about a person or group then we may let our biases and prejudices get in the way of what we really see, i. e. because of a racial stereotype for example " All Spaniards are lazy" we may assume that a person who happens to be from Spain is lazy, purely for the fact that a certain racial stereotype states it. This would stem from the ole cliché ½ " Don't judge a book by it's cover".

Personality.

What makes us the individuals we are?

Our personality is what makes us different from everyone else, and this is described as a single dominant characteristic (e. g. strong, weak, shy or polite) by most people, and tends to equate with social success. But for psychologists, this method only plays a small part, however scholars cannot agree on a definition of personality, because they operate from different theoretical bases.

What do we mean by personality and how is it determined?

Personality is what makes a person unique, and it's derived from the Latin words 'Per Sona' which translate as " To speak through". These words are particularly relevant to the contemporary analysis of personality, and were used in ancient Greece and Rome to the words were used to denote masks worn by actors. It is determined by person-situation interaction, that is the social learning aspects of personality. Thus a personality should develop from the uniqueness of each situation, rather than the commonality assumed by traditional approaches to personality. The 5 determinants are: Biological, Cultural, Familial, Social and Situational.

Are we at the mercy of our personalities or can we adapt them to give a different impression of who we are in different situations?

Personality represents the " Whole person" concept. Definitionally, people's external appearance and behaviour, their inner awareness, their pattern of self-measurable traits, and the person-situation interaction make up their personalities. With this in mind I would have to say that to an extent we are at the mercy of our personalities, because of the fact that certain things such as the patterns of non self-measurable traits would also have to be included

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in the definition of personality, and so traits which cannot be known to us cannot be amended when we enter various situations, but other than that it would have to be said that we can to a certain extent, depending on our acting abilities, and of course the strength of our self identity, adapt or change our personalities in various situation.

Learning and Communication.

What role does learning play in our development?

The objectives of learning are: Define, explain, discuss, analyse, and relate. Learning plays a vital role in the development of us; it moulds us to be the people we are. This has ties with the classical psychological argument "Nurture verses Nature", in that there is debate to exactly what extent learning helps us as a person. The main role learning plays in our development though is to gain knowledge about the world around us, so that we can interact properly with other people and our environment.

How is learning influenced by communication?

Communication actually reinforces what we learn by giving us oral and in some cases visual stimuli, which gets us more involved in the learning process, and therefore helps us to embed it into our long-term memory. This is far superior to a more traditional way of gaining knowledge, e. g. like reading a book.

Motivation and Exchange.

What is the difference between social and economic exchange?

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The exchange theory within an organisation is where the manager provides more benefits/ rewards than burdens/ costs. Therefore the difference between social and economic exchange is that with social exchange you are provided with more social time during working hours i. e. from breaks, and with economic exchange you would gain more money. Both are seen as heavy motivators in an organisation.

How do expectancy and equity theories of motivation compare to those based on needs and wants?

The equity and expectancy theories simply put; the theories argue that a major input into job performance and satisfaction is the degree of equity (or inequity) that people perceive in their work situation. It's therefore a cognitively based motivation theory, and there is a specific process of how this motivation occurs. Equity occurs when a person perceives that the ratio of his or her outcomes to inputs and the ratio of a relevant other's outcomes to inputs are in equilibrium. When compared to a theory based on needs and wants e. g. that of Maslow, who's 'Hierarchy of needs' (Physiological, safety, love, esteem needs and finally " self-actualisation"), the equity theory seems to be in advance, because instead of centring on simply what people can gain from their job i. e. their job lets them reach a certain tier on the hierarchy, it measures to what degree of equity one perceives in the work situation.

How does transactional analysis work?

Transactional analysis works by using psychoanalytical theory as a background for identifying three important ego states: Child, Adult and

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Parent. These three states are roughly equivalent to the Freudian concepts of id, ego and superego (respectively).

Role Taking.

How do social roles influence us?

Social roles will influence us in a number of ways throughout our lives, for example as parents the 'responsible' social role which this stereotype indicates means that you will have to adapt yourself to fit into this role. Therefore social roles influence us by changing our behaviours and attitudes to suit certain stereotypes.

Do we merely perform roles that we are given to us, or are we able to 'write our own script' and improvise within the role?

In society we all have roles, which we are given, and more often than not we don't choose to be in a certain role, but within any role we have a certain amount of control over what we do within that role. There is no script already written for us, so we have to write our own scripts and do what we think is correct in a given situation.

Groups and Teams

What is a group?

A group is basically a collection of individuals, who have joined for a practical reason, such as economic safety, security or social reasons. And although they are individuals, a group is often formed from very 'like-minded' people.

Do people behave differently in groups?

Within a group people can often lose their own identity, and therefore will definitely behave differently whilst in the group, i. e. if someone within the group thinks that one course of action is best and the rest of the group thinks otherwise, then that person will almost certainly conform under the pressure of the group. Another way some people will act differently in a group situation is, that with the support of others within the group, they may become more confident than they would've been before. This would have good implications, when brainstorming ideas, because people will feel more confident to speak their mind.

Is there a 'dark side' to group behaviour?

In 'groupthink' by Irvine Janis, he defines the dysfunction of highly cohesive groups as, " a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures.". Committees who suffer from groupthink are so bent on reaching consensus that there is no realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action in a decision, and deviant, minority or unpopular views are suppressed. In the symptoms of groupthink, it could be said there is a 'dark-side', because the group will often ignore questionable ethical or moral issues or stances, those who oppose the group are sometimes thought of as evil, and because of the fact that loyal members don't question the 'direction' the group is going, the slightest questioning within the group will cause the group to turn on or dismiss an individual. So in answer to the question, yes there can be a limited 'dark-side' to group behaviour.

## Organisation structure: Rules, control and conformity

Are people controlled by structures or can they resist or subvert them?

In the organisational world people are almost certainly ruled by the structure of a company in many cases, e. g. In many companies in Britain you will find that companies have a rigid structure, i. e. there is a clear, definitive manager, middle management and workforce, even though many companies have opted for the more oriental approach of delayering, so that structures are shorter and flatter to make communications between workers and higher management easier.

In some parts of the world like Japan, the management try to 'fit in' with the staff, by travelling to work the same way they do, and eating in the same room, but the structures are still there, they never actually leave even though in these situations they can actually seem to disappear. There is yet to be a completely successful 'modern' company to adopt a communist style leadership, where the idea of job sharing is taken to an extreme, and everyone can manage the company and equally, everyone can do the everyday jobs that, that particular workforce does. Although a 'narco-syndicalist' organisation is a nice idea it wouldn't happen in today's 'modern' society; but that isn't to say that it won't be happening in the future. Until then though people will be controlled by social and organisational structures.

Video Notes: What makes long hours worth it?

Change.



How do organisations change and what effects do such changes have on the people they employ?

Organisations can change in many ways, the first is in their competitiveness, the second is economic change, the third is change towards future trends, the fourth is internationalisation, and finally there is a change of management. A change in competitiveness will effect the people a company employ, because when a company aims to become more competitive it may wish to streamline slightly which may put the issue of job security up in the air, and also the company will be looking to get more productivity out of the workforce, which will put extra pressure upon them.

An economic change, for example " The great depression", will also put jobs on the line because a company not only will have no need for all of their employees, but they may not even be able to afford to actually pay their employees wages. A change towards future trends, would maybe effect employees, by putting pressure on them to adapt with the company, by getting up-to-date training and even changing their job because their job becomes obsolete in the change.

Internationalisation would effect employees because they will almost certainly see a change in the way the company is ran, i. e. a company which has expanded to many different countries would need to re-layer to cope with the extra paper work, and although may not effect the day- to-day running of that particular store, it would be a slight change in the working life of an employee. Finally a change of management would effect the people they employ quite dramatically for the simple reason that a complete change

would be very stressful, and they may even worry about the security of their own jobs, because the main reason for a complete management change is under achievement.

Does change cause stress?

Change doesn't always cause stress, it would really depend on the individual. If you are conservative (opposed to change), then a very small change could cause a lot of stress, but if you're quite liberal, or even radical, then a large change may not phase you at all. On this, I would have to say that change does cause stress, but only to a certain extent.

Is change good for us?

Again this is a question, which could go both ways. On one hand change can be good for someone who is easily bored and likes a diverse range of activities to choose from, but if the person is conservative then they would get stressed out by the change and therefore it wouldn't be good for them. Therefore I would have to say that to an extent change can be good for you, depending on the individual.