

Chapter 14
Understanding Social Systems

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PUBLIC SPEAKING: AN IDEA PERSPECTIVE
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General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. appreciate the importance of social-systems in understanding audiences.
2. understand the components of social systems.
3. use social systems to improve your communication.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. list in order, define and differentiate each of Kelman's three stages.
2. list, define and provide examples of four concepts related to roles in a group.
3. explain how internal role conflict can be used in persuasion.

“Doing is the great thing. For if, resolutely, people do what is right, in time they come to like doing it. -- John Rusking .

When we consider that each individual is unique, it seems impossible that we could ever adapt to a room full of people. However, our social nature works to make the adaptation possible. We find that people, in general seek out groups for affiliation that are similar to them. Then, once that affiliation is established, they tend to use the norms of that particular group as a reference for their thinking at least when with the group. Finally, the more they associate with a group, the stronger the influence of that group on their beliefs and on their behaviors.

Kelman sees the change in three stages. The first stage is *compliance* in which the individual conforms to the wishes of the group so as to gain rewards and avoid punishments from the group. The second stage is *identification* in which the individual behaves in accordance with the wishes of the group to maintain a warm relationship with members of the group. In the third stage, *internalization*, the individual adjusts his or her beliefs to be more congruent with those of the group.

Thus, social influence serves to unify a majority of the groups to whom you will be speaking. You can generally direct the heart of your comments to the most typical member and the message will be received well by the group as a whole.

Even in a class situation, especially public speaking, you can see this phenomenon, even when the class has only been in existence for a short time. The class shares commonalities in purposes for taking the class and in their goals and apprehensions.

Inset 14-1

USEFUL INFORMATION CONCERNING SOCIAL PRESURE

A. The Asch studies – Solomon Asch tested the tendency of college students to yield to group influence. In a series of studies, he would place one student with from two to eight confederates. Each time, the group was seated in order with the naive person in the last seat. Then they made a series of choices matching the length of one line to the same line in a set of three lines. The confederates were instructed to provide a wrong answer in a majority of the decisions. The naive person always responded last. The choice of the correct line, in each case, was clear and unambiguous as established by a control group. Any errors were, then, clearly the result of conformity pressure.

The results showed a clear impact of the majority on the individual. One third of all responses by the students were in error. Still, one fourth of the students refused to yield at any time. In one study, where one of the confederates did not give the same answer as the others, the conformity effect was greatly reduced. It was reduced basically to nothing when the other individual gave the most erroneous answers.

B. The Crutchfield study – While the choices in the Asch study were all unambiguous and trivial, Crutchfield's study involved ambiguous as well as unambiguous questions of professional men in a context where their performance could reflect on their qualifications to advance. His results were similar to Asch's when the decisions were clear cut, but the conformity rate jumped to 79% when the correct answer was unclear.

Persuasion and Kelman's system

The pressure to conform to the group can be strong. As noted in Chapter One, behavior change that is a result of social pressure falls beyond the limits of this text. However, I also recognize that persuasion operates in a social system and its application depends on an understanding and appropriate application of messages within that context. Kelman's system provides us an opportunity to

clarify further how persuasion differs from other forms of effecting change in others. Internalization is clearly the province of the persuader. The persuader's goal is to help others to view the world in a realistic and enlightened way to the end of improving the world in which we all must live.

Inset 14-2

SELF-INSTRUCTION BLOCK INTEGRATING KELMAN'S SYSTEM WITH COGNITIONS

For each of the following questions, select the BEST option.

Q: Which domain of cognitions is most relevant to the identification stage?

1. Reality.
2. Relationship
3. Goal

A: 2

Q: Which of the following beliefs reflect the identification stage?

1. If I don't attend meeting, I'll have to pay a fine.
2. As a member of this group, I should dress conservatively.
3. Helping others is probably something that I want to do.

A: 2

Q: Which of the beliefs above reflects compliance?

A: 1

Q: Which belief is internalization?

A: 3

Considering the following thoughts as an internal argument,

1. As a member of this group, I should dress conservatively.
2. I'm going to a group meeting tonight.
3. I'll dress conservatively.

Q: What is the bridge for this argument?

A: 1

Q: What is the premise for this argument?

A: 2

Q: Which part is #3?

A: Conclusion

If a speaker, who is a member of a group, attempts to control other members' behavior through compliance or identification, that attempt would fall outside the domain of persuasion. In contrast, a nonmember may discuss the social implications of members' actions to help them resolve internal conflicts in the process of realigning their beliefs. That realignment is by definition internalization. {Couldn't a member do the same? Of course, it is possible to do

so but with difficulty. It's difficult to have accepted the "it ain't me" claims.) It is in this context, a discussion of components of roles may be helpful.

inset 14-3

USEFUL INFORMATION RELEVANT TO OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

The Milgram Studies—Stanley Milgram conducted studies which illustrate the power of authoritative prescriptions on behavior. In the study, individuals were asked to play the role of teacher to help an experimenter learn more about memory. The person playing the role of pupil was an individual trained for the part. The teacher was told that he or she was to present the student with a list of four sets of paired words and then ask the student to give the second word when cued by the first of the pair. The learner was strapped to a chair and electrodes were positioned with the clear intent to permit the learner to be shocked. Before the teacher was a panel indicating shock levels varying from 15 to 450 volts with corresponding descriptors ranging from "slight" to "danger severe shock." The teacher was provided an authoritative justification linking punishment to learning and was told to administer shocks for incorrect answers, starting with the mild, 15 volts, for the first wrong answer and progressing in 15 volt increments for each additional mistake. Of course, no shocks were administered, but the pupil's responded accordingly as if they had been at each shock level. At some point in the proceedings the teachers expressed discomfort with continuing, but the experimenter/authority informed them that the experiment required them to administer a shock. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the teachers continued to the extreme-shock level.

Components of Roles

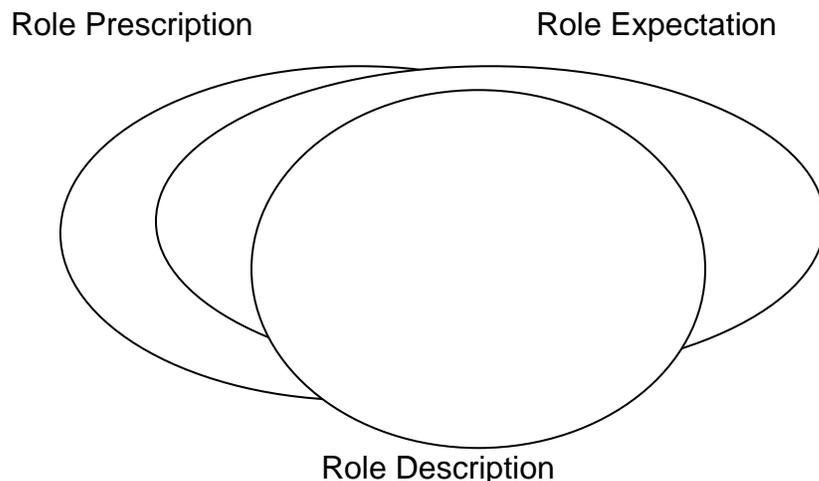
One way of looking at this social influence is through a consideration of *roles*. Roles may be defined as the behaviors that are associated with membership in a group. Roles are linked to membership in at least three key ways. First, there is *role expectation*: that is, the behaviors members expect of each other in a particular social context. While members don't follow that expectation all the time, it generally has influence. It is easy to recognize that people are going to behave differently in the classroom than at a sports arena. Consider even the differences between how people act if they are in the stadium for a pep rally, versus for an intramural game versus for a championship game.

Role prescription is the behaviors required of group members in the form of regulations, rules or laws. Generally, role prescription can be found in some written form but is often a matter of oral traditions that are commonly understood as law. Groups vary of course in the degree to which these rules are made dominant; but, even in the most informal of situations, legal codes exist that govern behavior. When these laws are made prominent in a situation, they wield a surprising strong influence on the behavior of group members. For example, the word “lawsuit” can demand the attention of the strongest company official.

Role description covers the behaviors that become associated with a particular member through his or her actual behavior. Role description varies from individual to individual as each applies the expectations and prescriptions to his or her personality and personal values. No role description reflects either of the other two factors completely; however, all role descriptions overlap the other two in some regard (see Figure 14-1).

A fourth term, *role conflict*, becomes relevant to our understanding of social influence and how we may need to use it in dealing with others. We need to distinguish between two types of role conflict, external and internal. External role conflict occurs when two different roles in our lives put pressures on us to perform two entirely different acts at the same time. When a boss asks Person A, as an employee, to work late on the same evening when Person A, as a parent, needs to attend a special event, Person A experiences role conflict, external role conflict. External role conflict is often discussed and illustrated. It is relevant to our discussion, but not as relevant as internal role conflict.

Figure 14-1
Diagram of Role Influences



Primarily as public speakers, we need to strive NOT to prompt the feeling of external role conflict in our audience. The practice of asking individuals to put themselves in another role, termed alter-casting, works well if used in an introduction to focus attention on a relevant topic. However, when the group is an

audience with an established common purpose, alter-casting serves more to disorient them. It will often alienate them because they may feel that the speaker doesn't care enough to recognize who they are as a group. Most importantly, the speaker fails to use the unifying force of their common role. The speaker, then, is forced to deal with them each as an individual.

Internal-role conflict occurs when there are pressures within one social context for individuals to behave in two different ways. When the members of the group expect one set of behaviors, but the bi-laws demand something different – the role expectation is one thing and the role prescription is another – internal role conflict occurs. In Figure 14-1, role conflict is possible in all the segments where the three circles do not overlap. If a leader from within the group tells the members that they must change their behavior because of the rules, any change is likely to fall into Kelman's stage of compliance. If a group member indicates that members' behavior does not fit with group norms, any change is likely to match Kelman's stage of identification; i.e. the members feel the need to conform to please the other members including the speaker.

A speaker from outside the group can create *Internal-role conflict* by demonstrating that the group's behavior does not conform to their own standards as reflected either by role expectation, role prescription or both. The conflict can serve as a motivator for change but that pressure does not come from the speaker. As in the discussion of motivation, role conflict produces energy needed for change. This energy can be used to constrain the group's behavior to reflect better the group standards or to facilitate more of the desired behavior by bringing into question whether the group has outgrown its image. Of course, as with all motivation, the speaker must exercise good judgment to control the group's use of the energy. We will discuss these issues more in Chapter 18, Persuasive Structures.

Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed the importance of social pressure to the speaker. We considered how our social nature makes adaptation possible. We also considered where its use extends beyond the persuasive uses of communication. Within the area of persuasion, we examined the functioning of three dimensions of roles and how these dimensions may affect the group's desire to change.

Key Sources

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