

The TA Organization Model

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Eric Berne's study of groups and organizations arose out of his use of the group as an environment for psychotherapy.¹ His book provides a framework under which groups may be studied and analysed. The present author assembles the building blocks of this framework and presents it as the TA Organization Model (TAOM), a transactional model of groups and organizations in which TA as it is traditionally understood forms a part as well as a basis for organization development.² TA has tended to focus mainly on the individual. TAOM the TA group model, focuses on the social organizing of individuals and thus link the individual and his environment. TA distinguishes structure and function. This distinction is minimised by some in regard to organization,⁴ and is clear in the TA group model. Controversy may be left aside since the main aim here is to describe Berne's Organizational Model.

Structure and function in TAOM

A hint as to the final elaboration of TAOM comes from the following: "groups can be consistently and usefully classified on the basis of their structure, their dynamics, their work, the group authority and their psychological aspects".⁵ From studying the set-up of the organization and the interrelationships between its parts, a sense of its structure begins to emerge. When to this is added the individual member's self-awareness in relation to the organizational leadership, the picture of the organization's structure becomes complete. Similarly, when the energy of the organization is examined, it is seen to be available for achieving the organizational objectives, for expressing itself as forces in and out of the organization, and it is also seen in the characteristics of the members or individual proclivities. Thus, under organizational structure are to be found analysis of the organization's "space", its "canon", and the

"image" of each of its members. Under organizational function or dynamics are to be found analysis of the organization's "work", its "forces", and the "individual proclivities" of its members: Every element of an organization can be studied under one or other of these six categories of the TAOM to provide a comprehensive analysis. These categories will now be described in more detail.

Organizational "Space" 1st Element of TAOM

In its simplest enunciation, the "space" of an organization describes the roles that are required for an organization to function. "Space" differentiates leadership, membership, and non-membership. These are diagrammed in amoeboid form in Figure 1. Members of the organization, M, are differentiated from non-members, NM, by the major external boundary X, which may be geographical as in the case of a nation or psychological as in the case of an association. Anyone who is located within the major external boundary, X, is a member of the organization. In addition, within the membership, leadership, L, is differentiated from the ordinary membership by the major internal boundary, Y, and members are differentiated from one another by minor internal boundaries, Z.

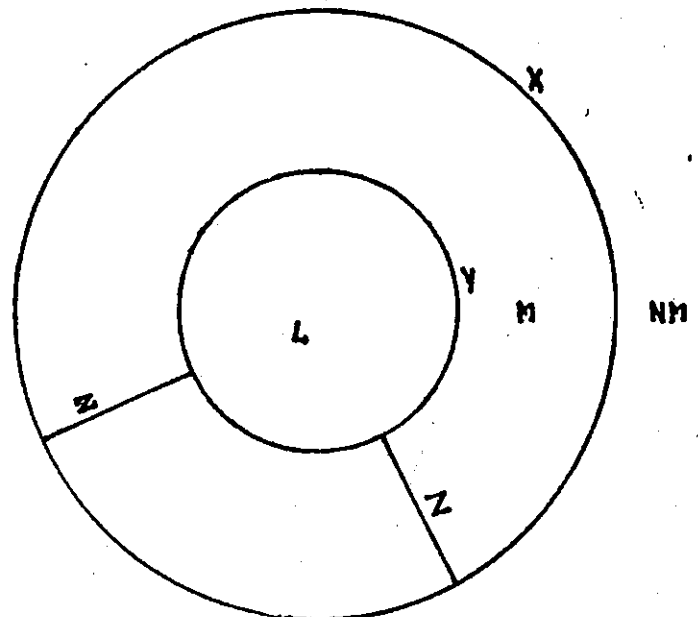


FIG 1

The simple model of Figure 1 becomes compounded when there are levels within the membership as for example in a hierarchical organization where

each member is answerable to a clearly defined superior; this is diagrammed in Figure 2 (a). When there are minor internal boundaries within the leadership as diagrammed in Figure 2 (b), then the organization is said to be complex; and a combination of compound and complex leads to what Berne calls a complicated organization. So an organization is classified as simple, compound, complex, or complicated. The author has worked with several organizations that by tradition are compound organizations, i. e. with a hierarchy of authority from the top executive to the ordinary member. Many of these organizations have undergone an evolution into complex organizations as one or other member becomes a leader in his own right and for all practical purposes independent of his superior executive. Structural change in the organization has taken place de facto

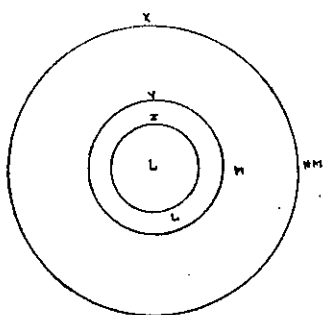


FIGURE 2a

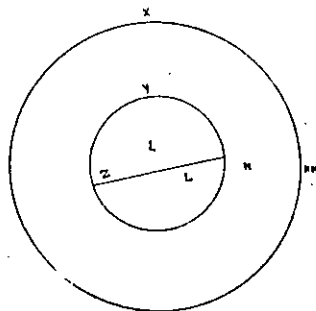


FIGURE 2b

without members and leaders being fully aware of this and the de rure approach is no longer valid. Recognition of this change has helped several organizations clarify problems of conflict on the issue of authority.

Among the "organs" or sub-groups of an organization, two deserve special attention; the external and the internal apparatus. These organs assist the leadership and even take on some of the authority of the leadership. In a nation, for example, the external apparatus consists of those groups responsible for foreign relations and defence, while the internal apparatus consists of the moral-building agencies and the police force. In a therapy group these roles may be filled by the leader himself, or he may delegate them to someone else, e.g. arranging chairs for meetings, or collecting contribution.

Leadership itself is exercised in three distinct levels: responsible, effective, and psychological. The responsible leader is the person who has to answer to the membership or to some higher authority for what the group does. The effective leader is the

person whose voice is listened to. The psychological leader is the person who, though he may now be outside the organization, once belonged to it and made some statements about policy which are upheld by members. For example. In industrial unrest, the responsible leader who may be a manager is not always the effective leader: his voice is not heard! Again, change is often resisted on the grounds that it goes contrary to what some revered person i. e. the psychological leader had said many years previously: responsible leadership is undermined by psychological leadership.

This description of an organization's "space" is introductory covering where everybody fits into the organization, and the exercise of leadership. Such tools as organization charts and location diagrams are included under it, and considerations such as rigidity or flexibility of boundaries need to be considered in actual studies. Ways of crossing the boundaries come more properly under the second element of organization structure, namely, its "authority".

Organizational "Authority" 2nd Element of TAOM

Organizational "canon" describes relationships that exist across its boundaries. These are limiting factors within which an organization functions. These relations are not, of themselves, forces; the latter are studies under organizational dynamics or function.

The three principal elements of the group's limiting factors or authority or "canon" are its constitution, its rules, its culture. The constitution gives a formal description of the group and its objectives. Without its formal organization, the group has no defined and agreed goal. When this is the case, the group leaves itself open to dysfunctional time structuring or game playing; for when there are no goals, all roads are equally effective in achieving them. If the goals are implicit the group is faced with hidden messages, the first of games. The second element of group authority is its Rules. These give members guidelines and policies, and decisions for carrying out the constitution.

The culture of a group consists of the material, intellectual and social influence which brings about regularity of behaviour, especially with regard to the organization's work. Culture of an organization has three manifestations: etiquette, technicalities, and character. These correspond to the three components of personality as seen in TA: etiquette to

to fit his provisional imago, or he leaves the organization.

In practice the author has found that groups which focus on their members' Basic Life Positions are able to concretise the imagos more easily. In TA language, Basic Life Position is defined as that way in which one perceives oneself as okay or not okay in relation to others. At the 2-dimensional level an individual favours one of the 4 basic life positions, namely, that he had long ago with his parents, especially mother. This 2-dimensional level applies to the provisional imago and adapted imago as the individual becomes incorporated into the organization. As his imago becomes operative, and as he differentiates more and more individuals, at least a 3-dimensional Basic Life Position will be taken up; such can be distinguished: I+U+T+, I+U+T-, I+U-T+, I+U-T-, I-U+T+, I-U+T-, I-U-T+, I-U-T-. Here, "I+" stands for "I am okay with me", "I-" for "I'm not okay with me", "U+" for "you're okay with me", "T+" for "they're okay with me/us".⁷ One instrument has been devised for studying the 2-dimensional basic life position of college students.⁸ The 3-dimensional basic life position and its relationship to the organisational "imago" offers a fertile field for research.

Organizational Dynamics or Function

Thus far, the author focused on those elements of an organization that describe what it is, its structure. The dynamics or functioning of the organization answers questions about how it exists, and includes analyses of the forces that operate in or on the organization, the work done by it and the ways its individual members fill their time.

A link between the study of an organization's structure and its function is the need that the organization has to survive. For optimal survival firstly, the imagos of individuals need to be firm and in agreement: this is known as ideological survival. A situation may arise when the leadership will make us of the membership in the interests of the group's survival: this is physical survival. Thirdly, the formal structure of the organization, its constitutional set-up, must be maintained if the organization is to produce those goods for which it is planned: this is effective survival. Effective survival is measured by the organization's ability to what it is organized for, and regulate its forces. These will be considered now.

Organizational Forces—4th Element of TAOM

In the TA model of a group, the various forces are classified according to the boundaries across which they operate. One force is homoeostatic, it holds the organs together, mobilizes them for production, and opposes the other forces; this is the force of cohesion. Cohesion operates to protect and nourish the organization and its functions, firstly, across the major external boundaries. Here it is opposed to forces of pressure. Across the major internal boundary, cohesion is opposed to agitation; across minor internal boundaries cohesion is opposed to individual proclivities. Cohesive forces are mobilized to achieve the goals of an organization. "In so far as the organization interacts with its environment, it is subjected to outside pressures; if these forces are greater than cohesion, then the organization becomes dysfunctional. Agitation is the force that operates against leadership, whether to remove it or activate it to change. Individual proclivities may either support the cohesion of an organization or they may erode it; for example, transactional games destroy the cohesiveness of an organization since they consume much time and energy which otherwise would support the organization in what it is doing. Transactional games probably account for more waste of productive time and energy than any other single factor in industry and business.

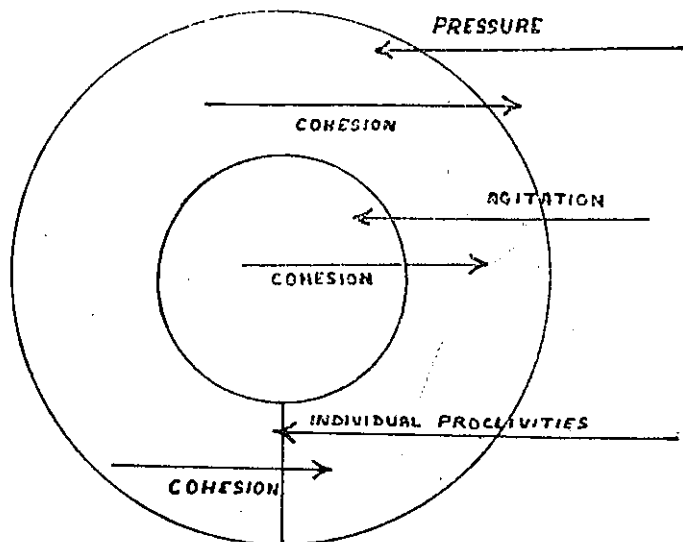


FIGURE 4

Organizational Work—5th Element of TAOM

The group's forces are utilized to do work. The energy used by members of the organization is directed either towards producing some effect on the external environment through the organization's

the Parent egostate ; technicality to the Adult egostate; and character to the Child egostate. For example, etiquette deals with socially acceptable ways of behaviour : members of the organization learn, during their initiation, the way they are expected to behave and think. In some industrial concerns a specific element of etiquette is "trust the boss", and another, "get the job done by the men otherwise you are responsible". By contrast, the character of the organization comes out in hidden messages such as "beware of the boss", and also in organizational games, where in addition to a lot of fun and excitement there are negative pay-offs. The technicality of the organization refers to the way it is set up, its payment system and other rational aspects specific to its culture.

That this aspect of organizational analysis is important can be seen from several examples of change that have been made in the social-service organizations mentioned above. There, constitutional renewal took place and was not implemented because the culture was against it. One group the author worked with recently, discovered that by bringing out into the open those elements of its culture that were "never spoken about", it was able to plan a strategy to change elements of its culture to make it supportive of the renewed constitution.

Another useful result of analysing group authority is that in the case of organizations belonging to a parent organization, several objectives of the parent organization are found to be limiting factors or boundaries within which the local organization functions. While the local organization has freedom to determine its own goals and must use this freedom explicitly, it is circumscribed or limited by the constitutional objectives of the parent body. A functional definition of freedom is one in which an organization sets its own direction, within limits prescribed by its parent organization.

Public versus Private Structure. Before considering the third element of organizational structure, a word on public and private structure is called for. The public structure of an organization is something that can be observed. Thus, included under the heading of "public structure" are both organizational space and authority. The public structure has two elements, namely, organizational or formal structure, and the individual structure, of the persons who fill positions. Even such an intangible as organizational culture, especially its character, can be observed. However, what the individual person perceives

as his relationship to the organization is, on the one hand, a part of the structure and, on the other, is not directly observable but can only be inferred; this private structure is the "imago" of the individual.

Organizational "Imago" 3rd Element of TAOM

The organisational "imago" is the collection of individual "imagos" of members and leaders. This complex and intangible reality's general character can be inferred by trained persons, directly experienced by members or indirectly observed from social situations. Briefly, the individual's "imago" is the self-perception or self-image he has of where he stands in relation to the group, especially the leader.

The imago can be diagrammed as in Figure 3. The individual is in the "self" slot, he differentiates the leader in a superior position. He may also differentiate one or more individuals of the group on the

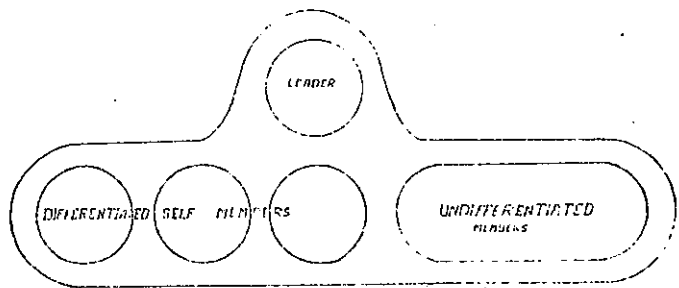


FIGURE 3

basis of his interaction with them at the moment the imago is taken; the remainder are undifferentiated in the imago for this moment. While the imago has a general pattern for each individual, it changes from moment to moment and evolves as the individual invests more of himself in the group.

Before an individual joins a group or organization, he has certain expectations as to what his relationship to the leader will be ; this is provisional imago. After joining the group, he begins to fit into its culture and adapt to what is expected of him; this is his adapted imago. The next state of incorporation is when he feels that he "belongs", that he can initiate interaction and transactional games; this is his operative imago. Finally, when he is well into the organisational structure and goes beyond games he has an adjusted imago. A source of trouble in organisation occurs when an individual's imago does not coincide with the imago in the leadership nor with the group imago and this is not recognized. Ultimately, either the individual adapts when he enters the organization, or he works to change the group imago

activity, or towards defending the organization from destruction by combat, or towards a healthy process of working by members of the organization. Thus the product factor of the organization is "what" it produces, or its specific activity, and the maintenance factor is "how" it produces, i.e., its process or its preservation and growth.

When analysing an organization's forces and work, classifying the types of activity is useful. For example, an organization which is concerned only with maintaining its process and marshals all its cohesive forces to this end, may not have the necessary cohesion to fight off attacks from outside itself; or it may not have surplus cohesion to promote change and growth within its boundaries. Thus the group's work may be classified as functional, e.g., product and process, and dysfunctional e.g., transactional games. Analysis of the group's energy utilization under at least these three heads has been found productive in several organizations.

Individual Proclivities—6th Element of TAOM

Individual proclivities are the tendencies of members as they transact with each other. It is here that Transactional Analysis is being used as an organization development intervention technique; examples of this are described in Jongeward's books.⁹ Once an individual grows in awareness of his own operation through his three egostates (structural analysis), he is able to improve his powers of communicating with others (transactional analysis proper) and rectify dysfunctional communication of himself (game analysis). To this summary of outcomes available in the traditional division of TA, relationship analysis is added: the individual grows in his power to have satisfying and productive relations. When and to the extent that an individual effects change in himself, then and to that extent he becomes capable of facilitating others as they change. Without self-awareness and change of self, the facilitator, especially if he happens to be a top executive, will probably reinforce organizational games.

Using the TAOM

The author has used TAOM with several organizations in which members have a high level of investment in the group; all are concerned with social welfare activities. When called upon to facilitate these groups in problem-solving situations, the author uses the following steps (sometimes called

the systems approach to problem-solving:

1. Identification of problem, need, opportunity;
2. Enunciation of desired goal;
3. Feasibility Study of problem and goal within the boundary conditions set by the organization;
4. Delineation of alternative suggestions (at least two);
5. Selection of one solution and decision to implement it;
6. Planning and implementing the selected strategy;
7. Evaluation of the programme and feed-back to earlier states of the process to see if the goal has been achieved or, modification is required, or, the programme scrapped.

The TAOM is used for the feasibility study in Point 3 of the Problem-Solving Method. It offers a comprehensive and easily identifiable framework for the existing boundary conditions of the organization. The skelton of the model is given in Figure 5.

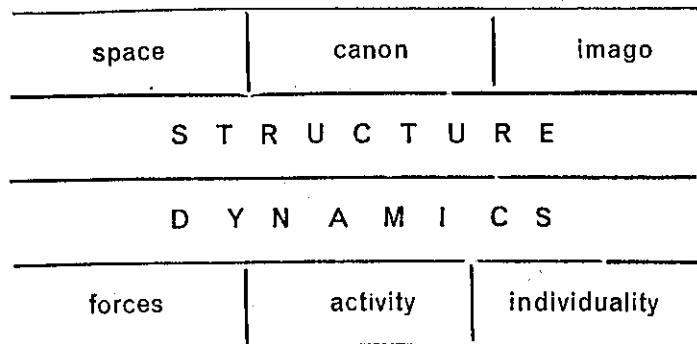


Figure 5

Assessment of TAOM

Underlying TAOM is a view of man that says he is okay, and that if he feels or thinks he is not okay, he works on himself to become okay in thought and feeling. A principle of TA is that everyone has freedom to achieve this okayness provided he is ready to take responsibility to change himself as distinct from wanting someone else to do the changing. This applies to organizations. The TA view is that groups of individuals are inherently okay, and that if they have reason to believe there is some non-okayness, they can change this so that

the organization becomes okay for all its members and others.

A major proposition of the TA model is that there are two aspects of the organization that need consideration, namely, the structural and functional, and that each of these is further subdivided into the individual and the group point of view. When Berne wrote his book on organizations, he did so from a psychoanalytic background and with the purpose of offering a systematic framework for the therapy of organizations. He developed the model with a view to its being used, and used it himself. However, his later thinking and writing was at the individual level. He and others after him largely neglected his work on organisations.¹⁰ The strength of the model lies in its comprehensiveness and in the conceptual framework it offers for organisational therapy.

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