

## **Role Negotiation Process**

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### **Purpose**

To provide a structural method for people to share with their colleagues the ways in which their work behavior helps or hinders their productivity. Further, group members are helped to negotiate specific changes in each others' behavior which are mutually satisfying.

### **Summary**

Too often the issues of power and influence in organizations are ignored by those attempting to alter the behavior of organization members or to build working relationships in new settings. Role negotiation faces these issues by explicitly surfacing aspects of an individual's or group's work-related behavior, discussing these aspects openly, and then negotiating a settlement among the parties involved that is mutually satisfying.

### **Process**

Role negotiation is a small group process in which an individual exchanges messages with another person, outlining the behavior that he/she views as helping or hindering his or her own productivity at work. After discussing and clarifying this feedback, dyads can negotiate agreements based on an equitable quid pro quo.

### **Time**

One and a half to four hours depending upon group size and level of communication among members.

### **Numbers**

Ten is about the maximum number, given that messages need to be written to, as well as received from and digested by, every other member. This process can be speeded-up by filling out the message forms before the meeting. The process can also be used successfully between units that work together. Here the data is aggregated into messages from one group to another, and when summarized, provides the basis for a discussion on future work relationships.

## References

Harrison, Roger. "Role Negotiation: A Tough-Minded Approach to Team Development." *Social Technology of Organization Development*. La Jolla, California: University Associates, 1976.

## Introduction

Role Negotiation describes the process of changing the role which an individual or group performs in the organization through negotiation with other interested parties. A role includes not only one's formal job description, but also all the informal understandings, agreements, expectations and arrangements with others that determine the way one person's or group's work affects or fits in with another's.

The technique makes the basic assumption that most people prefer a fair, negotiated settlement to a state of unresolved conflict, and that they are willing to invest some time and make some modest concessions in order to achieve a solution. A small but significant risk is called for by the participants: they must be open about what changes in behavior, authority or responsibility they wish to obtain from others in the situation. If the participants take the risk asked of them and concretely specify the changes desired on the part of others, then significant changes in work effectiveness can usually be obtained.

## Process

### *Guidelines*

1. It is not legitimate to press or probe anyone's feelings or emotions. Who does what, how and with whom are the concerns here.
2. Openness, honesty and interest about one's own behavior and those of others involved is expected and essential for positive results.
3. Expectations and demands are not adequately communicated until written down and clearly understood by both sender and receiver.
4. Something requested or demanded must be accompanied by something given up in exchange. It is expected that in the bargaining and negotiating process each party will agree to modify their behavior in exchange for some desired change on the part of the other.
5. While threats and pressures are neither illegitimate nor excluded from the negotiation process, positive incentives yield greater results in most cases.

## Propositions About Feedback

1. The more abstract and global the feedback, the harder it is to use. People can choose to change specific actions but cannot easily change global traits or personality characteristics. Make sure your messages are clear and relate to specific behavior. Use a recent example if it seems useful.
2. The more evaluative and attributive the feedback, the greater the likelihood that the recipient will respond defensively and will have difficulty learning from the message. Therefore, attribution should be minimized by describing what the observer saw and how he or she responded.
3. The more inferential the feedback (global, evaluative, attributive), the greater the difficulty of testing its validity. If one cannot test the validity of another's feedback, one is not likely to integrate it and change.
4. The more delayed the feedback, the greater the difficulty the recipient will have in using it. Feedback is delayed when it comes long after the behavior. A common form of delayed feedback is "gunnysacking"—saving up a series of reactions, then dumping them all at once.

## Instructions

*Step 1:* Discuss in your group, the influence and power (a) you believe others to have, (b) you believe yourself to have, and (c) others believe you to have. What is influence and power? How is it manifested in your work relations with others?

*Step 2:* Each of you should now think (and take some notes, if necessary) about the way work is conducted between yourself and others in the group. This should be done individually and quietly, with the following questions in mind:

- a. What things would you change if you could?
- b. What would you keep the same?
- c. Who and what would have to change in order to improve things?

Keep in mind and focus upon those things that might be changed to improve your own effectiveness.

*Step 3:* Now use one of the attached "Issue Diagnosis Forms" for each of the other group members, answering all the questions on the page. Use the back of the form if necessary. Keep in mind the focus upon increasing your own effectiveness.

*Step 4:* Exchange the lists within your group such that you now have each of the lists pertaining to your own work behavior.

*Step 5:* Make a master list that summarizes each list's items on the "Summary List Form" attached.

*Step 6:* Share your Summary List with each of the other group members by writing it upon the flip chart and posting it.

*Step 7:* Now question each of the other group members about items on the list by asking, “What,” “Why” and “How”? Do not offer a rebuttal to their replies! You are allowed to ask clarifying questions only, not to make statements.

*Step 8:* Select one or more behavior items from the list that you would particularly like to see some change in on the part of another person. Now select one or more items that you feel you may be able to change in the direction others desire. The “most negotiable items” are those where there is a combination of (1) a high desire for change on the part of an initiator and (2) a willingness to negotiate on the part of the person whose behavior is the target of the change attempt. Focus upon these items.

*Step 9:* Engage in a negotiation process by making offers in the form, “If you do X, I will do Y.” Negotiation ends when all parties are satisfied with both what was given up and what was received. Write the agreement down as specifically as possible using the “Final Agreement” form attached. Continue to negotiate on other items on the lists.

*Step 10:* Publish the results of the contracting cycle by circulating them among the members of the group.

## **Evaluation**

Now consider what your feelings and attitudes are about the process you engaged in. How might this process be improved and applied to other situations you confront? Plan on a follow-up on the agreements reached with the other members of the group. Role negotiation is, of course, no panacea for work relationship problems. It requires an ongoing process of use and improvement.

For more information on this or related materials, contact CFAR at [info@cfar.com](mailto:info@cfar.com) or 215.320.3200, or visit our website at <http://www.cfar.com>.

**Role Negotiation**  
***Issue Diagnosis Form***

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Message from:

To:

If you were to do the following things more or better, it would help me to increase my own effectiveness:

If you were to do the following things less, or were to stop doing them, it would help me to increase my own effectiveness:

The following things which you have been doing help to increase my effectiveness, and I hope you will continue to do them:

**Role Negotiation**  
***Issue Diagnosis Form***

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Final written agreement between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**Role Negotiation**  
***Issue Diagnosis Form***

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**Summary List**

Summary of messages to \_\_\_\_\_ from other group  
members \_\_\_\_\_ .

More or Better

Less or Stop

Continue as Now