

Role Play



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Two or more members of a group are presented with a situation which they are required to resolve by acting out the roles of those represented in the situation. The process and result is then analysed and evaluated, usually by the members of the group themselves. Aim: to explore how people might behave in a given situation by acting out that behaviour in practice.

Technique

This is a simple form of simulation which is easily arranged - but from which the participants may learn a great deal, particularly in the area of relationship skills.

Role play may be introduced in several different ways, Because it deals with problems, usually involving people, it is not unlike case study, but there are some fundamental differences. Case study leads initially at least to discussion, whereas role play is basically a form of simulation.

- role play can be used to explore possible solutions to a problem,
- role play can be used to explore how people might behave in a given situation,
- two people volunteer to play the roles,
- they 'think themselves' into assumed roles,
- the role play is not likely to last more than ten minutes,
- after the role play the whole group discusses what has taken place.

At one extreme, role play can arise spontaneously, e.g. during a discussion.

At the other extreme, the trainer may arrange role play for a specific purpose and plan it carefully to satisfy specific learning objectives. Nevertheless, the principles established above should still apply.

In such a case, the trainer should:

- outline the situation to all members of the group,
- describe the characters involved,
- ask for volunteers to play the roles,
- allow them to act out the situation, making up their lines as they go along.

At the end of the scene, all members of the group should discuss what has taken place, the motivation of those concerned and why the scene developed as it did.

As in case study, the situation should be realistic and relevant; and deliberately chosen to satisfy the objectives of the session.

The trainer may go as far as to write out the situation or prepare a tape (as in case study), and may prepare notes for each of the characters involved.

With inexperienced participants the trainer should restrict role play to two or three characters - and let it run for no more than ten or twelve minutes.

Later, when participants become skilled at role play, and can learn more without feeling embarrassed or becoming emotionally involved (two possible reactions with inexperienced people), it is possible to create more involved situations with additional characters.

- When introducing trainers to the 'group process', the members of a tutor group may be given roles to play, one of them being that of 'discussion leader'...

The discussion which follows role play is important. The trainer should firmly release the players from their roles. The discussion should

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analyse the action - and pin-point key features of the feelings of the players, as well as analysing important pieces of dialogue.

- Did any player change behaviour?
- Why did it happen?
- As time went on did the players understand each other better - or not so well?
- Why?

- and so on.

It is important to seize on such emotive insights as soon as possible - and before they are forgotten.

Discussion can later involve the facts, causes and effects, principles, and reinforcement of the learning experience.

Note

Role play helps participants develop the ability to project themselves into the minds and feelings of others, and thus increase understanding of human behaviour and skill in working with people.

Critics rightly point out the dangers of embarrassment or becoming too emotionally involved. When members of a group know one another well and feel 'secure' in their company, these risks are minimised.

Nevertheless, the trainer must be aware of such dangers and use role play only when feeling confident that it will satisfy learning objectives of the session in question.

On the other hand, if the trainer is concerned to change attitudes or behaviour and believes that this can -be best achieved by allowing the participants to become emotionally involved in role play, the trainer should encourage this. The players should be released from their roles afterwards and allow time for them to recover their equilibrium. Such a method should not be used at the end of the day, or towards the end of a course.

Obviously, such a method should only be used by a skilled trainer working with a group, the members of which are familiar and 'secure' in one another's company