



**LUNDS**  
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# **Role shifts within the working day**

**A phenomenological pilot study of how employees experience role shifts**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore how people during their working day experience role shifts if they on the whole experience or are aware of any role shift. Do they need time to adjust themselves to different roles? To find out about this a pilot study with a phenomenological approach was performed by having 4 participants write short diaries about their thoughts, feelings and ideas when they experienced a role shift. In addition 4 interviews with participants from 2 different situations were performed. The diaries were analysed with the help of Meaning Constitution Analysis (MCA-Minerva). The study shows that there are role shifts and that these can be connected with frustration if not sufficient time for reflecting or adjusting is available. The study also shows that the order of role shifts can be important, affecting the need for a longer adjusting time or not.

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## Role shifts

When I set out to work for this study I remembered my own experiences the last year and my reflections about “burn-out” and frustration at work. At that time I worked as an instructor and consultant and had also the responsibility over 6-7 employees without being formally a groupleader. I was “tired” and especially when a colleague and I were working for a 2-day course, I had to ask him to take the second day himself because I could not find my strength that day. At several occasions I thought of my situation while driving home from work. Once it struck me that its not the workload itself but the ever shifting circumstances. I noticed that every 4<sup>th</sup> week I had a new group of approximately 18 people coming and I had the introduction for 3 days, starting at Monday mornings. This I had done several times but nonetheless I had to spend the second half of the Sunday before to get in the right mental mood.

Bodil Jönsson (1999) in her book *Tio tankar om tid* wrote about adjusting time (sw. “ställtid”) and I found a similar theme in the book of Tom DeMarco (2002). Could it be that I needed more time for adjusting to a new task or enter a different role? More time than was available? Here I found an idea that I wanted to explore further. *What happens if the time available is not sufficient for adjusting mentally to the task or role?* Could it be that I had a longer adjusting time than was planned for? What about my colleagues, was I alone about this feeling and experience?

What if I’m not alone about this experience? What happens with those experiencing that the needed adjusting time is not available? It would of course have implications for both the individual and the work. Tom DeMarco (2002) in his book talks about waste of time changing from one task to another, effects on teamwork and frustration when splitting the employees work into several tasks. In Smither (1998) I found an indication that stress can be perceived of both those having a large job scope or a small one. Also van der Vliet and Hellgren (2002a) found in their study that “the workload for the staff leaves no room for either reflection or recovery to any greater extent”. And it seems to be worsening, in the radio news I heard the other day that a company was cutting the smoke pauses for the employees.

In the last years we have seen in Sweden an enormous increase in sick leave. People are burdened with high workloads. The reason for this increase is complex and only partly due to the change in the working places. Stress is found as one major factor. Maslach and Leiter (1997) are leading authorities in the study of burnout. They ascribe six sources or mismatches

between job and person for the reason of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). These mismatches are *work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, unfairness, breakdown of community* and finally *value conflict*.

Another well-known authority in this field is Karasek (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). He developed a model of interaction between *psychological demands (high or low)* versus *decision latitude (high or low)*. A person with high psychological demands with high decision latitude will be in less danger than a person with the same high demands but with less decision latitude. A person with low demands and low decision latitude will as well not be in a big danger but instead probably find the job passive and non-engaging, low job satisfaction (Broadbent, 1995).

One problem today is that people experience more ambiguity, due to lack of guidance. “it is not clear exactly what should or should not be considered a component of work, or even how work should be carried through” (van der Vliet & Hellgren, 2002a, p7). There is a great deal of unpredictability in process and goal and difficulties to delimit the job in space and time (van der Vliet & Hellgren, 2002a; Allvin, Wiklund, Härenstam, & Aronsson, 1999).

### Change over time

Some of the major challenges for the organizations today or for the last decade are dropping prices, competition from low cost countries, higher need for competent workers and less of unqualified jobs et cetera. To meet this, the companies have to cut costs, increase the productivity, which in turn means that fewer employees have to produce more (van der Vliet & Hellgren, 2002b; Horbury & Wright, 2001; Martin & Schumann, 1997). Over the time different management theories have been tried out in full scale. Organisation transitions and theories how to do it come and go (Rövik, 2000, p18; Burke & Cooper, 2000, p4). It seems that in the end we are stuck with an increased time-pressure, need for flexibility and multiskilling (Horbury & Wright, 2001, p10).

In many articles and books you can find that in order to increase the workers job satisfaction, the employer should broaden the range of tasks or give more decision latitude (Bratton & Gold, 1999, p108; Lindström-Myrgård, 1994, p55; Kilbo & Eklöf, 1992) even though it has been difficult to demonstrate the effects by research (Chmiel, 1998, p21; Smither, 1998, p241). This can be seen as a reaction to the former Scientific Management and its job & task rationalization. From the era of Taylor and Scientific Management the world has changed a lot and the employees nowadays are better educated and place higher demands on their job and employers. Different researchers have approached these changing conditions

differently in order to meet the challenge of the changing world. There is a broad range of latitude between one extreme of the scale to the other, from job & task rationalization to organizational units and self-maintaining teams (Davis, 1979,p29).

Mayo changed many ideas about working with his Human Relation thinking based on the Hawthorne studies. Herzberg on the other hand launched his 2-factor theory of hygienic and motivating factors. Maslow should not be forgotten with his theory of the human nature and its basic needs. A more complex view of man and his desire had evolved. He was no more driven by the want of money (Warr & Wall, 1979). For an employee to be satisfied, the job had to be enriched or enlarged. According to Hackman and Oldham (1980) a good job design consist of five main aspects: 1) skill variety, 2) task identity, 3) task significance, 4) autonomy, and 5) feedback. According to their model, the more a job contains of these five aspects the more potential it should be to motivate the employee. See appendix 1 to get a better and more complete overview over the evolution of job design. Only a few have been mentioned in this section.

### Multiskilling

Health & Safety Executive (HSE) in England has undertaken a study to find the impacts of multiskilling on health & safety (Horbury & Wright, 2001, p2). The report considers that fundamentally multiskilling is ”increasing people’s skill and competencies, and enabling and allowing them to carry out tasks previously or traditionally carried out by other people”.

This change over time is well in accordance with the notion of enriching and enlarging the jobs in order to enhance the job satisfaction. The employee will meet a job full of responsibility, flexibility and variation over the day and/or week. Allvin et al. (1998) found in their study that this new ‘limitless’ job gives the individual great possibilities to structure the job him-/herself. But it is not only giving the possibility; rather it is demanding it. Giving the individual higher personal responsibility also leaves her on her own to a higher extent in the job.

Today “Organisations typically multiskill with the intent of removing functional barriers and increasing the flexibility of the workforce, it is rarely about the ‘ideals of job enrichment and empowerment’ [...] using people to cover a larger proportion of production activities, with the intention being to reduce labour costs” (Horbury & Wright, 2001, p2).

The HSE report categorises multiskilling in three categories:

Vertical multiskilling. This means that supervisory and administrative support tasks are learned by individuals.

Horizontal multiskilling. This means that skills from another function or discipline are learned and finally

Depth multiskilling. This means the acquisition and application of more complex and specific skills.

#### Skill-based, Rule-based and Knowledge-based tasks

According to the model (SRK) of Rasmussen (1987) different tasks have different decision levels. Some tasks are ‘simple’ and done more or less automatically (skill-based) and represent sensori-motor performances and acts, while others need more knowledge in the form of decisions according to specific and learnt rules (rule-based) often in familiar situations. More demanding tasks and unfamiliar situations need higher conceptual and problem solving capabilities (knowledge-based). The performance is more explicitly goal oriented and probably represented with a mental model.

As a lot of companies complain about the difficulties finding competent people and there still is a high rate of unemployed people it seems trivial to assume that there has been a shift from a more skill based type of jobs to a more knowledge based type of jobs (Warr, 1995). In their study van der Vliet and Hellgren (2002a, p29) have found this as well “that working life has, to a large degree, come to incorporate mental rather than physical activities”. Other researchers argue for the same. “We are in danger of designing jobs, roles, and organizations that will impose a dysfunctional burden on employees, thereby bringing the problem of limits to capacity to the fore” (Sparrow, 2000, p181). He continues: “Information overload (number and difficulty of decisions and judgments that information requires; time available to act; quality of required information processing and predictability of information inputs) is now a significant issue.”

#### Role shifts

The literature above mentions job enlargement and enrichment, variation and flexibility, empowerment and more responsibility et cetera. But I think that there is at least one dimension missing. Can there be too a big variation in the tasks? Can the variation or speed of change between skill-based tasks and knowledge-based tasks be too great? At least if they are performed within a too short time space. Could it also be that the employee not only feels a variation in tasks but also find him-/herself in different roles?

Can there be a difference between roles and tasks? I think so even though they often accompany each other. In one moment I am a project leader and have to behave as such, in another moment I am perhaps a participant in another group as a union representative. During the last months I have experienced myself and discussed with colleagues this difference. In a specific role I can perform a lot of different tasks e.g. produce copies of learning materials, make a PowerPoint presentation or correct student tasks. On the other hand I can change role as well as tasks. I can work as a teacher in the morning, as an administrator just before lunch and as a seller in the afternoon trying to find new customers. In the evening maybe I sit down to study a new course to be updated in my profession.

In the literature I have found different aspects of roles. A classical work is Goffman (1959) who treats the concept of roles from the individual's point of view of presenting him-/herself to others. You can be on front stage or back stage and you can shift roles quickly depending on the situation. Goffman uses terms from the world of dramatics to explain different aspects of roles. Forsyth (1995, p358) speaks about two basic types, task roles and socioemotional roles. Those who occupy task roles focus on the work while the others "focus on the quality of the relationships among group members." Forsyth continues: "Once people take on roles, such as leader, follower, or critic, they must play their parts." and "very few people can fulfil both of these positions simultaneously." This gives the impression that you take on a role once and forever or at least do not change it rapidly.

Westlander (1993) lists several terms contained in the concept of role. Westlander also summarises some definitions of role. The essence of role according to Westlander (1993, p91; based on Biddle) is "the behaviours characteristic for people who are in a specific context more or less confined" (my translation from Swedish: "avser beteenden karaktäristiska för människor som står i ett bestämt sammanhang, mer eller mindre avgränsat"). One important aspect of role-taking is the expectations from others. The person taking a specific role does not decide him-/herself how to perform. There is an interaction between the role-taker and the surroundings.

The concepts and model put forward by Westlander give me the impression of a rather slow process. But what if the employee has developed or has taken different roles in different circumstances and has to enter and leave them several times a week or during the day. Examples of different roles maintained by one sole person could be: union representative, group leader, expert in a specific subject, instructor, company representative and colleague.



Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore how people experience role shifts if they on the whole experience or are aware of any role shift. If they are aware of role shifts, do they find them stimulating or frustrating. And if possible find out what they think of available time for adjusting to different roles or if they can shift rapidly.

**Method**

For the purpose of this investigation I chose a phenomenological explorative approach. I was interested to find out if others shared the experiences that I had had. The concept of role shift in my understanding I did not find in the literature. There are a lot of research made in role shifts between work and family life, but in this study I was interested in role shifts within the work during the day or maybe the week. In the literature review I did not find any material about this, which implies that not very much research is done about it.

I chose the diary form, because I wanted the participants to express themselves as freely as possible. Somehow I had to introduce them in the thinking of role shifts but at the same time not to plant too much of my own thinking. Therefore the ingress was as short as possible (see appendix 2) but still informative. A translated version of the introduction follows.

In the newspaper 'Sydsvenskan' Carola described some time ago, in connection with her role in 'Les Misérables', that "I throw myself into the role, pull it over my body like a garment"

During the last time I have wondered a lot of all these shifts we do from one role to another. In the same day we will function either like this or like that. We enter and leave roles at many occasions. Maybe during the same day or during the working week.

The participants got the written introduction to the task and were then asked to write a short diary of their daily experiences of role shifts. What their thoughts and associations were, just as they experienced them (see appendix 2 for the instruction in Swedish).

In addition to these diaries I also had shorter talks to people (postgraduate students) in similar situations to get a better understanding of how people understood the idea of role shift. Was my own understanding appropriate or not? Is there any difference between tasks and roles or is it the same?

Finally some participants were interviewed with the same instruction as a basis but with complementary interactive questions if they lost the track. The reason for these interviews was two-fold. One reason because I wanted to assure some material for my study. The participants who were asked for writing the diary had a lot to do and could not assure me that they had enough time to produce the material I wanted. Another reason was to see if I could find any difference between those working at a governmental office and those working in an organisation put under the condition of competition. Even though the collection of the material was different I thought some similarities or differences could be found. The interviews lasted approximately 10-20 minutes and were written down in the course of the interview. As the interviews not were tape-recorded, the notes are short and abbreviated and not expressed exactly by the words of the interviewee, they were not analysed with the help of the MCA-Minerva programme.

### Participants

More than 11 participants got the instruction and were asked to write the diary. Most of these participants are teachers/instructors for unemployed adults or students with practical experience before they started to study again. Two participants are ministers/vicars in their professions. They were chosen because of their shifting tasks, need for flexibility and rapid change. They all also have a big contact area and a lot to do with other people.

Three employees in a governmental office were interviewed and one female accountant working on her own. Their situation is a bit different but all of them also have a work with high mental demands and rapid changes not planned for as they get a lot of calls disturbing their work. They also have a lot to do with other people, both individually and with officials from governmental offices.

Unfortunately even after reminding the participants not more than 4 returned the diaries, 3 teachers /instructors, and 1 vicar. Those who were interviewed were all men except for the female accountant; the others were 2 men and 2 women at different ages, ranging from 30 to 55 years.

### Analysis of material

The diary material was received in digital format (WinWord) and was then transformed to RTF-format. The material was examined by the help of the Meaning Constitution Analysis programme (MCA/Minerva). For a better understanding of the MCA-method see Sages & Dahl (1999).

The texts were split into meaning units and each unit was then characterised by different modalities. Those modalities are:

- belief (doxa-affirmation or absolute certainty, doxa-negation, possibility, probability, question)
- function (e.g. perceptive or "something that happens", imaginative, signitive or "vague"),
- time (past, present, future, empty)
- affect (aspiration, positive-prospective, pos-retrospective, neg-prospective, neg-retrospective)
- will (engagement, unengagement, wish-positive)
- property (e.g. my, its, their)
- subject (e.g. I, we, one-all)

Every meaning unit contains information about the participants thinking about the life world (Sages & Lundsten, 2003). Every meaning unit was analysed by attributing passive synthesis expressed as partial intentions. From this phase of the analysis entities and predicates are obtained of each meaning unit.

In the final phase of my analysis, my prime interest was to find out if the participants expressed themselves somehow about role shifts. I tried to find out how they expressed themselves about changes, and encounters with people. How did they use concepts related to time and need such as being well prepared in the job?

## Results

### Primary findings

A comparison of how the participants responded was made with respect to the different modalities.

From diagram 1, we can see that all four participants who wrote the diaries expressed

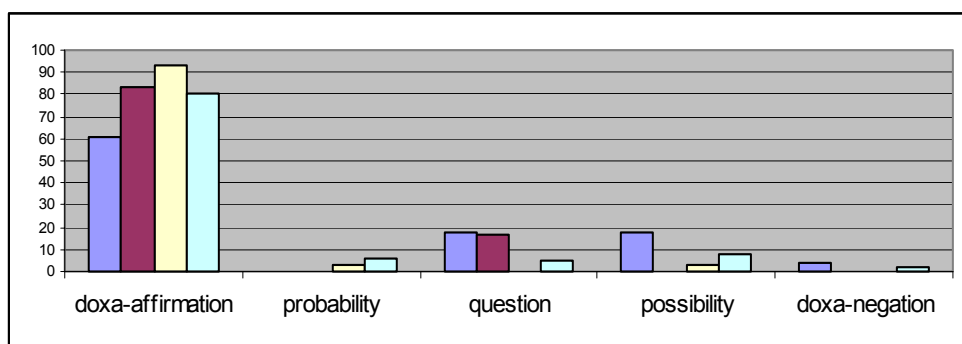


Diagram 1. Modality: Belief

themselves more or less in a doxa-affirmative way. This indicates that the participants knew what they were talking about. They did not question their thinking, they reported with certainty their experiences.

Diagram 2 shows the way the participants expressed themselves concerning the modality of affects. Even in this modality there was similarity in the way of responding. They all mostly responded in a neutral way. One participant to some extent used a negative-retrospective way of expressing him-/herself.

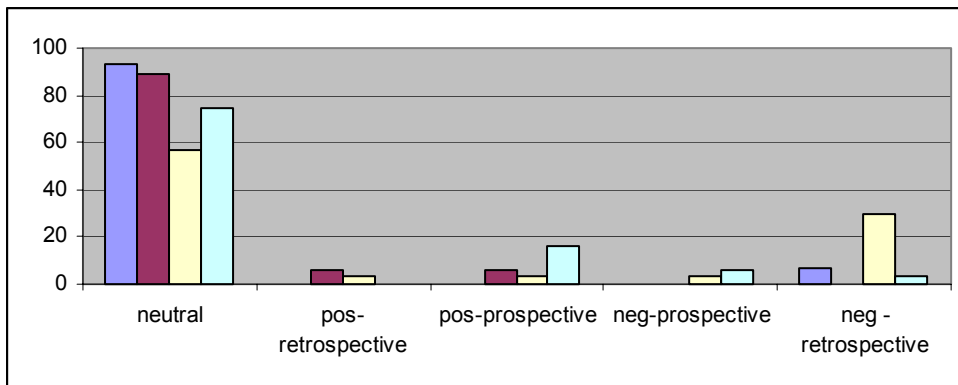


Diagram 2. Modality: Affect

I examined more closely those who expressed themselves most varied (i.e. less neutral) concerning the affect. The result I perceived was that they connected positive-prospective modalities with hope for making changes in their situation, to reserve more time in their agenda and if they saw positive evolution in their area of responsibility. On the contrary their negative-retrospective modalities were associated with inefficiency, people who take their time, and that there is not time enough. The table below lists some of predicates filtered with the affect modality.

Table 1. Predicates filtered with positive-prospective and negative-restrospective category

Positive-prospective	Negative-retrospective
Book time in my agenda before & after	To be back on zero
Who wants to start the course	Inefficiency with capital letters
Two students who want to start	Being grabbed away from the meeting
Need time to 'sink in'	That can not be reached in due time
	Who can not adjust oneself properly
	Idiotically to agree
	Can last almost 30 minutes

Diagram 3 shows the modality of Will. Here we see a more divers way of expressing one-self. First of all the participants express themselves in engagement or not at all. Some participants express themselves in a varied way and use all of the categories. The category ‘aspiration’ in this analysis is used in the sense of ‘others aspiration’ upon you. This indicates situations where you cannot decide yourself but are the ‘will-less object’ of others desires and demands. Two of the participants seem to be under this condition and are accompanied with a distinct lower engagement.

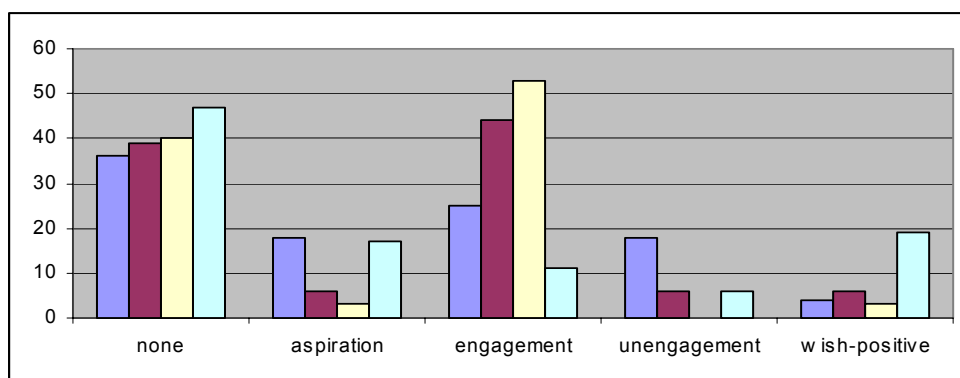


Diagram 3. Modality: Will

How do they express themselves concerning encounters, contacts, meeting other people and be in touch with others? From the entity-predicate analysis some examples are shown in table 2.

Table 2. Entities and predicates about contacts with students, visitors, ‘customers’

Students / clients / visitors	Students who want to quit and you have to deal with Student who enters in the middle of a lesson Groups who can cause you worry before entering A student who wants to quit due to personal reasons Many can come and who are quite new One has to talk The teaching can work well He can start the next week Mail that demands Who can grab you Talk to a student Calls that exist They have to take their consequences Students that can show up To meet people in the line
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These examples show that the participants meet people, in this case, students, visitors or 'customers' in as well a systematic way as situations not planned for, situations in which the participant is a 'will-less object'. People can come and grab them and disturb them in occupied situations. Telephone calls and mails require action, people in person requiring talk. The calls and talks can require time not accounted for and can be difficult to shorten.

"I decide to skip the mails and only listen to the answering machine. From which one did cost me almost 2 hours work"

In some occasions these encounters and situations seem to give satisfaction e.g. when a lecture works well.

"Nice feeling to teach. To be honest I dwelled in this role a little bit longer in order not to take action at my writing desk with all the things waiting for me"

But most of the cases give the impression of 'tiredness' and always being available. Some translated examples show this as well:

"To take time for the one I meet in the corridor"

"A student enters just in the middle [of the lesson] and must talk to me, [...] he feels psychologically quite bad. I ask him to calm down"

"Meeting with colleagues ... Everything is extending over time and I can't engage anymore. As soon as the meeting is 'fading' I excuse myself and leave the building due to tiredness"

"The report to SCB is supposed to be digitally, but it doesn't work of course, so I have to do it by phone. Another 30 minutes"

Table 3 shows some examples how the participants thought about time and changes. One impression was that the participants did not express themselves explicitly about time and changes very often. Filtering the entities with respect to 'time' and similar expressions did not give many findings. Some translated examples from the diaries are:

"When I'm off duty I need several hours without anything to do"

"I send the students for a coffee break and sit down in order to find a substitute"

"I still haven't checked the mail or the telephone. I know I have a lot to do for the laboration tomorrow "

Table 3. Entities and predicates about time and changes

Time / changes	Who can not reach in time Changes that can be many during a day or week Schedule exist Need time to put things in order both in brain and on desk All the time Agenda exist Days that can be long That can not really be reached Time that does not exist during working day That often does not exist That could be booked before and after That you could take Timeschedule that often is to tight.
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On filtering the material with respect to entities similar to ‘be prepared’ for the task, ‘rushing’ or adjusting gave a result like those examples in table 4.

Table 4. Entities and predicates about being prepared, rushing, adjusting

Prepared / rushing / adjusting	That have to be alert all the time That can not finish things Can be ‘here & there’ That must keep in memory Feels like lose ends are hanging around Changes that can be many during a day or week Can be psychologically demanding Adjusting time to put things in order That anyhow has to be prepared Time to move exist That can not be reached That have to be calm & peaceful To sink into Who can study, read and plan That can last for several hours That can be badly prepared Who starts to improvise Fells like everything is under control
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Some translated examples from the diaries illustrate this as well:

“I go back to the group and start improvising. It seems not to be very serious”

“Even though they are ‘small’ they have to be prepared”

“I am irritated that I didn’t take the chance that it should have worked, but still I am pleased that I don’t have to worry any longer” (The participant was working long hours during the night in order to prepare a lesson)

One of the participants reflected him-/herself upon the situation after writing the diary. Two interesting reflections were these:

”A good day where the teaching has been in focus. Feels like I have shorter recovering time e.g. I start up with my job at home much earlier and last much longer. I am convinced this is due to that my day has been less divided. Yet it is always true that I am not capable of preparing myself for the tasks tomorrow directly after the administrative tasks.”

”Another thought that strikes me [...] is that I easily can adjust from teaching [...] to administration [...] but not in the reverse order. To go from administration to e.g. correct student tasks is quite impossible for me. I need time there and not only 10 minutes, rather hours.”

How did the participants who were interviewed express themselves? Some statements are of interest.

Interviewee A:

“It is funny when you put yourself in different roles: other people treat you differently, normally you are just T, the joker, and they think they know you and you are categorised. At other moments, in a different role, you and your competence are not questioned. A changed attitude from the colleagues”

“It is stimulating to enter different roles. A positive and interesting experience”

Interviewee B:

“Normally I do not experience different roles. I take my papers and go. Maybe sometimes when presenting something for the board otherwise not. I try to imagine the questions that will be put forward but sometimes I focus more on the technical content when the questions are about totally different issues”



“Role shifts exist but I have not thought about it [...] as long as I can exercise heavy-weight lifting during lunchtime. It clears my thoughts. I feel discomfort if I do not have that opportunity.”

“I am normally accustomed to most of my surroundings. In new situation, of course it needs preparation, a process both conscious and unconscious”

#### Interviewee C

“Frustration, no, perhaps if I was forced to do that and that.”

“An enormous freedom, I am alone, here is a playground and I have a responsibility within the whole.”

“There is never a lack of tasks. I never have to ask myself what to do now?”

“There is a confidence from the leaders in what we do and a security in the environment”

#### Interviewee D:

“When I have to go to the governmental office I prefer to do that in the morning. I have to be alert to 100%”

“Certainly I play different roles, depending on who the client is, how much I can reveal, how friendly or strict I have to be”

“If a client visit me and at the same time I get a call, I normally ask them if I can call them back, because I behave differently to different clients”

#### Difference between interviews and diaries

The interviewees from the governmental office did not show the same degree of needing adjusting time and as I performed these interviews at the end I had the opportunity to ask two of them what they thought about this difference. One of them referred mainly to the opportunity to exercising during lunchtime, which cleared his mind. He also referred to his independence and the boss not hanging on his shoulders. The other mainly referred to the well-known settings and his freedom and not to be forced to do this and that in connection with the confidence the leaders had.

The female accountant had no problem as long as the time-schedule worked and things could be planned for and performed in a certain order. On the contrary, if the time-schedule of some reason not could be followed or if things not could be planned in a certain order it could get chaotic.

## Discussion

### Role shifts

First of all I will try to make a clearer distinction between task and role. In the text I have so far used both words and I find it difficult myself to say this is a role and that is only a different task within the same role. Still I find the participants show that there are different roles within their work. One of the interviewees clearly indicates this and he finds it even stimulating and he sees how other colleagues treat him differently depending on which role he has.

Westlander (1993) says that roles need two parties. There is both an expectation and interpretation in the interactive play. This must mean that most of the activities involving role-taking is in connection with other people. The material confirms that unexpected and stressing moments somehow is connected with other people. You have to be alert, be prepared for the unexpected, you are not 'mentally adjusted' and mostly it seems that you have to stand up for others expectations. Goffman (1959) uses the term 'presenting oneself' which also implies a connection with other people.

I do not get the impression from the participants that the shifts in roles are in themselves stressful but that there is a lack of time. A time for reflection or/and adjusting.

### Time for reflection and adjusting

The diary-writing participants expressed a need for time for adjusting or reflecting. They needed this time to let things 'sink in' or to put things in order in the 'brain' or to get ready mentally to start their next task. One participant used the expression 'loose ends hanging around' and a need or wish to find time to tighten them up.

I was surprised myself to read in the reflections of one of the participants that from task A to B, there was no problem to shift, but to shift from B to A he/she needed a lot of time. Similar statement I got with my talk to the postgraduate students that they could easily shift from writing on their work and then in the afternoon go teaching, but not the other way around. When I made my last interview with the accountant I got a similar answer. She preferred to go to the governmental office in the morning, because she had to be 100% alert, and she did not want to be disturbed by clients in the morning.

What tasks or roles demand this extra time? I will come back to this later when discussing the results in connection with the SRK-model. These statements from the

participants also show clearly the need for time shifting from certain tasks to other. This is in accordance with both the concept of adjusting time ('ställtid') by Jönsson (1999) and the idea not to split the working day too much as DeMarco (2002) proposes in his book.

### 'Preparedness' for the unexpected

One of the participants found him-/herself focusing on one thing while the need was for something else. Another had to improvise and/or 'send the students for a coffee break' while trying to solve another problem. A third was grabbed by students after a meeting and asked for an answer with the mind still somewhere else. If this happens once it can be thrilling and stimulating to look back upon afterwards if successfully solved. But if it happens more often it can be frustrating. Maslach & Leiter (1997) and Karasek & Theorell (1990) both have the control dimension as one of the important ingredients if a person is at risk for burnout.

On aspect of the control dimension, as expressed by the participants, is the need for always being prepared for what can happen next. Analysing the material gives me the impression that the participants always live under the risk for something unexpected to happen, always be on service for someone else and maybe not mastering the situation as they want to. They are to some extent used to this but can often be trapped in the unexpected situation.

"...to take time for the one I meet in the corridor, in the line at the cash desk..."

"Few students arrived, where are the rest and who is the ordinary teacher?. Do I have to go and look for them or do they have to take the consequences..." [participant working temporarily as test leader]

One participant expressed it as 'idiotic' to give the service asked for, and thus loose time and in turn maybe get more frustrated.

"Idiotically I agree to help them on standing foot. They point at their code and wonders what is wrong with it ... That you never learn! It took me 30 min to localise the fault. It should normally take less, but slow in my head after the meeting, I missed the obvious."

### Completing the SRK-model

With the above examples in mind I will return to the SRK-model of Rasmussen (1987). At the skill-based level things are made more or less automatically. At the rule-based level things are handled from an 'If ... Then ...'-way of thinking. At the knowledge-based level the individual's problem solving capabilities are asked for.

The results I got made me think a bit differently than from the beginning. It seems that the well-known e.g. programming, writing on the thesis or regularly meet new groups with a certain agenda is not always 'simple' even if familiar. According to the SRK-model problems on the knowledge-based level should be more of an unfamiliar type of situation, but here it seems that even in familiar, repeated tasks there is a need for adjusting time. And for what is this adjusting time needed?

I think that certain circumstances and situations demand that you open up your mind. Could it be to be prepared for the unexpected or to find all loose ends again or to open up all 'doors to different compartments in the brain'? DeMarco (2002, p26) refer this to 'extra cost' for sinking in to mentally intensive activity. Among the statements from the participants there are lot of examples confirming this. The SRK-model as presented by Rasmussen (1987) does not give any example of this type of activities.

#### The difference between interviews and diaries

When looking at the differences between interviews and diaries it must be borne in mind that there are at least two major possibilities of error. First of all the participants interviewed and those writing diaries come from totally different organisations and environment. They all encounter a lot of people, they all have mentally demanding tasks but still it can not be safe to say that they can easily be compared. Secondly a person being interviewed will probably express him/herself differently in front of the interviewer than a person writing a diary.

#### Final conclusion

From this I conclude that at the knowledge-based level there are at least two kinds of demands. First: the demand for problem solving capacity for the unfamiliar problem. Second: that even in familiar situations, the demand for 'opening up' and bring to the fore all threads and possibilities in order to be e.g. creative in programming or to follow and guide a group in team-building activities or to prepare for a sermon. At least the second type, opening up, seems to need adjusting time, which the participants did not find sufficient or had to take from evenings or nights.

This pilot study shows that some activities and especially those involving different types of encounters and activities involving 'opening' up the mind need time for getting into the role. In situations where you are in a better control of the situation, where you can better plan your activities, it seems that there is not the same problem.

As more and more companies work with less distinct boundaries and their need for multiskilled people is increasing it is important to bear in mind the difficulties and implications it can have on the individuals health and at the end even the effectiveness of the work.

This study is an attempt to find out how people experience role shifts if they are aware of any. The study shows that there are role shifts even if the participants do not use the term themselves or think about it actively. The concept of role shift is vague in the context for this study and further studies could explore this further. The different settings between the participants call for a more local approach when investigating the issue of role shifts further. Another suggestion for further study is to find out how widely spread this phenomena is and what can be done to increase the awareness of the problem and hence avoid people risking burnout.

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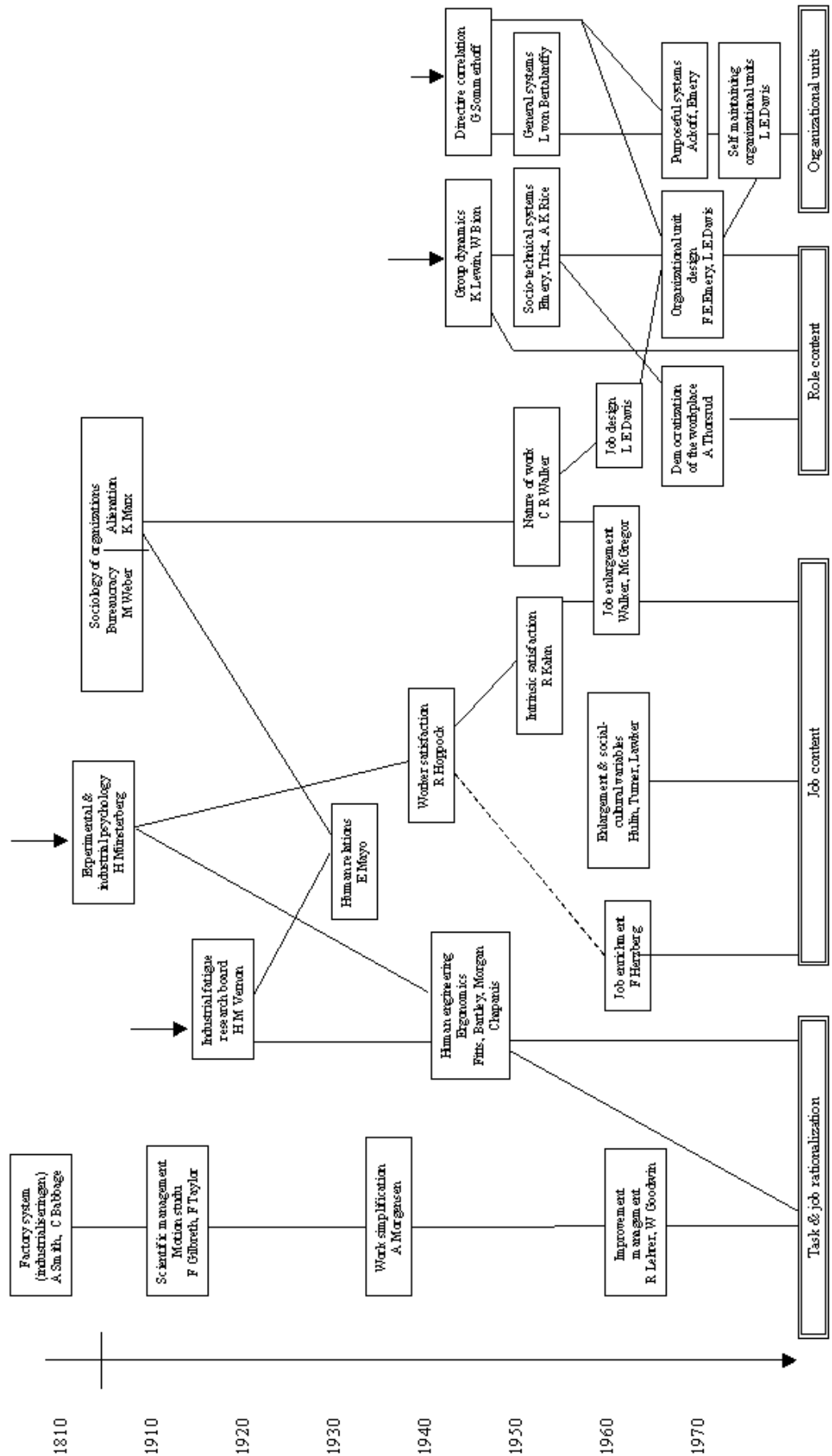
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Appendix 1

# Genealogy of work

Based on Design of Jobs, (1979), 2ed, L.E.Davis & J.C.Taylor





## Appendix 2

### Rollskiften

I Sydsvenskan beskrev Carola för en tid sedan, i samband med sin roll i "Les Misérables" att hon "kastar sig in i rollen, trär den över kroppen som ett plagg".

Under den senaste tiden har jag funderat på alla de skiften vi gör mellan olika roller. Under samma dag ska vi fungera än som det ena än som det andra. Vi går in i och ut ur roller vid många tillfällen. Kanske under samma dag eller under arbetsveckan.

Jag skulle vilja att du funderar på och skriver ner de tillfällen du upplever att du skiftar/byter roller under din arbetsdag/arbetsvecka. Hur upplever du dessa rollskiften?

Försök beskriva dina tankar, upplevelser, idéer och associationer runt omkring detta, precis så som du upplever dem och såsom du vill nedteckna dem.

För mig är det viktigast att du skriver ner dina upplevelser och inte hur du skriver, Jag bryr mig inte om stavfel eller ordval. Det är inte fråga om uppsats i svenska utan korta tankar kring rollskiften.

Gör detta under några arbetsdagar, kanske en arbetsvecka.

*Translated into English*

*In the newspaper 'Sydsvenskan' Carola described some time ago, in connection with her role in 'Les Misérables', that "I throw myself into the role, pull it over my body like a garment"*

*During the last time I have wondered a lot of all these shifts we do from one role to another. In the same day we will function either like this or like that. We enter and leave roles at many occasions. Maybe during the same day or during the working week.*

*I would like you to consider and write about those situations when you experience a shift in roles during your working day / week. How do you feel about these role shifts?*

*Try to describe your thoughts, experiences, ideas and associations around these situations, exactly as how you experience them and as you want to write them down.*

*For me it is more important that you write them down and not how you write. I will not consider misspellings or selections of word. It is not an essay but short thoughts about role shifts.*

*Do this for a couple of days, maybe a week.*