

INFLUENCE OF URBAN PLANNERS' ROLE CONFLICT**James M. Mayo Jr., University of Kansas**

Planners have strived to understand the optimal ways to accomplish desired ends (Bolan, 1967; Hudson, 1979; Galloway, 1979). Many descriptive studies have illustrated the dilemma of planners attempting to use selected strategies in various roles to accomplish desired outcomes (Altshuler, 1964; Rabinovitz, 1969; Catanese & Farmer, 1978). Empirical analysis of planners' role performance, however, has been lacking but planners have recognized the importance of realizing their capacities and limits in their roles (Jacobs, 1979:63). What hindrances can planners expect in their roles?

The planner faces two questions: How able am I in doing my work. How much am I being constrained by my agency to get the job done? Planners experience two types of role conflict. First, they may feel that they lack the personal ability to perform the role. Role conflict is an individual condition. Second, planners may perceive that their organization constrains them from performing the role. In this circumstance, role conflict is a group situation. Does conflict result from the working environment, personal life experiences outside of work, or a combination of both circumstances? Such knowledge is needed in understanding the limits and potential for planners when they attempt to resolve planning problems. What roles do planners use?

Bolan and Nuttall (1975:26) identify nine roles as being useful in practice to planners and politicians: 1) a community knowledgeable, 2) initiator, 3) a technical expert, 4) an expert on process, 5) public leader, 6) a mediator, 7) in a judge role, 8) vetopower role, and 9) coalition maker.

CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

Role conflict may result from ascribed, socioeconomic, organizational and professional characteristics as reflected in Figure 1.

For ascribed considerations, older personnel tend to experience less conflict in work (Dewar & Werbel 1979; Quinn & Staines 1979; and Smith et al 1969), and nonwhites tend to be more frustrated than whites in being successful in their jobs (Alderfer & Guzzo, 1989). In studies on sex as it relates to work conflict,

however, findings have been inconclusive (Miller, 1975). Employees who earn more income experience more job satisfaction than do lesser paid employees (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Better educated workers have not been found to be more satisfied in their jobs than the less-educated (Goldman, 1978; Kalleberg, 1977). However, planners who want politics in their work tend to be more highly educated and role conflict seems imminent when planners are unable to dictate outcomes (Buck, 1976:21). Familism as a personal life style and community involvement outside of work have not been addressed in empirical studies for planners.

Large organizations have more worker tension than smaller groups (Kahn et al, 1964; and Porter and Lawler, 1965). Long term employees are more satisfied with their jobs than are short term employees or personal with high job turnover (Dubin, Champoux & Lawler, 1975; Porter & Steers, 1973). Some studies have found that decentralized management decreases work conflict (Worthy, 1950; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1969). Others have found the opposite to be true (Carzo & Yanowzas, 1969). Decentralization, does provide the opportunity for more shared leadership responsibilities. Personnel with higher job positions and with more roles tend to experience less conflict and satisfaction in their work (Gurin, Veroff, Feld, 1960; Morse, 1953; Hackman, Lawler, 1971; Shepard, 1970).

Professional variables, as defined in this study, appear not to have been used to predict role conflict for planners. These variables include professional involvement outside of work and years of professional practice.

CONSTRUCTION OF INSTRUMENT

The initial questions in the questionnaire were oriented to ascribed characteristics, socioeconomic conditions, organizational characteristics, and professionalism. In transposing answers from respondents, some alterations were made. Race was defined as white and nonwhite, and marital status was married or unmarried. Familism was formed by three variables. If a planner was a married, noted a religious affiliation and had more than two people living within the household, a score of

one was given for each indicator, and summed for a familism score. Centralization of management was defined by a ratio between responses for the number of managerial positions and the agency's size. Management style was defined by the scale developed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958).

Respondents were asked the importance of each of the planner roles in their work, and to evaluate their personal ability to perform these roles, and to indicate how their organizations constrain them in these roles. Conflict scores for each role were established from responses to role questions.

ADMINISTRATION OF INSTRUMENT

The sample was formed by selecting every fifth agency in the 1976 directory of the National Association of Regional Councils. This strategy was used in an attempt to obtain an even geographical distribution within the United States. Planning directors for these agencies were contacted and asked to submit the names of their personnel than they considered to function as planners. In case of nonresponse the agencies listed immediately before and after the nonresponding agency were identified. Between these two listings, one agency was randomly selected and then contacted for obtaining planner names for the sample. After receiving all of the planner lists, 100 percent sampling was used.

Survey questions were mailed in the spring of 1977 to 865 public planners. When a planner did not respond within four weeks of the initial mailing, another questionnaire was sent. The response rate was 62 percent.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The role conflict scores for personal inability and organizational constraint were factored on separate computer runs. Oblique rotation was used, because oblique factors tend to explain the variance of clustered items more than orthogonal factors.

The next analytical step was to determine which variables explain role conflict as defined by the resulting factors. All four types of indicator variables — ascribed, socioeconomic, organizational and professional — were used simultaneously to predict role conflict through stepwise regression.

DEFINING ROLE CONFLICT

In Table 1 the factor patterns for role conflict

in personal ability and organizational constraint are similar, and the factors generated for both types of conflict are defined as political and technical. The public leader, mediator, judge, veto power, and coalition maker roles are identified as being political. In all these roles, it is necessary for a planner to negotiate or make decisions with other people — the public, public administrators and planners. These roles focus on special management of planner problems. The community knowledgeable, initiator, technical expert, expert on process, and judge roles are seen as technical. The combination of these roles emphasize skills. The technical planner must be able to initiate a view of a problem, analyze it, and then make a decision based upon analysis.

Political and technical role conflict are not mutually independent. A planner who experiences personal inability in political roles experiences the same conflict in technical roles. The Pearson correlation between these types of conflict is significant ($R = .46$). The same pattern exists for planners who experience organizational constraints in the performance of their roles ($R = .49$).

If political roles are only valued, planners emphasize lobbying, mobilizing support and neutralizing opposition. The political roles are identified in this study can be related to their findings. A planner may use the mediator role to lobby. The public leader and coalition maker roles are helpful to mobilize support. Finally, a planner can try to use the judge and vetopower roles of neutralize opposition.

When technical roles are only valued, planners are committed to analysis and technical quality. For analysis, the planner can use the initiator role for identifying problems, the community knowledgeable role for knowing the facts, and the judge role for evaluating results. Planners may commit themselves to technical quality by emphasizing their roles as a technical expert and as expert on process.

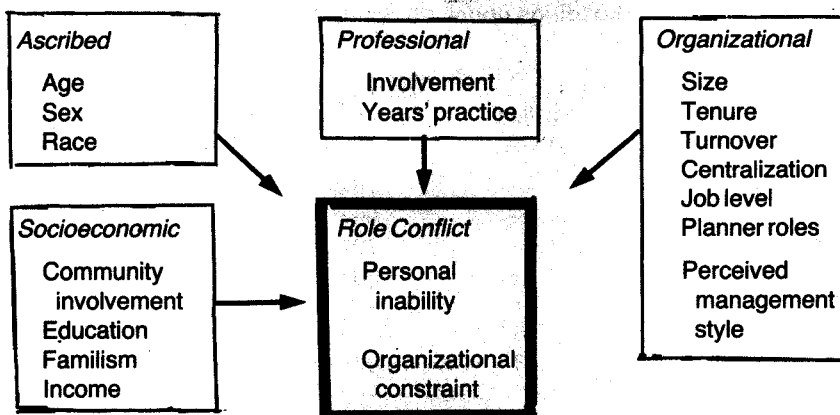
Planners who feel that political roles are important can face more problems than planners preferring technical roles. In the factor analysis, political roles explain role conflict about two to three times as much as did technical ones. Planners who identify themselves as political or hybrids may experience more personal inabilities and more constraint from their organizations than technical planners.

TABLE 1: FACTOR LOADINGS PATTERN FOR PLANNER ROLE CONFLICT
(Loadings under .25 omitted)

<i>Planner Role</i>	<i>Personal Inability</i>		<i>Organization Constraint</i>	
	Political Roles	Technical Roles	Political Roles	Technical Roles
Knowing Community Initiator	----	.75	----	.84
Technical Expert	----	.66	----	.67
Process Expert	----	.73	----	.79
Public Leader	.81	----	.78	----
Mediator	.76	----	.76	----
Judge	.43	.27	.51	.30
Veto Power	.80	----	.84	----
Coalition Maker	.81	----	.80	----
Explained variance	37.1%	15.3%	43.4%	15.9%

TABLE 2: SIGNIFICANT BETA COEFFICIENTS FOR ROLE CONFLICT

<i>Variable Type</i>	<i>Personal Inability</i>		<i>Organization Constraint</i>	
	Political Roles	Technical Roles	Political Roles	Technical Roles
<i>Ascribed</i>				
Age	----	.09	----	----
Race	----	.08	----	----
Sex	----	----	----	----
<i>Socioeconomic</i>				
Community—Involved	----	----	-.07	----
Education	----	----	----	----
Familism	-.14	-.11	----	-.09
Income	----	----	----	.09
<i>Organizational</i>				
Size	----	----	----	----
Tenure	----	----	.07	----
Job Turnover	----	.07	----	----
Centralization	----	----	----	----
Job Position	----	----	.10	.08
Number of roles	----	-.06	-.16	-.14
Management style	----	----	----	.07
<i>Professional</i>				
Involvement	----	----	----	.10
Years' Practice	----	----	----	----
MULTIPLE R	.14	.17	.20	.23
Explained Variance	1.9%	2.7%	4.0%	5.5%

FIGURE 1: INDICATOR MODEL OF ROLE CONFLICT FOR PLANNERS**INFLUENCES ON ROLE CONFLICT**

Which independent variables explain role conflict for personal inability and organizational constraint? The conceptual model in Figure 1 was tested. Table 2 shows the multiple regression results with the listing of standardized regression or beta coefficients.

PERSONAL INABILITY

Ascribed variables weakly explain to personal inability. Sex is not significant. Planners who are older and white tend to be more concerned about their ability to perform in technical roles. This study confirms earlier research that older employees tend to have more job conflict. Planners may feel that the demand for technical knowledge is increasing, but their educational training is becoming dated when new techniques are introduced. They may become critical of their skills as they face planning problems in practice.

Whites experience more personal inability in technical roles than nonwhites. There are a number of possible interpretations. First, since whites tend to be more educated and have better jobs, whites may feel that their jobs are more complex and demanding. On the other hand, planners go where the problems are, and nonwhites may feel more confident than whites about the technical skills needed to address within minority communities.

For socioeconomic variables, community involvement, education and income are not significant, but familism is important. Planners who emphasize familism as a life style tend to have less conflict in political and technical roles than other planners. Familism may be

viewed as being therapeutic or as a substitute for achieving success. The family can provide self-confidence to an individual by praising personal ability in skills. On the other hand, some planners may be less concerned about how they perform in work when compared to their family concerns. If they do, these planners reduce role conflict associated with personal inability.

None of the organizational characteristics predict political role conflict, and job turnover and the number of planner roles are the only variables to predict conflict in technical roles. Planners with high job turnover tend to feel less able in technical roles than planners with low job turnover. Planners who remain in an agency long enough to understand its planning problems are probably more able to adapt their skills to these problems.

When planners have fewer roles, conflict in technical roles is greater and more concentrated than for planners with more roles. Sieber (1974:573-574) emphasizes that actors who strategically accumulate roles allow for some of their roles to act as buffers for other roles thereby reducing tension. This pattern appears to occur for planners.

Professional characteristics, professional involvement and years of professional practice, are not found to affect planners' perceptions of their abilities.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSTRAINT

None of the ascribed characteristics are significant, and only three socioeconomic characteristics mildly explain role conflict experienced through organizational constraint. A

planner's community involvement, which is considered to be voluntary and not job related, tends to reduce conflict in political roles. While the influence is small, the relationship does demonstrate that politically oriented planners use community involvement to improve their skills and to sustain their desires to exert social influence. Buck (1976: 23) has found that community involvement outside of work by planners was related to their willingness to accept politics in their jobs.

For technical roles, familism and income mildly predict role conflict. Planners who emphasize familism as a life style experience less organizational constraint than other planners. They value their family commitments more than those at work, or they receive psychological support from their families to prepare them for conflict at work. Planners with higher incomes tend to feel more constrained by their organizations in technical roles than planners with lower incomes. When planners with technical skills are paid more than individuals with fewer skills, the skilled planners can feel unable to make use of their abilities to influence planning outcomes. Planners with mathematical modeling skills or practitioners who have perfected their interpersonal skills are often frustrated with the ineptness of bureaucratic routine in resolving problems.

Organizational characteristics predict role conflict due to organizational constraints more than other types of variables. Planners who have more years of service with their current organizations tend to feel more constrained in political roles. As people in organizations evolve from being neophytes to veterans, they may negotiate for holding or obtaining political roles within their agencies. In doing so, they can encounter conflict, because political roles are often institutionally guarded.

Planners with high job positions feel constrained in political and technical roles. Planners can depend upon political skills and/or technical expertise to reconcile problems between groups or separate interests. As a planner has a higher position, decision responsibility is greater, and conflict may be unavoidable. The importance of decisions also increases when groups can not resolve their problems. Management personnel who are boundary spanners between groups often experience role conflict (Organ & Green, 1972; Adams,

1976; & Miles, 1976). Whetton (1978) has found that agency directors can satisfy community leaders and staff separately but not together. Yet planning directors prefer their jobs having political roles more than staff. Weick (1967:203) comments that people who experience conflict are achievement oriented and set goals, and they persist significantly longer in the face of insolvable problems than do persons with less conflict. Planners in high positions may seek conflict to enjoy the opportunity to resolve it.

Planners who have more roles tend to experience less conflict in political and technical roles. Planners who accumulate roles allow for some roles to be tension buffers when planning problems affect other roles. These findings appear to contradict job position results, because planners with high positions also have more roles. A separate analysis indicated that there exists a significant contingency between job position and number of planner roles. There are a number of planners who have a high job position with few roles, and these planners experience more role conflict than other planners. Karasek (1979:292) has found that workers who have low decision latitude and high job demands tend to experience job strain. As a result, planners in high positions and with many roles will be in conflict situations, but they are able to stabilize themselves in roles where planning problems are not critical. As these planners have fewer roles, which results in lower decision latitude, they are unable to circumvent restraints within their organizations. As a result, they have conflict in their roles.

Planners who work under a decentralized management style tend to feel more constrained by their organizations in technical roles than planners under centralized management, but staff planners may perceive that management is not providing adequate assistance in technical issues for resolving planning problems. They may not wish to be told "do it this way or else." On the other hand, planners can feel constrained when suggested advice is not forthcoming from their managers. Planners involved in professional activities experience conflict in technical roles. They widen their knowledge base in professional activities, and then feel constrained by their organizations to use their acquired skills.

CONCLUSION

Organizational characteristics are the best predictors, but none of the study's variables are strong indicators for role conflict. The explained variance for each role conflict factor is quite low. The results do confirm many traditional findings, but explanations for a planner's role conflict should be directed elsewhere.

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