

# The Fundamental Assumptions of Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Approach and Their Implications for Administration

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*In this paper, Rogers' perception of man and his views on the role of society are examined. The author indicates that the foundation blocks of the person-centered approach are the assumptions that (1) man is at core a trustworthy organism striving toward constructive development and (2) the individual should be freed from the domination of any agency outside himself. The author also agrees that Rogers' person-centered approach is revolutionary in nature.*

*The person-centered approach advocates more equal power-sharing among organizational members; emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development; and pays special attention to the feeling side of organizational life. Because of its humanistic and democratic nature, the person-centered approach can have significant implications for the field of administration. However, since Rogers fails to deal with the problems of domination and manipulation at a more fundamental level, the "revolutionary" person-centered approach faces the danger of being used as a tool to manipulate employees. Further treatment of the problems of domination, contradiction and deprivation seem necessary if the approach is to escape this dilemma.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Carl Rogers is best known as the founder of client-centered therapy, his influence is not limited to the field of psychotherapy. As originator of the "person-centered approach," Rogers has had a tremendous impact in many fields. Academicians and practitioners in such diverse fields as psychology, psychiatry, education, social work, religion, and administration are likely to find Rogers' innovations in non-directive counseling, encounter groups, student-centered teaching, group-centered leadership, person-centered marriage and coupling, etc., highly relevant and inspirational. There is no doubt that Rogers, because of the far-reaching effects of his work, is one of the most prominent social scientists of this century.

It goes without saying that the above mentioned innovations have helped Rogers attain his world-wide reputation. However, they are only part of the reason for his lasting influence; his influence mainly stems from his profound belief in certain basic assumptions embedded in his person-centered approach, assumptions which reflect his passionate regard for humanistic values and his strong faith in the goodness of human nature. Richard Farson demonstrates this point well:

I would predict, therefore, that we may see, in the not too distant future, a dramatic resurgence of interest in Rogerian psychology. Not because his methods are more patent or intensive or exciting. They aren't. But because they **dignify us as persons** (emphasis added).

The issue of human dignity has been a great concern for many students of administration who perceive the all-pervasive bureaucratic organization as casting a shadow on people's lives;<sup>2</sup> treating people as insignifi-

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Farson, "Carl Rogers, Quiet Revolutionary," in Richard I. Evans, Dialogue With Carl Rogers (New York: Praeger, 1981), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Denhardt, In the Shadow of Organization (Lawrence, Kan.: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981).

cant;<sup>3</sup> making their lives meaningless;<sup>4</sup> and contributing to the desparation or rootlessness of individual experience.<sup>5</sup> In their eyes, if people are to be freed from the domination of organizations, a reformulation of the mode of organizing is necessary. Rogers' person-centered approach, because of its humanistic overtones, appears to offer significant insights for this reformulation. The purpose of this paper is to examine the basic assumptions of Rogers' person-centered approach and to explore its possible implications for administration. The emphasis will be on the two foundation stones of the approach: Rogers' thoughts on human nature and his view of the role of society, rather than his various techniques and theories.

## THE FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH

### Rogers' Perception of Man

The foundation of the person-centered approach is the assumption that **man is at core a trustworthy organism.**<sup>6</sup> It is on this trust in the individual that Rogers builds his person-centered approach, and it is here that the analysis of his fundamental assumptions will begin.

Rogers believes that there is an "actualizing tendency" in every organism, that moves toward the constructive fulfillment of its potentiality.<sup>7</sup> The behavior of an organism is always in the positive direction of maintaining and enhancing itself. Man as an organism also has this natural tendency

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<sup>3</sup> William G. Scott and David K. Hart, *Organizational America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Ralph P. Hummel, *The Bureaucratic Experience*, 2nd ed., (New York: St. Martin's, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind* (New York: Vintage, 1974).

<sup>6</sup> Carl Rogers, "The Foundations of A Person-Centered Approach," in Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 113-136.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

inside himself which moves toward wholeness, toward more complete and complex development, toward self-regulation, and toward an independence from external control. Unfavorable conditions can disturb but can never destroy this actualizing tendency--unless the whole organism is destroyed. Rogers has, more than once, referred to the following experience to illustrate this organismic actualizing tendency.<sup>8</sup> The description of the experience is so very revealing and touching that it is worth of quoting at length:

I remember that in my boyhood, the bin in which we stored our winter's supply of potatoes was in the basement, several feet below a small window. The conditions were unfavorable, but the potatoes would begin to sprout--pale white sprouts, so unlike the healthy green shoots they sent up when planted in the soil in the spring. But these sad, spindly sprouts would grow two or three feet in length as they reached toward the distant light of the window. The sprouts were, in their bizarre, futile growth, a sort of desperate expression of the directional tendency I have been describing. They would never become plants, never mature, never fulfill their real potential. But under the most adverse circumstances, they were striving to become. Life would not give up, even if it could not flourish.<sup>9</sup>

In the same manner, on the basis of his therapeutic experience, Rogers maintains that the actualizing tendency exists in every individual including mentally troubled persons whose lives seem abnormal:

Yet the directional tendency in them [the mentally troubled] is to be trusted. The clue to understand their behavior is that they are striving, in the only way they perceived as available to them, to move toward growth, toward becoming. To us the results may seem bizarre and futile, but they are life's desperate attempt to become itself. It is this potent constructive tendency which is the underlying basis of the person-centered therapy and all that has grown out of it.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Carl Rogers, Carl Rogers on Personal Power (New York: Delacorte, 1977), p. 8., and Rogers, A Way of Being, p.118.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers, On Personal Power, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid..

Rogers' second basic assumption about human nature is that man desires a relationship which is safe, intimate, and communicative. This tendency might be blocked and the individual might become isolated or hostile, but the fundamental tendency is toward having a meaningful social relationship.<sup>11</sup> When people are offered a nonthreatening psychological climate, as in the case of client-centered therapy, they tend to move toward a relationship in which they can be their true selves; can communicate this real self to others in a genuine form; and can relate to others in an intimate, non-disguised way. (The relationship in client-centered therapy is characterized by an attitude of **genuineness** on the part of therapist, in which his feelings and thoughts are expressed without any disguise; by an **unconditional positive regard** toward the client, which accepts the client as a unique individual with value in his own right; and by an **empathic understanding** which enables the therapist to see "reality" through the client's eyes)<sup>12</sup>.

In other words, to Rogers, man is not in nature irrational, unsocialized, and destructive of others; quite the contrary, man is basically "social," and has the deepest need for affiliation and communication with others. Therefore, we do not need to ask who will control man's aggressive impulses,

for as he becomes more open to all of his impulses, his need to be liked by others and his tendency to give affection will be as strong as his impulses to strike out or to seize for himself.... His total behavior, in these and other areas, as he moves toward being open to all his experience, will be more balanced and realistic, behavior which is appropriate to the survival and enhancement of a highly social animal. [emphasis added]<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Carl Rogers, "A Humanistic Conception of Man," in Richard Farson ed., Science and Human Affairs (Palo Alto, Ca.: Science and Behavior, 1965), p.26.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid..

Rogers' third basic assumption on human nature is that "man is wiser than his intellect."<sup>14</sup> By this Rogers means that the intellect or the "rational mind" is only a part of the total organismic experience: there are other parts as well -- feeling, intuition, and unconscious reaction. By being more aware of the whole array of his experience, and by trusting the total organismic experience instead of the limited "conscious thinking," man can be wiser, have better judgment and can be more creative and free.

One of the basic things which I was a long time in realizing, and which I am still learning, is that when an activity feels as though it is valuable or worth doing, it is worth doing. Put another way, I have learned that my total organismic sensing of a situation is more trustworthy than my intellect.... I have found that when I have trusted some inner non-intellectual sensing, I have discovered wisdom in the move.... I think of it as trusting the totality of my experience, which I have learned to suspect is wiser than my intellect.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the elements of feelings, hunches and impulses are not so dangerous and unpredictable that they need to be guarded by the consciousness. Rather, they are parts of and should be integrated with the natural process of organismic functioning. Only through this integration of nonconscious inner directions with awareness and conscious thought can an individual move forward "in a total, unified, integrated, adaptive and changing encounter with life and its challenges."<sup>16</sup> In short, for Rogers, the elements of impulses, feelings as well as thoughts, tend to be self-governing and thus make the whole organism trustworthy.<sup>17</sup>

Rogers' basic assumptions about human nature can then be summarized as follows: man has an actualizing tendency toward growth and develop-

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<sup>14</sup> Rogers, "Conception of Man," in Farson ed., Science and Human Affairs, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Rogers, On Becoming a Person, pp. 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers, On Personal Power, p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Rogers, "What It Means to Become a Person," in Rogers, On Becoming a Person, pp. 107-124.

ment; he is basically social and is longing for a relationship which can facilitate his process of "becoming"; and as he is functioning freely and well, his total organismic experience is trustworthy.

The questions then are (1) What is the significance of these underlying assumptions? and (2) How are they different from those of other prevailing psychological and sociological approaches? One of the better ways of answering these questions is to contrast Rogers' views with those of Freud, a thinker whose views on human nature appear to be the opposite of those of Rogers.

To Freud, the core of our being is the "id" which follows the pleasure principle and always demands instant, instinctual satisfaction. Therefore, if man's basic nature is released, destructive consequences are to be expected. Basically, Freud distrusts human nature:

The element of truth behind all this,... is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. *Homo homini lupus* [Man is a wolf to man].<sup>18</sup>

In short, Freud's view of human nature is quite pessimistic. To him man is at core a "savage beast" driven by the unconscious forces of sex and aggression toward selfish gratification; man is by no means a "trustworthy organism" striving toward self-actualization and meaningful social relationships.

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<sup>18</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition* (Vol. 21), (London: Hogarth, 1961), pp.110-111.

There are significant implications in these different conceptions of man; for these philosophical differences will ultimately manifest themselves in the treatment of various social issues. For instance, if one takes a Freudian point of view of human nature, one is likely to believe that man is distrustful and antisocial and thus needs guidance, regulation, reward and punishment from those in authority. Otherwise, social chaos will ensue. In other words, the locus of control lies outside the individual. On the other hand, if one takes a Rogerian view of human nature, one is likely to believe that an individual can make his own decisions, choose his own direction, and realize his own capacity as an autonomous person. In other words, the locus of control resides within the individual. Society does not have to power over the individual, to socialize (or to "shape") the individual. The individual will be self-socialized, and will move in a direction which is constructive to both the individual and society as a whole. These different conceptions of human nature can have important implications for the field of administration, and this will be discussed in the latter part of this paper.

### **Roger's View of Society's Role**

Because of his far-reaching influence, Rogers has been recognized increasingly as a "quiet" revolutionary":

Carl Rogers is not known for his politics. People are more likely to associate his name with widely acclaimed innovations in counseling technique, personality theory, philosophy of science, psychotherapy research, encounter group, student-centered teaching; .... each one a stunning contribution by itself. But in recent years, viewing the body of his work as a whole, I have come to think of him more as a political figure, a man whose cumulative effect on society has made him one of the most important social revolutionaries of our time.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Farson, "Quiet Revolutionary," p.xxviii.



It was just before the publication of **Carl Rogers on personal power** that Rogers showed explicit concern over the issue of politics in psychotherapy and various interpersonal relationships.<sup>20</sup> (Politics is defined by Rogers as "the process of gaining, using, sharing or relinquishing power, control, decision-making".<sup>21</sup>) Rogers himself says: "I've been practicing and teaching politics all my professional life and never realized it fully until now."<sup>22</sup> Yet, the political dimension is clearly embedded in the person-centered approach, and the book **Carl Roger on personal power** does have a very clear political orientation. The purpose of this section is to address the following questions: What are Rogers' positions on the issues of power, control, and freedom? What is his view of society's role? What make him a "social revolutionary"?

As presented in the previous section, the person-centered approach is based on the premise that man is at core a trustworthy organism. This premise greatly influences how the issues of power and control are treated in the person-centered approach. For instance, Rogers insists that the role of the therapist in psychotherapy is not to do anything to solve the client's problems, or to induce the client to see his problem in the way perceived by the therapist. Instead, Rogers maintains that the therapist should try to avoid making decisions for the client. It is the client who has to make his own decisions and take ownership of his feelings and thoughts. The therapist should function only as a facilitator, not an originator. In other words, in a Rogerian therapy, the locus of evaluation and the right to make decisions is completely in the hands of the client.

When the idea that **power and control should be placed at the hands of client** is extended to other social institutions, its political impact is

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<sup>20</sup> Rogers, Personal Power, pp.1-2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

tremendous. A person-centered approach would necessarily imply a more equal sharing of power in every social institution. The person-centered approach claims that not only the client in therapy but also the students in the class, members of the group, employees of the organization, and youngsters in the family should be trusted and empowered. And when this principle of trust and empowerment is extended to the members of society as a whole, a challenging political statement can be made: **power should be vested in the people and society should free the individual!**

To free the individual from domination by any source outside the individual himself is one of the major intents of the person-centered approach.<sup>23</sup> Rogers maintains that the locus of evaluation on value choices should be inside oneself. The valuing process should not be dominated by **introjected** social norms and values and the expectations of social others. In other words, the individual should be allowed an organismic way of valuing—that is, he should be allowed to trust and use the wisdom of his organism—his feelings, intuitions as well as thoughts. His ideas should be understood, respected as such; their validity should not be required to be certified by society.<sup>24</sup> However, for most people, this organismic valuing process is distorted, as they relinquish the locus of evaluation to others in order to get social approval, affection and esteem.<sup>25</sup> When people behave according to introjected values instead of following their own organismic valuing process, society has succeeded in exercising its control over the individual. For Rogers, this form of control causes a serious problem: since the socially derived values are not actually owned by the individual, they

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<sup>23</sup> Harry A Van Belle, Basic Intent and Therapeutic Approach of Carl Rogers (Toronto, Ont.: Wedge, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> Carl Rogers, "Toward a Modern Approach to Values: The Valuing Process in the Mature Person," in Carl Rogers, Person to Person (Lafayette, Ca.: Real People, 1967), pp. 13-28., and Carl Rogers, "A Modern Approach to the Valuing Process," in Carl Rogers, Freedom to Learn for the 80's (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1983), pp. 255-268.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid..

sometimes contradict the individual's experience, and since they are not tested by the individual's experience, they are usually fixed and rigid. Worst of all, the individual distrusts his own experience and thus creates an incongruence between self and experience and an alienation between the individual and society.<sup>26</sup>

The notion of alienation created by the imposition of alien social effects on the individual is not original. Freud provides a good account of how the cultural superego imposes the mechanism of repression upon the individual, creating the inevitability of guilt.<sup>27</sup> However, Rogers' resolution of this problem is quite different from that of Freud. What psychoanalysis does is to help the patient bring about some kind of working compromise between the superego and the id, and then return him to the society of like-minded men.<sup>28</sup> For Rogers, the therapist does not have to help the client to achieve this kind of compromise, and the individual is not required to tolerate introjected social preferences. Instead, the therapist, or to put it in a broader scale, the parents, the teachers, the group leaders, and the administrators, should provide an interpersonal relationship to help the individual to realize that

I am not compelled to be simply the creation of others, molded by their expectancies, shaped by their demands. I am not compelled to be a victim of unknown forces in myself. I am less and less a creature of influences in myself which operate beyond my ken in the realms of the unconscious. I am increasingly the architect of self. I am free to will and choose. I can, through accepting my individuality, my 'isness' become more of my uniqueness, more of my potentiality.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid..

<sup>27</sup> Peter Homans, "Carl Rogers' Psychology and the Theory of Mass Society," in David A. Wevler and Laura N. Rice ed., Innovations in Client-Centered Therapy (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid..

<sup>29</sup> Carl Rogers, "Learning to be Free," in Rogers, Person to Person, pp. 47-48.

When individuals are allowed to undergo a process of "learning to be free"--free from being driven and compelled by internal and external forces--and move toward making responsible, independent decisions, the problem of incongruence between self and experience, and alienation between individual and society can be solved.

In summary, Rogers believes that the most important role of society's institutions is to facilitate "the process of becoming"--by allowing freedom for individuals to be their true selves; to experiment with different possibilities; and to choose their own paths toward growth and fulfillment. The society should avoid imposing established values on individuals, and should refrain from censuring their different attempts to realize self-actualization.

Rogers' person-centered approach is, in its very nature, socially and politically revolutionary. It is revolutionary for the following reasons. First, the principles of the person-centered approach can be applied to all interpersonal relationships and thus has an impact on the power relationships in all social institutions. Second, Rogers' genuine trust in the tendency of the individual to move toward constructive development and his or her capacity to make sound choices makes him a genuine supporter of a democratic philosophy in which all power is vested in the people. Third, Rogers' ideas are easy to understand, and do not require long years of professional training before one can apply them. Thus, the person-centered approach may gain acceptance by people in all walks of life. Fourth, Rogers is definitely a radical critic of the status quo. The following quotation can best demonstrate Rogers' radical stance toward current American society:

The wealthiest nation in the world is said to be unable to afford proper health care for its people. The efforts to eliminate poverty are themselves being eliminated, while the top eight percent of the populace receives more income than the bottom fifty percent. This gap between the rich and poor in this country grows steadily wider. Great corporations have an inordinate influence on our government and our life, and even presumptuously interfere in the affairs of foreign countries. High office now goes

preponderantly to men of wealth, so that of our one hundred senators, supposedly representing the people, forty are reported to be millionaires. The ordinary person has sensitive and compassionate representation neither in the corporation for which he works, nor in the government which rules him.<sup>30</sup>

In short, Rogers' views on society are quite radical in their nature: he is genuinely concerned about the realization of man's potentialities; he demands that individuals be released from introjected social constraints through the concepts of the organismic valuing process and the "fully functioning person";<sup>31</sup> He tries to change the social world by helping individuals to gain their inner freedom; and he is a powerful critic of the status quo. He is, without any doubt, a quiet revolutionary.

## THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION

Rogers' views on human nature and the role of society have been discussed in the previous section. The purpose of this section is to explore their possible implications for administration by addressing the following questions: What does a person-centered organization look like, if operated according to the above-mentioned assumptions and principles? What are the characteristics of managers who adopt the person-centered approach of leadership? And what are the limitations of person-centered administration?

### The Person-Centered Organization

If the administration of an organization is guided by a person-centered philosophy, what will the organization look like? The best way of addressing this question is to compare the various features of the person-centered

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<sup>30</sup> Carl Rogers, "The Emerging Person: A New Revolution," in Evans, Dialogue With Rogers, pp. 150-151.

<sup>31</sup> Carl Rogers, "A Therapist's View of the Good Life: The Fully Functioning Person," in Rogers, On Becoming A Person, pp. 183-198.

organization with those of the bureaucratic organization, which is the dominant mode of organization in today's society. Such a comparison will highlight not only the characteristics of the person-centered organization but also the shortcomings of the bureaucratic organization. This comparison will encompass analysis of the following areas: (1) supervision and control, (2) organizational goals and objectives, (3) issues of power, authority, and decision-making, (4) communication and (5) organization structure.

1. Supervision and Control. In bureaucratic organizations, there is a very pessimistic assumption that organizational members are by nature selfish, aggressive, and incapable of taking responsibility.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the organization needs to tightly control its members through close supervision, strict regulation as well as economic reinforcement.

In the person-centered organization, however, there is a quite different assumption about human nature. Members are perceived as trustworthy, social, and longing for growth and development. Therefore, it is not necessary for the organization to exercise close control over its members. If a supportive, understanding and permissive climate is provided, the members are likely to be self-directing and self-responsible.

2. Organizational Goals and Objectives. The goals of the bureaucratic organization are the increase of productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, profitability, and stability for the organization itself.<sup>33</sup>

The goals of the person-centered organization are not limited to the organizational side. Members' personal growth and development will be

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion on the assumption of human nature in organization, please see Douglas M. McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," in Jay M. Shafritz and Albert C. Hyde ed., Classics of Public Administration (Oak Park, Ill.: Moore, 1978), pp. 187-194; and Robert Tannenbaum and Sheldon A. Davis, "Values, Man, and Organizations," in Wendell L. French, Cecil H. Bell, Jr., and Robert A. Zawachi ed., Organization Development (Plano, Tex.: Business, 1983), pp. 47-59.

<sup>33</sup> H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University, 1946), pp. 196-239.

given the highest priority in the organizational goal hierarchy. In addition to the pursuit of formal organizational objectives, the organization is also obliged to provide a psychological environment which makes its members feel safe, understood, and accepted, and thus facilitates the actualization of the constructive forces within each of them. In a person-centered organization, the provision of training, education and learning opportunities is mandatory. Job assignment and promotion is considered not only an issue of organizational management but also an issue of individual development. Termination of employment or punishment are the last things to be used to solve problems. In short, the organization is obliged to provide a facilitating environment where its members can engage in a struggle "to be and to become" and to realize their potential.

3. Power, Authority and Decision-making. In the bureaucratic organization, authority is attached to the rigidly defined rank and position. Power is distributed unevenly through the hierarchy, with the ultimate power resting at the apex of the organizational pyramid. Members at the bottom of the bureaucracy rarely have opportunities to make meaningful decisions that will have a significant impact on the organization and its environment.

In the person-centered organization, where it is assumed that individuals can be trusted and should be empowered, power is equally distributed among members. Since opportunities to participate in decision-making are given to all members, individuals do not have to occupy important administrative posts in order to control the direction and major decisions of the organization. The authority of decision-making can be delegated to various task groups or individuals, with members as a whole reserving the right to modify or reject these decisions. Rogers provides a vivid account of his personal experience with this type of power distribution in an organization. As an administrator at the Counseling Center of the University of Chicago, he found that

when power was distributed, it was no big thing to be the coordinator or chairman of the budget committee or whatever. Consequently administrative tasks were very often sought by the newest members of the staff, because it was an avenue of becoming acquainted with the workings of the operation. An intern might chair a group making up next year's budget. The newest staff member might head a planning group, or a group to pass on membership or promotions.... Senior members of the group were freed to spend more time on research and therapy, knowing that if the various administrative task groups failed accurately to represent the sentiment of the members, their decisions would be rejected by the staff as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

4. Communication. In bureaucratic organizations communications is highly formal and structured. It is predominantly top-down and is directed toward the attainment of organizational goals set by the top management. Also, because of the emphasis on organizational "rationality," communication is very impersonal in nature.

In a person-centered organization, the pattern of communication tends to be informal, unstructured and flexible. Continuous efforts are made to remove barriers to free communication between all organizational members, be they rigid communication procedure, lack of interpersonal encounter, or clumsy and complicated methods of communication.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the purpose of communication is not limited to the transmission of organizational messages; it is also for organizational members to offer each other sincere support and genuine feedback which is critical for their self-exploration and self-actualization. More importantly, in the person-centered organization, communication can be very personal and the expression of such "irrational" elements as feelings and emotions is accepted and encouraged. The following quote demonstrates the importance of free expression of personal feelings in organizational communication:

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<sup>34</sup> Rogers, On Personal Power, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Gordon, "Group-Centered Leadership and Administration," in Carl Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), pp. 320-382.



I found the enormous importance of personal feelings in administrative matters. Often the staff would spend hours (or so it seemed) in arguing some trivial issue, until a perceptive member would see and state the feelings underlying the issue--a personal animosity, a feeling of insecurity, a competition between two would-be leaders, or just the resentment of someone who had never really been heard. Once the feelings were out in the open, the issue which had seemed so important became a nothing. On the other hand when the staff was in open communication with one another, heavy issues such as the allocation of the budget for the following year, the election of a coordinator, the adoption of an important policy might take only minutes to decide.<sup>36</sup>

In short, one of the most characteristic features of the person-centered organization is the construction and sustenance of a process by which members can communicate freely with each other, both their thoughts and feelings, and it is through this process of free communication that both organizational effectiveness and personal development are attained.

5. Organizational Structure. The structure of a bureaucratic organization is formal, hierarchical and impersonal. It is based on the principle of specialization (i.e., functional division of labor), and is accompanied by clearly assigned authority and responsibility. As a pattern of interrelationship among organizational members, the bureaucratic structure tends to be de-humanizing and alienating, for individual needs for freedom, creativity and wholeness are compromised to fit into this rigid structure.<sup>37</sup>

In person-centered organizations, the prevailing belief is that "institutions should exist for people, not the reverse."<sup>38</sup> Thus, an organization is not conceived as a fixed and static structure; rather, it should become a process which "should allow freedom for experimentation in alternative life-styles and for creative outlets of all types... should allow failures to occur

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<sup>36</sup> Rogers, On Personal Power, pp. 94-95.

<sup>37</sup> Denhardt, Shadow of Organization.

<sup>38</sup> Rogers, A Way of Being, p. 351.

without condemnation... should maintain flexibility and avoid censuring different attempts to achieve growth and fulfillment."<sup>39</sup> In such an organization, authority and responsibility are not rigidly defined; there is no rigid assignment of jobs. Also, there is no "right" way of operating the organization; the organization does not have a fixed mode of operation, and is able to make constant changes based upon its experiences. In short, the vitality and growing capacity of a person-centered organization is "closely bound up with its lack of rigidity, with its continually surprising capacity to change its collective mind, and to use a new mode of operation".<sup>40</sup>

### **The Person-Centered Manager**

If a manager believes in the person-centered approach's basic assumptions about human nature (that is, the individual has within himself enormous resources for self understanding and self development, and that these resources can be best utilized if a facilitating psychological climate is provided), this will influence the way in which he carries out his managerial role. He is more likely to treat subordinates as unique individuals rather than using them as dispensable instruments. He will perceive himself as a facilitator helping the group members actualize their potentialities rather than a leader possessing superior qualities and higher morality. He will probably give full autonomy and responsibility to subordinates and allow them to be self-directing and self-responsible rather than making decisions for them or coercing them "when necessary." His belief in the person-centered approach will encourage him to be more genuine toward subordinates, expressing his feelings and thoughts as part of the group rather than hiding behind a facade and playing a power game. It will give him a more empathic understanding of people's personal worlds instead of keeping

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<sup>39</sup> Robert D. Nye, *Three Psychologies*, 3rd ed., (Monterey, Ca.: Brooks/Cole, 1986), p. 138.

<sup>40</sup> Rogers, *On Personal Power*, p. 94.

them in a distant, objective, and thus "safe" position. He is likely to show his unconditional positive regard for subordinates by being willing to listen to "crazy" suggestions and to understand "unacceptable" behavior rather than immediately interpreting them as deviating from organizational norms and therefore requiring correctional action.

Also, if a manager believes in the assumption of the person-centered approach that the locus of evaluation should reside within the individual and that the organismic valuing process should be honored, then he is more likely to encourage and rely on subordinates' self evaluation rather than his own evaluation of others. He is less likely to try to "raise other people's consciousness," and instead be willing to offer feedback based on his organismic experience. He will not find it rewarding to make people "well-behaved and productive"; instead he will gain satisfaction in helping people achieve what they otherwise could not have achieved.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, the person-centered manager believes in the worth of his subordinates, and treats them as persons with unique individuality. He adopts the attitudes of acceptance, understanding and genuineness which are similar to those of the client-centered therapist. He sees himself more as a facilitator whose goals are to help his group become independent and self-responsible and to aid it to actualize its potentiality.

### **Some Assessments of the Person-Centered Administration**

It should be recognized that it is difficult to apply the person-centered approach to the area of administration. However, this does not mean that person-centered administration is only an intellectual ideal which does not exist in the real world. On the contrary, there is solid evidence that the person-centered approach is indeed applicable to different organizations and

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<sup>41</sup> The above discussion draws heavily on Rogers' "Some Notes On Leadership," in Rogers, On Personal Power, pp. 91-92.

can generate positive results. For instance, there are several research findings indicating that person-centered managers are of more value to an organization than typical managers;<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, some case examples also demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach. For example, Rogers presents some of his personal experiences with the person-centered approach, and on the basis of these he maintains that the approach can be applied in typical industrial settings and is capable of facilitating the development of organizational members as well as increasing the corporation's profits.<sup>43</sup> He also presents a real-life case in which a consultant helped a modern industrial giant achieve a tremendous increase in profits by practicing person-centered administration in some of its manufacturing plants. "The profit gain to the company is so great that this is regarded as a trade secret which must not be leaked to other firms in their highly competitive industry!"<sup>44</sup>

Even though empirical research, case examples, and personal accounts indicate that a person-centered organization can function as effectively as a conventional organization, most administrators may still be doubtful about it. For the skeptics, Rogers urges them to open their minds and experiment with the new possibilities.

And this may increase the chance that you will try out, in your own experience, in a small way, some of the hypotheses of a person-centered approach.... You may begin to be more open, empathic, and trusting of an adolescent son or daughter. You may, if you are an executive, see what happens if you give more responsible autonomy to one or two of your subordinates. Or you may try understanding your wife (or husband) purely from his or her point of view, not trying to change or control those perceptions. You may, if you are a teacher, give your students freedom of choice in some small part of their learning where you feel comfortable in doing so.... It is this slight opening of the door to possible sharing of

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<sup>42</sup> See Rogers, *On Personal Power*, pp. 96-100; and Gordon, "Group-Centered Leadership."

<sup>43</sup> Rogers, *On Personal Power*, pp. 90-104.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

power and control, to more communicative and human ways of being, which, for me, justifies the presentation of evidence.<sup>45</sup>

The above discussion has shown that Rogers' person-centered approach can have many important implications for the field of administration. For the present author, the most significant implication lies in the approach's proposition that **organization should exist for its members, not the reverse, and therefore concern for human dignity should be supreme!**

Rogers is not the only who has considered the problem of human dignity in the organization. Indeed, this concern has been shared by many students of administration. Organizational humanists such as Maslow,<sup>46</sup> McGregor,<sup>47</sup> Likert,<sup>48</sup> Argyris,<sup>49</sup> Bennis,<sup>50</sup> and Golembiewski<sup>51</sup> have all offered their thoughts on how to preserve or restore human dignity in the organization. But Rogers is still the most distinguished of these theorists for two reasons. Firstly, throughout his work, Rogers consistently expresses his strong faith in the goodness of human nature in such a sincere and passionate way that most readers would feel deeply moved. It is this profound belief in the constructive nature of man that makes him most distinguished. Secondly, unlike most human relations theorists who do not pay direct attention to the issues of power and politics,<sup>52</sup> Rogers explicitly addresses these issues in a serious way and takes a firm position toward the equalization of power within social institutions. He is, in comparison to the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>46</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, Motivation and Theory, 2nd ed., (New York: Haper & Row, 1970).

<sup>47</sup> Douglas McGregor, The Human Side of Enterprise (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).

<sup>48</sup> Rensis Likert, The Human Organization (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

<sup>49</sup> Chris Argyris, Personality and Organization (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); C. Argyris, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1962); C. Argyris, Integrating the Individual and the Organization (New York: Wiley, 1964); C. Argyris and Donald Schon, Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

<sup>50</sup> Warren Bennis, Changing Organizations (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

<sup>51</sup> Robert T. Golembiewski, Men, Management, and Morality (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

previously mentioned theorists, much more willing to challenge the status quo and adopt more radical solutions to the problem of organizational domination.

Although the previous discussion has shown that Rogers' person-centered approach can offer great insights in the field of administration, two limitations of the approach need to be made explicit. Firstly, although there are research findings showing that person-centered managers are more likely to be high-producers than those who are task-oriented, there are other theories and research (contingency theory, for example) indicating that this might not necessarily be the case. If the concern is organizational productivity, then a person-centered manager might be less valuable to the organization when the situation requires a task-oriented leadership style. The supporters of person-centered administration should acquaint themselves with contingency literature, otherwise their arguments for the effectiveness of person-centered administration will be somewhat less sustainable. Secondly, although Rogers recognizes the irony that "treating people as persons was a trade secret"<sup>53</sup> and that the management of a capitalistic enterprise is "truly interested in persons, so long as that interest turns a profit,"<sup>54</sup> he does not suggest how this irony should be handled. Rogers' failure to offer any concrete solution to this irony clearly demonstrates that he has not explored the origin of the problems of domination and manipulation beyond the transactional immediacies of group life. Without tracing these problems to the source and dealing with them, those who believe in the person-centered approach might have to face the possibility that a "revolutionary"

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<sup>52</sup> For a discussion on Organizational Humanism or Human Relations Theory see Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, Modern Approach to Understand and Manage Organization (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), pp. 63-107., Robert Denhardt, Theories of Public Organization (Monterey, Ca.: Brooks/Cole, 1984), pp. 91-116., and Michael M. Harmon and Richard T. Mayer, Organization Theory for Public Administration (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), pp. 197-239.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, On Personal Power, p. 102.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid..

approach will end up being a tool employed by top management to make people "happy, productive, and profitable"! In short, Rogers' failure to incorporate a macro-perspective into his approach makes it somewhat incomplete.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In this paper, Rogers' perception of man and his views on the role of society are examined. The author indicates that the foundation blocks of the person-centered approach are the assumptions that (1) man is at core a trustworthy organism striving toward constructive development and (2) the individual should be freed from the domination of any agency outside himself. The author also agrees that Rogers' person-centered approach is revolutionary in nature.

The person-centered approach advocates more equal power-sharing among organizational members; emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development; and pays special attention to the feeling side of organizational life. Because of its humanistic and democratic nature, the person-centered approach can have significant implications for the field of administration. However, since Rogers fails to deal with the problems of domination and manipulation at a more fundamental level, the "revolutionary" person-centered approach faces the danger of being used as a tool to manipulate employees. Further treatment of the problems of domination, contradiction and deprivation seem necessary if the approach is to escape this dilemma.

# 卡爾羅傑斯人本途徑之重要基本 假設及其對行政之可能意涵

陳 勝 仁

本文對人本途徑之重要基本假設加以檢視，並探討其對行政之可能意涵。此一由卡爾羅傑斯所創立之途徑乃建立於以下兩項基本假設之上：(1)人乃是一不斷尋求建設性發展之有機體，其在本質上是可信賴的，以及(2)社會應協助個人成一個“如其所是的我”；應使其免於受任何外來強制力量之宰制。基於此二假設而發展出之人本途徑，本質上實可謂極具革命性。

就其對行政之意涵而言，人本途徑主張組織成員間應有較公平之權力分享，並強調成員個人之成長及發展應受到最高度之重視。此一途徑亦主張組織成員感覺與情緒之表達應被允許並受到鼓勵。由於其對人性民主具有極真誠之關懷，人本途徑實可對現今之行政理論與實踐提供極有意義之啓示與指導。

然而，由於羅傑斯未能從根本面對並處理組織中有關宰制與操控之問題，此一途徑面臨了可能被利用為工具以操縱員工之危險。人本途徑應對此問題有一更深入之處理以期避免此一困境。