



Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

CAHRS Working Paper Series

Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies
(CAHRS)

July 1992

A Role-Based Taxonomy of Human Resource Organizations

Christiane M. Labelle
University of Quebec at Hull

Lee Dyer
Cornell University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrswp>

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

Support this valuable resource today!

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in CAHRS Working Paper Series by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact catherwood-dig@cornell.edu.

If you have a disability and are having trouble accessing information on this website or need materials in an alternate format, contact web-accessibility@cornell.edu for assistance.

A Role-Based Taxonomy of Human Resource Organizations

Abstract

[Excerpt] An empirically-derived classification (taxonomy) of human resource "departments", based on a few fundamental roles played in organizations, was developed as an alternative to the mostly speculative existing typologies. Four types emerged: the strategic partner, the strategic advisor, the operational partner, and the operational administrator. The stability of the solution and the relationships with variables not used to generate it were found satisfactory. The types show some similarities with those identified in the literature.

Keywords

CAHRS, ILR, center, human resource, studies, advance, classification, taxonomy, organization, typologies, partner, advisor, administrator, solution, relationship, managerial

Comments

Suggested Citation

Labelle, C. M., & Dyer, L. (1992). *A role-based taxonomy of human resource organizations* (CAHRS Working Paper #92-35). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies.

<http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrswp/322>

**A ROLE-BASED TAXONOMY OF
HUMAN RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS**

by

CHRISTIANE M. LABELLE
Universite of Quebec at Hull
P.O. Box 1250, Station B
Hull (Quebec), Canada J8X 3X7
(819) 595-2208

and

LEE DYER
Cornell University
Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies
School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Ithaca (New York) 14853-3901
(607) 255-2273

Working Paper #92-35

This paper has not undergone formal review or approval of the faculty of the ILR School. It is intended to make results of Center research, conferences, and projects available to others interested in human resource management in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions.

A ROLE-BASED TAXONOMY OF
HUMAN RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

An empirically-derived classification (taxonomy) of human resource "departments", based on a few fundamental roles played in organizations, was developed as an alternative to the mostly speculative existing typologies. Four types emerged: the strategic partner, the strategic advisor, the operational partner, and the operational administrator. The stability of the solution and the relationships with variables not used to generate it were found satisfactory. The types show some similarities with those identified in the literature.

The authors would like to thank all the managers who have kindly participated in this study. They also thank the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies from The School of Industrial and Labor Relations of Cornell University and the University of Quebec at Hull for their financial contribution to this project.

While human resource departments are found in virtually all large-scale organizations, they come in many shapes and forms. Over the years, there have been several attempts to impose order on the apparent chaos in the form of descriptive and prescriptive typologies. Such typologies typically consist of three to five basic configurations bearing such labels as "operational, managerial, and strategic" (Fombrun, Tichy, and Devanna, 1984) and "routine service, show me, showcase, and full partner" (Petersen and Malone, 1975).

The typological research, while useful, (Andrews, 1986; Petersen and Malone, 1975; Torrington, 1988; Tyson and Fell, 1986) is not without its limitations. Existing typologies have emerged from a small number of casual observations or case studies, precluding generalizability. Researchers have employed a plethora of classificatory variables from study to study (and sometimes even within studies), complicating comparisons and synthesis. Published descriptions of configurations tend to be brief and, worse, inconsistent in content across types, complicating replicability, as well as judgments about the validity and usefulness of the results. Not surprisingly, then, this stream of research appears to have run its course without yielding generally accepted types or typologies of human resource organizations.

The present study attempts to move the field forward by improving upon previous efforts in several ways. First, it involves a larger and more representative sample than has

heretofore been the case. Second, it is framed around a single, yet inclusive, classificatory concept -- organizational role (Katz and Kahn, 1978) -- in the interest of promoting analytical and descriptive uniformity. Third, and most important, the study employs an empirically-based taxonomical analysis rather than a judgmentally-based typological design (Miller and Friesen, 1984) in an effort to produce results which are replicable, as well as verifiable. To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to develop a taxonomy of human resource organizations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Taxonomical research, even if exploratory, requires an underlying conceptual framework to establish boundaries (McKelvey, 1975) and to instruct the choice of variables and measures (Hair, Anderson, and Tatham, 1987; Harrigan, 1985; Kruskal and Wish, 1978). Here, as noted, the guiding framework was built around the concept of organizational role, which is defined as a collection of activities representing a mode of functioning by managers and professionals in human resource organizations (Tyson and Fell, 1986).

Role was chosen as the defining construct in part because it recurs (albeit in a loosely defined way) in the typological research on human resource organizations. In addition, it is a well-established construct in broader

organizational analyses (Katz and Kahn, 1978). Broadly defined (as above), it incorporates, or directly relates to, such important organizational characteristics as values, norms, and tasks, as well as lines of authority and work flows (Katz and Kahn, 1978, pp. 43-44). Thus, the construct holds great potential for parsimoniously capturing the considerable variation of activities inherent in human resource organizations.

The Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework which guided data collection and analysis in the present study. A basic premise is that human resource departments, like other organizations, face many opportunities and challenges from many sources (Hofer, 1974) of which three are key: the unit's host organization, the unit's major clients, and the unit itself. Continuing the logic, it is postulated that the responses to these opportunities and challenges also fall into three broad and corresponding categories (Bureau of National Affairs, 1979) -- (1) a business dimension, (2) a service dimension, and (3) a functional dimension -- and a number of more specific roles.

Insert Figure 1 here

The Business Dimension. It is well established that, in pursuit of business goals, human resource organizations play (or can play) both a strategic and an operational role (e.g.,

Fombrun, et al., 1984; Walker, 1989). The strategic role is manifest when a human resource unit engages in activities directed at the formation or implementation of the host organization's business strategy (Walker, 1988, 1992). Such activities evolve around broad and important (i.e., strategic) business issues, often involve significant change, and frequently come to fruition over several years (Greenley, 1986; Steiner and Miner, 1977). The operational role, in comparison, pertains to activities which promote the day-to-day operation of the business and, thus, are relatively concrete and routine. Dominant activities include program design and administration.

The service dimension. Human resource units, being staff functions, exist, in part, to provide services to important clients (Van Wees, 1990) or constituents (Tsui, 1987). As Figure 1 shows, the service dimension is postulated to involve two important roles: marketing and production (Bowen and Greiner, 1986). The marketing role involves activities that position clients as customers, with a requisite concern for their needs, well-being, and affect toward the products and services of the human resource organization, as well as toward the organization itself (Kotler and Levy, 1969; Van Wees, 1990). The production role involves the actual design and delivery of products and services. Especially important are the technical aspects of these activities (Hanan, 1983; Adam, 1983) and the balancing of technical niceties against practical feasibilities.

The Functional Dimension. Human resource organizations must sustain their own operations (Dunn, 1985). A key issue here is organizational influence, or locus of control (Morse, 1986; Woodward, 1970). Some, as suggested in Figure 1, are internally driven, while others are externally driven. The former are characterized by activities designed primarily to gain influence or control: being proactive, persuading clients (primarily management), approving or even making (rather than rubber-stamping) important decisions, and monitoring and, sometimes, subsequently amending the actions of line managers. The latter are characterized by a more reactive approach: keeping a low profile and yielding influence and control over human resource matters to line managers.

Building and Verifying a Taxonomy

The preceding roles, once measured, were expected to cluster in identifiable patterns. The vagaries of the previous research precluded precise hypotheses about the nature of these configurations. In general, it was reasoned that the prevailing profiles would be characterized by both concentration and consistency.

Concentration means that a profile would be dominated by an emphasis on a limited number of roles (in contrast to an equal emphasis on a full range of roles). Consistency refers to the emergence of a limited number of roles in any given

profile; it stems from the need for organizations to make the most of available resources by exploiting potential synergies and compatible competencies. A human resource organization focusing on the strategic role, for example, might also choose to put a relative emphasis on the marketing and internal roles (rather than the operational, production, and external roles) to provide the consistency needed to assure that its strategic thrusts would be "customer-driven", as well as aggressively pursued.

But these are speculations which assume a level of rationality that may or may not be justified. It remains to be seen: (1) whether the activities of human resource organizations factor into the six delineated roles, (2) whether these six roles, in turn, cluster into a relatively small number of concentrated and consistent configurations, and (3) the extent to which the resulting taxonomy is logical in the context of what else is known about the human resource organizations involved.

METHODS

To address these issues, data analysis proceeded in three stages. (All statistical analyses were conducted using the SAS statistical package (SAS Institute, 1987)).

Stage 1: Determining the Dimensionality of Roles

Since roles are complex phenomena, it was necessary to generate a questionnaire with a full range of items adequate to tap the domain suggested by the conceptual model (Figure 1), to reduce the data into a manageable number of dimensions, and finally, to establish whether, in reality, the roles converged to form dimensions consistent with the model.

Variables. The conceptual framework served as a primary guide in choosing questionnaire items. Specific items were culled from the literature and from two pretests involving five respondents. In all, 57 questions were formulated to determine the extent (on a scale ranging from 1 to 6) to which they reflected the practices of the respondents' human resource department. The items were arranged in a mixed order so that the roles measured were not obvious to the respondents.

The business dimension included 16 items, eight measuring the strategic role (e.g., degree of participation in strategic decision making) and eight measuring the operational role (e.g., degree of involvement in basic, routine, or short-term activities to support business operations).

Twenty-four items pertained to the service dimension. Eight were developed for the production role. Sixteen were identified for the marketing role because it was necessary to take into account both line managers and employees as target

clients (Ritzer and Trice, 1969; Tyson and Fell, 1986; Watson, 1977).

The third dimension, the functional dimension, involved seventeen items. Eight measured the internal role (e.g., approving important human resource decisions), while nine others tapped the external role (e.g., giving priorities to what line managers consider important).

Techniques of analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (common factor model) was chosen as the preferred data analysis technique (Kim and Mueller, 1978). The procedure used was principal axis factoring with orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX method) (Hair, Anderson, and Tatham, 1987). The Kaiser criterion (i.e., eigenvalue > 1) and the Scree test served to determine the number of retained factors.

The resulting factors were scaled and coefficient alpha was calculated to determine scale reliabilities (Carmines and Zellers, 1979) preceding subsequent analyses.

Stage 2: Identifying Types of human resource Departments

In the second stage of analysis, the factor-based scales were subjected to cluster analysis (Aldenderfer and Blashfield, 1984; Everitt, 1986; Hair et al., 1987) to identify homogeneous configurations of human resource departments (i.e., the taxonomy).

Scales as Variables. Three scales (one per dimension) were used to identify clusters, and the others were reserved for later use to test the usefulness of the cluster solution. Distance measures were used to identify clusters (Aldenderfer and Blashfield, 1984; Everitt, 1986; Punj and Stewart, 1983).

Techniques of analysis. Ward's (1963) method of cluster analysis was chosen because empirical comparisons (Everitt, 1986; Punj and Stewart, 1983) have shown that it generally outperforms other methods in recovering the known structure of hierarchical data and because it is widely used in the social sciences.

To identify an appropriate number of clusters, three heuristic procedures (Aldenderfer and Blashfield, 1984) were used: a subjective inspection of a tree diagram, an examination of a graph of fusion coefficients (Thorndike, 1953), and the identification of a significant jump in the values of fusion coefficients.

The stability (or replicability) of the cluster solution was established by splitting the sample into two parts, replicating the cluster analysis, and applying agreement kappa (Cohen, 1960; McIntyre and Blashfield, 1980). In this context, stability resembles reliability: a stable solution is not necessarily valid, but an unstable solution cannot be valid.

Stage 3: Examining the Usefulness of the Classification

Finally, the usefulness of the cluster solution was examined (Aldenderfer and Blashfield, 1984; Everitt, 1986).

Variables. Three categories of variables were used at this point: variables internal to the cluster solution, the scales (roles) that were left aside when the clusters were created¹, and a series of external factors including characteristics of the host organizations, of the respondents, and of the human resource departments themselves.

Techniques of Analysis. The analytical techniques used were ANOVAS for continuous variables and chi-square statistics for categorical variables. The Scheffé's contrast method was used to help interpret differences among clusters.

Sample

A sample of 1,000 U.S. corporations was chosen randomly from the Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors and Executives (1988). This sample was considered large enough to produce data from a variety of business units and to identify enough appropriate respondents in human resource management to satisfy the study's goals. The name of respondents was identified through the directory or, otherwise, personal contacts. Of the 1000 questionnaires sent, 264 (26.4 percent) were returned in a usable form.

Manufacturing was the most heavily represented industry among the respondents (162 firms, 61.6 percent), followed by finance (29 firms, 11 percent), transportation, communication, and public utilities (28 firms, 10.6 percent), services (18 firms, 6.8 percent), retail and wholesale trade (16 firms, 6.1 percent), and agriculture (10 firms, 3.8 percent).

The respondents represented a good cross-section of the organizations: there were 137 executives (vice presidents and above) (51.8 percent), 91 middle-level managers (e.g., functional directors) (34.5 percent), and 36 sub-functional directors and managers (13.7 percent).

RESULTS

Stage 1: Results on the Dimensionality of Roles

The factor analysis yielded² a six-factor solution that was considered acceptable on the Kaiser (i.e., eigenvalue) criterion³ and the Scree test⁴. Together the six factors account for 78.3 percent of the total variance. Only items with loadings higher than 0.40 were retained as part of a factor.

The first two factors correspond to the business dimension in the conceptual model. The first includes 14 items which have loadings ranging from 0.44 to 0.73 and accounts for 40.3 percent of the cumulative variance. It clearly represents the strategic role discussed earlier. The second factor

includes 16 items with loadings ranging from 0.40 to 0.66. It accounts for 14.9 percent of the cumulative variance and it represents the operational role discussed earlier. While these two roles are generally consistent with the conceptual model, the strategic role also includes six variables expressing influence and control (e.g., influencing top management, approving important human resource decisions) which were originally included to represent the internal role of the functional dimension. Thus, the strategic role has both a strategic and proactive component, as several authors (Andrews, 1986; Baird and Meshoulam, 1984; Miles and Snow, 1984; Petersen and Malone, 1975; and Tyson and Fell, 1986) have hypothesized.

The third and fourth factors correspond to the service dimension, but more in terms of clients served than the postulated marketing and production roles. The third factor contains eight variables with loadings ranging from 0.40 to 0.66 and accounts for an additional 8.7 percent of the cumulative variance. Since the included items all refer to employees as clients, it is labelled service to employees. The fourth factor has eight variables with loadings ranging from 0.41 to 0.55. It represents 5.9 percent of the cumulative variance and is labelled service to line managers because the items relate to providing services to this client group.

The one functional dimension contains seven variables with loadings ranging from 0.44 to 0.62 and accounts for 4.2 percent of the cumulative variance. It is labelled quality

management because the items primarily refer to monitoring, analyzing, surveying, and evaluating human resource activities in the interest of improving their design and administration. The sixth factor contains only two items and was uninterpretable.

Thus, the factor analysis provides only partial support for the conceptual model postulated earlier. The service and functional dimensions, in particular, need to be rethought.

The five retained factors were scaled and the Cronbach alphas are: .89 for the strategic role, .88 for the operational role, .83 for both service to employees and quality management roles, and .75 for the service to line managers role. These are considered acceptable for further analysis given the exploratory nature of the study (Nunnally, 1978).

Stage 2: Identifying Types of Human Resource Departments

Identification of clusters. Table 1 presents the results of the final stages of the clustering process and provides some useful statistics for estimating the appropriate number of clusters. The semi-partial squared multiple correlations (SPRSQ) in Column 4 indicate the decrease in the proportion of variance accounted for due to joining adjacent clusters to form the third one. The decrease is slight between five and four clusters, but sharp between four and three

clusters. This suggests that the five-cluster solution adds very little new relevant information. Column 5 shows the actual squared multiple correlation (proportion of variance accounted for by the clusters), while Column 6 gives the approximate expected value of R^2 under the uniform null hypothesis. These two statistics are necessary to compute the cubic clustering criterion (CCC) (Column 7) which is useful for estimating the appropriate number of clusters based on minimizing the within cluster sum of squares. A peak in the CCC values is used as the stopping rule. Since the peak is at the fourth cluster, this again is suggested as a good solution. Column 8 provides information on the pseudo F statistic which measures the separation among all the clusters at the current level, while Column 9 gives a measure (pseudo t^2 statistic) of the separation between the two clusters most recently joined. In both cases, the first significant peak or discrepancy occurs between the fourth and third clusters. In sum, the statistics provided in the table tend to favor a four-cluster solution. A subjective inspection of the tree diagram and an examination of the curve of the CCC and other coefficients also indicated that the four-cluster solution was optimal.

Insert Table 1 about here

Stability results. Agreement kappa ranges in value from 1.0 (perfect overlap between the two cluster solutions) to 0.0 (no overlap). The coefficient obtained was 0.439. This

appears to be somewhat low, but there are no published criteria on which to make the judgment. This moderate value, however, does suggest the need for additional evidence regarding the validity of the four-cluster solution.

Cluster Profiles. A cluster centroid is the average value of the variables contained in a cluster. A profile diagram based on cluster centroids is shown in Figure 2. It, along with the mean values on each of the variables included in each cluster were used to interpret and name clusters⁵.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The four clusters were identified and named as shown in Figure 2: "strategic partner", "strategic advisor", "operational partner", and "operational administrator".

Strategic partners dominate the sample, constituting 42.4 percent. The strategic role is primary (4.61), but this type shows strong involvement in the other four roles as well. Thus, this type appears to be the most developed and balanced of the four types.

Only 15.1 percent of organizations in the sample are classified as strategic advisors. The strategic advisor's involvement in the strategic role is high (4.42) and moderate with respect to quality (3.88) and service to line managers (3.68), and relatively low when it comes to operational matters (3.22) and providing service to employees (2.65). This type provides advice and expertise to management which focuses on

planning, coordination, and control, but it is less involved in decision making than the strategic partner (the item means are 4.54 vs 4.79) and also less influential among line managers (4.54 vs 4.78). Thus, compared with the strategic partner, the strategic advisor serves more as a consultant than influencer, implementer, or employee advocate.

Operational partners also represent only a small proportion of the sample (13 percent). This type is more focused than either the strategic partner or the operational administrator discussed below, but less focused than the strategic advisor. The operational role (4.45) is prominent; more emphasis is put on it than on the strategic role (4.21). Further, the type puts much more emphasis, in both an absolute and relative sense, on providing service to line managers (3.72) than on providing service to employees (2.43). Quality (4.08) is a major concern.

Operational administrators are the second most common type of human resource organizations in the sample, representing 29.4 percent of the total. This type has a balanced profile like the strategic partner, but it is the mirror opposite in terms of level of involvement. It has the lowest values on all roles except providing services to employees (2.68). Although its centroid value is slightly higher on the strategic than the operational role, the overall response pattern and a comparison with the other types indicate that it is more of an administrative than a strategic type (a high centroid value on

the strategic role may be due to its social desirability since it appears to have relatively inflated values across all four types).

Stage 3: Results from Profiling Analysis

The relationships of clusters with internal variables (i.e., the variables that served to generate the clusters) and with similar, but not identical variables were highly significant⁶. The results were also highly significant with most of the external variables: organizational and outside environment⁷, respondents characteristics⁸, and human resource department variables⁹.

These results help in interpreting the distinctive characteristics of each type. For example, when types are compared in terms of operational and strategic roles, the results indicate that the operational administrator has clearly an operational orientation and the strategic advisor, a strategic orientation. In comparison, the strategic partner and the operational partner are not as pure types¹⁰.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research helped in classifying human resource departments in groups according to the roles they play in their organizations. It can be concluded that the four types identified do not play all roles equally and that the strategic and

operational roles are roles around which the profiles are formed. Concentration was not verified, however, because the strategic partner and the operational partner emphasize highly more than one role. But roles within profiles tend to complement each other in nature and relative emphasis. For example, the operational administrator's has an overall low profile where operational, service, and functional roles serve to support basic operational and strategic needs, while the strategic partner has a high and comprehensive profile where the strategic perspective helps integrate operational, service, and functional roles and gives each more depth. Thus, the profile consistency seems supported by the data.

In addition, the results support the types that have been intuitively identified in the literature. Table 2 summarizes the comparisons.

 Insert Table 2 about here

Comparisons with Typological Research

Types similar to the strategic partner. Three of the seven types previously described in the literature have clear affinities with the strategic partner: Andrews' (1986) "strategic planning" type, Baird and Meshoulam's (1984) "type V", and Tyson and Fell's (1986) "architect" or "business manager" type. All involve such characteristics as playing an active role in business and human resource management decision making

(e.g. representation and regular contributions at senior manager meetings, attempts to assure that human resource decisions are fully integrated into business decisions, and strong values about human resource management), a high level of relevant technical competencies (e.g., diagnostic, problem-solving and conflict-management skills), giving quality services to line managers (e.g., by having regular contacts aimed at building their confidence, giving them a range of skills), and strong values about employees and their rights in the organization (search for employee involvement in achieving the company's goals, discussion with them of the company's intentions).

Types similar to the strategic advisor. Six types have characteristics consistent with those of the strategic advisor. They have variously been described as essentially interested in meeting top management's needs and in such activities as planning, policy formulation, the design and coordination of human resource systems, and research (Petersen and Malone, 1975). They also demonstrate a general willingness to leave it up to line managers down the organization to perform many operational human resource activities, that is, strategic advisor stress consulting over doing.

Types similar to the operational partner. Eleven types possess characteristics compatible with the operational partner, but the most similar are: the "industrial relations" and "control" types (Andrews, 1986), "type II" and "type IV" (Baird and Meshoulam, 1984), and the "administrative" or

"contracts manager" type (Tyson and Fell, 1986). There is a tendency among the authors to limit this type to an industrial relations type, while this research indicates that it covers broader situations. Thus, the many variants of this type in the literature seem to reflect more the particular contexts in which they operate rather than truly different types. The operational partner is nearly as focused as the strategic advisor. The operational role is dominant, while the strategic role is coordinated with it (e.g., a search for influence, maneuvering to gain a powerful position and control over human resource issues, and a drive for consistency and predictability through policies and procedures). There is a concern for quality, especially with respect to systems and techniques. Operational partners have moderate involvement with line managers as clients, more by way of directing their efforts than serving their needs. Employees are a major concern primarily when they present a threat to effective operations (e.g., operational partners seek to avoid confrontations that may challenge operations or uniformity of the system). In brief, operational partners exercise the influence of functional specialists broadly concerned with day-to-day efficiency and with control over human resource matters.

Types similar to the operational administrator. The dominant characteristics of the operational administrator are consistent with those described by various authors in the literature, especially with Andrew's (1986) "clerical" type,

Baird and Meshoulam's (1984) "basic" type, and Tyson and Fell's (1986) "clerk of works" or "administrative support" type. The relatively low profile of this type is also consistent with the literature. The authors reviewed believe that this type has little discretion because line managers keep the authority in human resource management and it is not asked to play a strategic role. The present study suggests, however, that operational administrators have a role to play strategically, but it is smaller and different than the role played by the other types (e.g., the types focus on strategy implementation and on building credibility in human resource management). The labels suggested in the literature generally reflect a preoccupation with operational support (e.g., concern with day-to-day issues, a focus on basic human resource activities and on administrative and clerical tasks), a moderate line management assistance (e.g., by relieving them of minor tasks), a relatively low service to employees (since it has little discretion, this type concentrates on helping to solve individual problems, while substantive matters are controlled by line managers), and an emphasis on low quality which probably reflects the simple nature of tasks with which these types are involved.

Articulation of types in the taxonomy

As some of the typological research suggests (Andrews, 1986; Baird and Meshoulam, 1984; Fombrun et al., 1984; Petersen

and Malone, 1975; and Tyson and Fell, 1986), it is possible to locate three of the four types on a continuum. The operational administrator appears to be the basic type (Baird and Meshoulam, 1984). The operational partner seems to be an operational administrator that has gained the competence and influence to play out more active roles in the organization (Fombrun et al., 1984). The strategic partner is the most developed and comprehensive type and the one which has the most influence on human resource matters (Petersen and Malone, 1975; Tyson and Fell, 1986).

The strategic advisor, however, appears to be on a different course. It specializes in one role and occupies a niche. This suggests that an aspiring operational partner has two basic avenues to follow: attempting to become a strategic partner by evolving towards a more comprehensive profile or, evolving toward the strategic advisor type by concentrating on the strategic role and backing off with respect to operational matters and concerns about lower level managers and employees as clients. It may also be that strategic advisors begin life that way rather than evolving from the operational types.

In sum, this research provides support for some of the types and typologies proposed in the literature and suggests that it is worth pursuing the effort to expand our knowledge of these, and possibly other, types of human resource departments.

Research Limitations

Future work should be designed to overcome the limitations of the present study, particularly those relating to the questionnaire, the sample and the respondents, and the data analysis techniques.

The questionnaire. Questionnaire items should be simplified to clarify the results by avoiding such problems as high loadings on more than one factor. Some items should be reversed to help eliminate social desirability problems. Since that was not done in the present study, the reported level of involvement in the strategic role may be an over-estimate.

The sample and the respondents. The sample is heavily weighted toward manufacturing firms (61.6 percent of the total), although service industries now represent about three-quarters of U.S. employment. It may be preferable to do stratified sampling by industry. Also, even larger samples may be desirable to enhance representativeness.

Ritzer and Trice (1969) found that human resource managers tend to overestimate their credibility and influence in comparison with line managers' perceptions. Employees may have perceptions that differ from both groups. Using only human resource managers as respondents gives only one perception of reality, and this may reflect more of an "intended" than a "realized" human resource approach (Dyer, 1984;

Mintzberg, 1978). Future research might benefit by including the views of client groups.

Techniques of analysis. Cluster analysis is not particularly a robust technique; that is, it has many indeterminacies, especially regarding the decision making process (e.g., the choice of the appropriate number of clusters, judging stability). For this reason, it is suggested that multiple techniques be used in the future to further understanding of the structure of the data and to see whether different cluster analysis techniques yield consistent results (by comparing the results obtained using Average method as opposed to Ward's method, or by varying the variables used to generate the clusters, and so on).

Additional Suggestions for future research

In addition to the preceding, there are ample opportunities to expand this line of research to other unexplored territories. There are at least two fertile terrains for this work: the theoretical framework and the design of studies.

The conceptual framework. More work needs to be done on the conceptual framework and on the measurement of human resource department roles since it was only partially supported by the data. Further, there is a need to search for other roles. The particular conceptual framework was limited to a

challenge-response model relative to the organizational environment, while elements of the external environment (e.g., labor market, government, and unions) were omitted.

The design of studies. Additional surveys are needed to replicate and expand this study. But, in addition, case studies could be used to explore in more depth the meaning of identified roles and to help in developing better measures. The Delphi technique (Milkovich, Annoni, and Mahoney, 1972) is another appropriate methodology. The composition of the panel of experts would be of the utmost importance. Ideally, such an investigation would include people from various backgrounds who have a good grasp of human resource departments at various hierarchical levels and in different environments and with varying perspectives (as noted above).

Further, studies should be designed to investigate human resource department roles in depth in large organizations to see whether separate types exist at different hierarchical levels (as suggested by Tyson and Fell, 1986), or if, in the main aggregate, most organizations have a single type with varying scopes and degrees of involvement in various roles at various hierarchical levels.

The present study was conducted in the United States. It would be interesting to see whether the human resource departments of organizations in other countries can be similarly classified. The above discussion on the classifications proposed by authors from both the United States (e.g., Andrews,

1986; Baird and Meshoulam, 1984) and Great Britain (e.g., Tyson and Fell, 1986) indicated some consistency. These types may also hold in France. A case study by Brabet (1991), for example, provided descriptions of two extreme types that seemed to correspond to the operational administrator ("gestion administrative") and a strategic type ("gestion anticipatrice").

Research is also needed with respect to the evolution of types (using longitudinal designs). Tyson and Fell (1986) provide an example: in one of the companies studied, they documented the move of a "contracts manager" type (operational partner) to an "architect" type (strategic partner) over time. Longitudinal studies would help in understanding the dynamics of types and how they are transformed to fit their environments. Such studies can eventually help in finding principles which make specific types more congruent with their environments, thus leading to studies on human resource department effectiveness in line with existing research (Tsui, 1987).

As a final word, it is hoped that the theoretical framework and the empirical evidence on types of human resource departments generated in this study will stimulate further research in this area and lead to a departure from the preponderance of atheoretical and prescriptive literature that has often characterized past work. The present research has made some progress, but the types found do not constitute a coherent body of knowledge, and consensus is yet to be attained.

Footnotes

1. Aldenderfer and Blashfield (1984) suggest that validating the cluster solution with variables that were used to generate it tends to produce highly significant results. For this reason, two scales were reserved to verify whether results persisted when using similar, but not identical variables.
2. These results are available from the first author.
3. At factor 6, the value was 1.23, 1.29 at factor 5 and 1.01 at factor 7.
4. The curve approached the vertical at factor 5, but was more flat at factor 6.
5. These values are available on request.
6. Differences in cluster means were significant at the 0.0001 level and the contrasts were significant at the 0.05 level.
7. They were significant with line manager awareness (at the 0.0001 level, contrasts at the 0.1 level), organizational structure (chi-square: 7.51, $p < 0.05$), size of organizational unit (chi-square: 16.87, $p < 0.01$), industry (chi-square: 12.39, $p < 0.05$), and degree of unionization (chi-square: 21.16, $p < 0.01$).
8. They were significant with career focus (chi-square: 14.56, $p < 0.01$), job focus (chi-square: 21.56, $p < 0.01$), and respondent's job title (chi-square: 12.89, $p < 0.05$).
9. They were significant with degree of centralization (overall mean: 4.72, significance level: 0.02), human resource management structure (chi-square: 13.43, $p < 0.05$, and human resource activity emphasized by the department (chi-square: 35.96, $p < 0.001$). Two other variables in this category approached but did not reach significance: technological development (overall mean: 3.71, $p < 0.09$; contrasts, $p < 0.05$) and human resource department title (chi-square: 11.37, $p = 0.08$).
10. The mean value on the operational role differed significantly between the strategic advisor (3.22) and the operational types (operational partner: 4.45; operational administrator: 3.83). The strategic partner differed from the other types, except from the operational partner (4.45). In terms of the strategic role, the operational administrator (3.88) differed significantly from the two strategic types (strategic advisor: 4.42; strategic partner: 4.61). The operational partner (4.21) differed significantly from the strategic partner (4.60), but not from the strategic advisor (4.42).

REFERENCES

- Adam, E. E., Jr. 1983. Towards a typology of production and operations management systems. Academy of Management Review, 8 (3), 365-375.
- Aldenderfer, M. S., & Blashfield, R. K. 1984. Cluster analysis. Paper series No. 07-044, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Andrews, J. R. 1986. Is there a crisis in the personnel department's identity? Personnel Journal, 65 (6), 86-93.
- Baird, L., & Meshoulam, I. 1984. The HRS matrix: Managing the human resource function strategically. Human Resource Planning, 7 (1), 1-21.
- Brabet, J. 1991. Portraits de la fonction personnel en Languedoc-Roussillon. Personnel (ANDCP), 320, 37-43.
- Bowen, D. E., & Greiner, L. E. 1986. Moving from production to service in human resources management. Organizational Dynamics, 35-40, 49-53.
- Bureau of National Affairs. 1979. The personnel department: Policy Guide No. 453. Washington, DC, 251-1.
- Carmines, E. G., & Zeller, R. A. 1979. Reliability and Validity Assessment. Paper series No. 07-017, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Cohen, J. 1960. A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 20 (1), 37-46.

- Dunn, W. B. 1985. Comprehension Needs of Human Resource Practitioners as Related to Major Concepts Presented in Human Resource Management Textbooks. Doctoral Dissertation. International University, San Diego, CA.
- Dyer, L. D. 1984. Studying human resource strategy: An approach and an agenda. Industrial Relations, 23, 156-169.
- Everitt, B. 1986. Cluster analysis. (2nd ed.). New York: Gower.
- Fombrun, C., Tichy, N. M., & Devanna, M. A. (Eds.). 1984. Strategic Human Resource Management. New York: Wiley.
- Greenley, G. E. 1986. The interface of strategic and marketing plans. Journal of General Management, 12 (1), 54-62.
- Hair, J. F., Jr., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. 1987. Multivariate data analysis. (2nd ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Hanan, M. 1983. Hi-Tech Growth Strategies. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Harrigan, K. R. 1985. An application of clustering for strategic group analysis. Strategic Management Journal, 6 (1), 55-73.
- Hofer, C. W. 1974. Some preliminary research on patterns of strategic behavior. in T. B. Green and D. F. Ray (Eds.). Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, 46-54.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. 1978. The social psychology of organizations. (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

- Kim, J. O., & Mueller, C. W. 1978. Introduction to factor analysis: What it is and how to do it. Paper series No. 07-013. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Kotler, P., & Levy, S. 1969. Broadening the concept of marketing. Journal of Marketing, 33, 10-15.
- Kruskal, J. B., & Wish, M. 1978. Multidimensional scaling. Paper series No. 07-011. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McKelvey, B. 1975. Guidelines for the empirical classification of organizations. Administrative Science Quarterly, 20 (1), 509-525.
- McIntyre, R. M., & Blashfield, R. K. 1980. A nearest-centroid technique for evaluating the minimum-variance clustering procedure. Multivariate Behavioral Research, 15 (2), 225-238.
- Miles, R. E., & Snow, C. C. 1984. Designing strategic human resources systems. Organizational Dynamics, 36-52.
- Milkovich, G. T., Annoni, A., & Mahoney, T. 1972. The use of Delphi procedures in manpower forecasting. Management Science, 19 (4), 381-388.
- Miller, D., & Friesen, P. H. 1984. Organizations: A quantum view. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Mintzberg, H. 1978. Patterns in strategy formation. Management Science, 24 (9), 934-948.
- Morse, C. W. 1986. The delusion of intrapreneurship. Long Range Planning, 19 (6), 92-95.

- Nunnally, J. C. 1978. Psychometric Theory. (2nd ed.).
New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Petersen, D. J., & Malone, R. 1975. The personnel effectiveness grid (PEG): A new tool for estimating personnel department effectiveness. Human Resource Management, 10-21.
- Punj, G., & Stewart, D. W. 1983. Cluster analysis in marketing research: Review and suggestions for application. Journal of Marketing Research, 20 (5), 134-148.
- Ritzer, G., & Trice, H. M. 1969. An occupation in conflict: A study of the personnel manager. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- SAS Institute, Inc. 1987. SAS/STAT guide for personal computers. (Version 6 Edition). Cary, NC.
- Steiner, G. A., & Miner, J. B. 1977. Management policy and strategy. New York: Macmillan.
- Thorndike, R. L. 1953. Who belongs in a family?
Psychometrika, 18, 267-276.
- Torrington, D. 1988. How does human resources management change the personnel function? Personnel Review, 17 (6), 3-9.
- Tsui, A. S. 1987. Defining the activities and effectiveness of the human resource department: A multiple constituency approach. Human Resource Management, 26 (1), 35-69.
- Tyson, S., & Fell, A. 1986. Evaluating the personnel function. London, GB: Hutchinson.

- Van Wees, L. L. 1990. Is personnel's survival through marketing? Personnel Journal, 69 (6), 96-102.
- Walker, J. W. 1992. Human resource strategy. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Walker, J. W. 1989. Human resource roles for the '90s. Human Resource Planning, 12 (1), 55-61.
- Walker, J. W. 1988. How Large Should the HR Staff Be? Personnel, 65 (10), 36-40, 42.
- Ward, J. H., Jr. 1963. Hierarchical grouping to optimize an objective function. Journal of the American Statistical Association, 58, 236-244.
- Watson, T. J. 1977. The personnel managers: A study in the sociology of work and employment. London, GB: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Woodward, J. 1970. Organizational behavior models. Kent, OH: Kent State University.

Table 1
History of the Clustering Process

NCL	CLJ	FREQ	SPRSQ	RSQ	ERSQ	CCC	PSF	PST2	TIE
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
10	20-23	30	0.02	.73	0.80	-6.91	68.4	20.6	()
9	16-17	43	0.02	.71	0.78	-7.17	69.0	23.6	()
8	13-18	37	0.02	.68	0.76	-7.44	69.6	23.5	()
7	26-15	35	0.03	.65	0.74	-7.91	69.8	36.0	()
6	12-14	61	0.04	.61	0.71	-8.32	70.4	38.4	()
5	6- 8	98	0.05	.55	0.67	-8.94	70.6	30.5	()
4	11- 9	68	0.06	.48	0.61	-9.42	71.9	45.3	()
3	10- 7	65	0.12	.36	0.46	-6.83	64.0	67.6	()
2	5- 3	163	0.16	.19	0.26	-5.12	54.4	57.1	()
1	2- 4	231	0.19	.00	0.00	0.00	.	54.4	()

Notes:

- (1) NCL = number of clusters.
(2) CLJ = clusters joined.
(3) FREQ = number of observations in the current cluster.
(4) SPRSQ = the semi-partial squared multiple correlation.
(5) RSQ = the squared multiple correlation.
(6) ERSQ = the approximate expected value of R square under the uniform null hypothesis.
(7) CCC = the cubic clustering criterion.
(8) PSF = the pseudo F statistic.
(9) PST2 = the pseudo t square statistic.
(10) TIE = ties for minimum distance;
() = absence of a tie.

Table 2
Correspondence of Types found
with Literature Types

TYPES /AUTHORS	STRATEGIC PARTNER	STRATEGIC ADVISOR	OPERATIONAL PARTNER	OPERATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR
Miles and Snow (1984)	Entrepreneur	Coordinator	Maintainer	?
Fombrun et al. (1984)	Strategic		Managerial	Operational
Baird and Meshoulam (1984)	Cross-functional integration (V)	Controlled growth (III)	. Functional growth (II) . Functional integration (IV)	Basic (I)
Tyson and Fell (1986)	Architect (business manager)		Contracts manager (systems reactive)	Clerk of works (administrative support)
Andrews (1986)	Strategic planning		. Industrial relations . Control type	. Clerical . Counseling . In-House consulting
Driver et al. (1988)	Managerial model I	Managerial model II	. Legal model . Behavioral	. Clerical . Humanistic
Torrington (1988)	Organization man	Manpower analyst	Consensus negotiator	. Welfare worker . Humane bureaucrat
Petersen & Malone (1975)	Full partner	Show case	Show me	Routine service

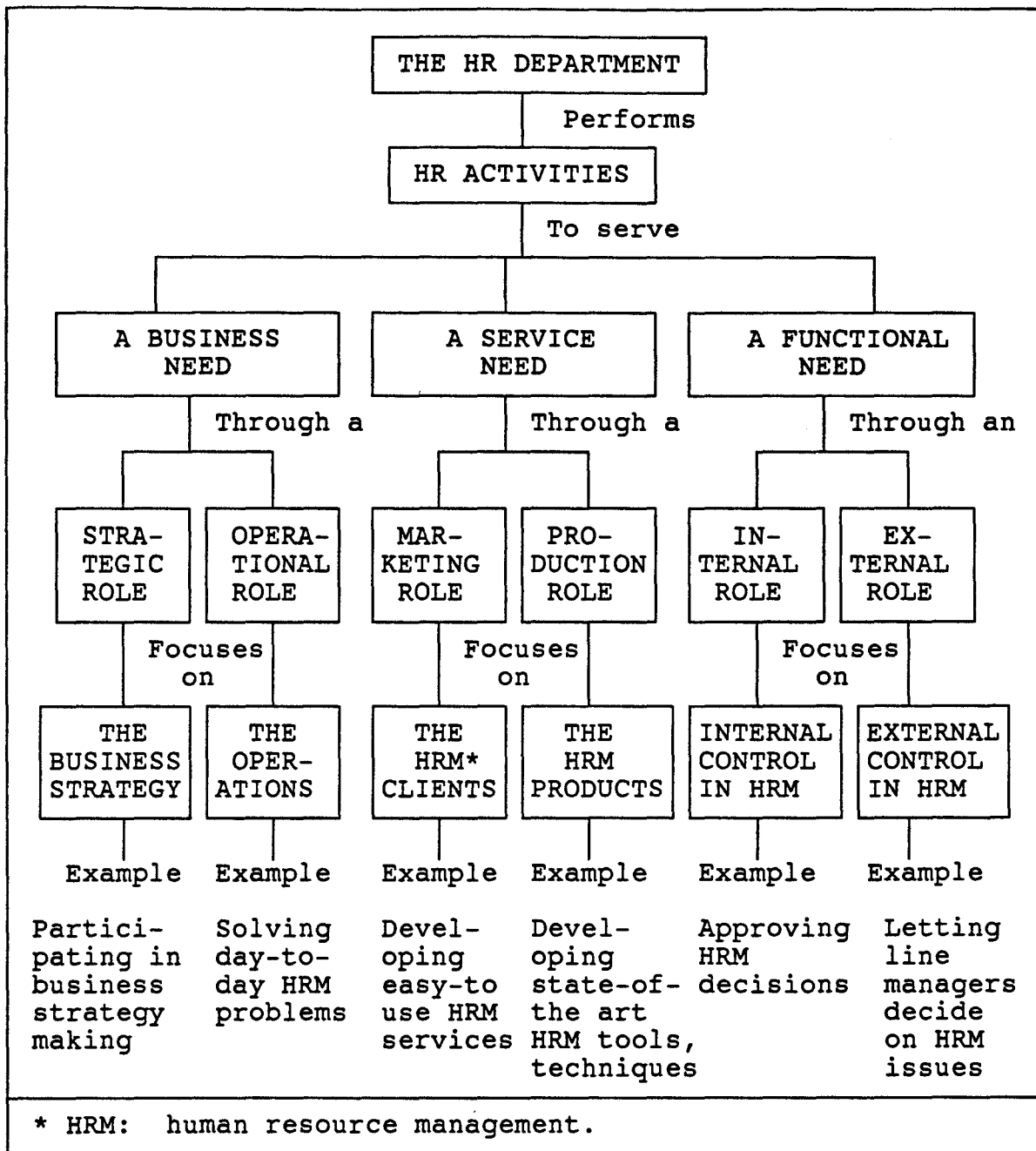


FIGURE 1

Concept Map of the Basic Roles of a Human Resource Department

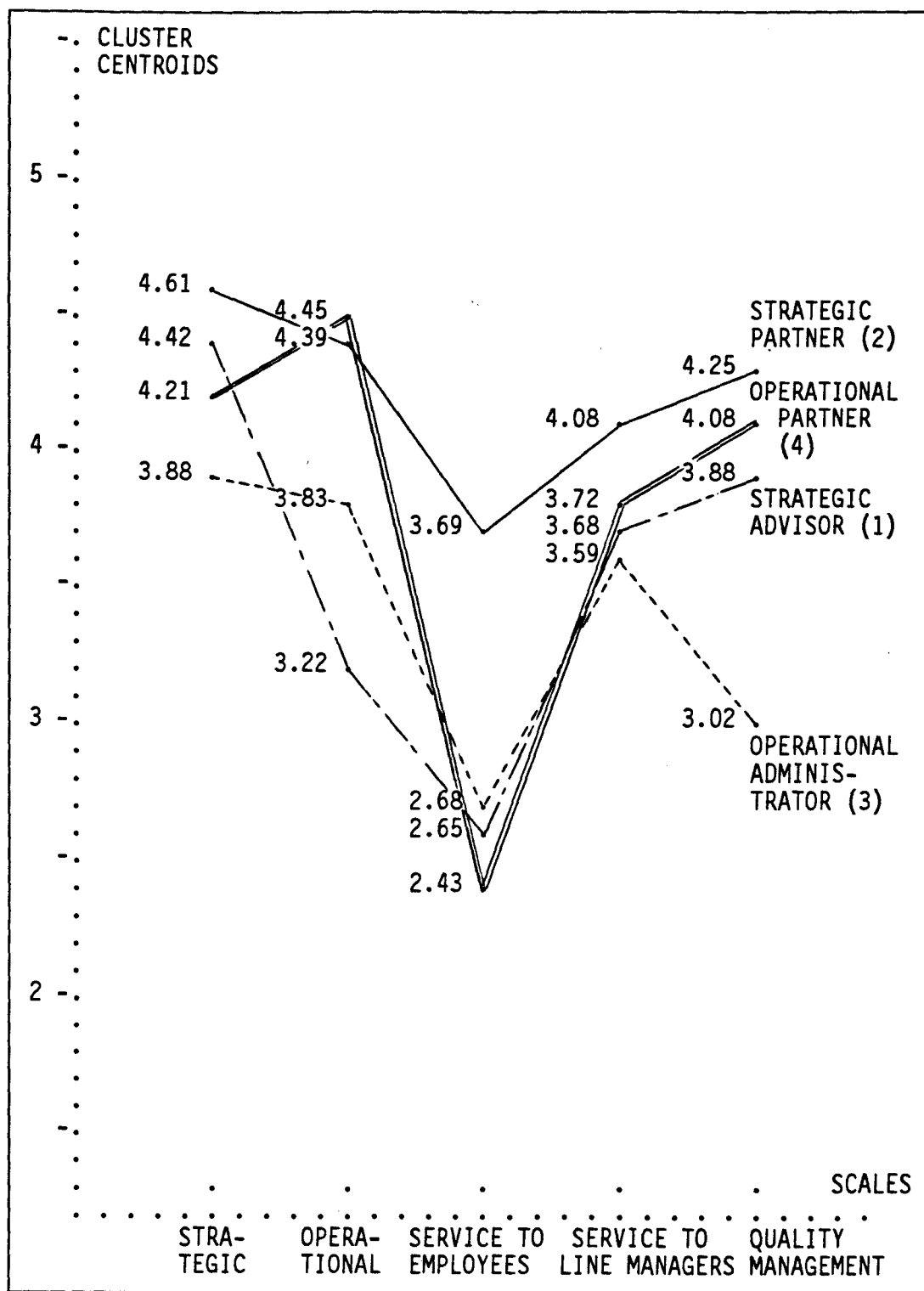


Figure 2
 Profile diagram of the cluster solution