A.K. Rice: A Forgotten Giant at the Tavistock Institute

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The Tavistock Institute’s Lunchtime Talk, 11 November 2020
TIHR SHAPER: Operating through a dynamic tension as institution builder

- From maths as logic to social anthropology
- From Cambridge to TIHR, via Colonial Service, Personnel Manager in Industry, Industrial Welfare Society (now The Work Foundation)
- From manager to scholar: scholarly practitioner
- Guiding the building of TIHR as an institute for research and consulting, as well as shaping the theoretical basis

Frank Auerbach, Head of E.O.W. - 1960
BION’s INFLUENCE: Shines through Ken Rice (AKR)

Participating in Bion’s first study groups; client of TIHR; early adaptor of leaderless groups in industry; member of TIHR Council; charged with TIHR’s organisation and management.

From his position as Deputy Director of Industrial Welfare Society, AKR commissioned TIHR to apply non-directive methods to training groups.

TIHR’s Council recruited AKR as an external member (both client and translator of Bion’s work) linked to industrial development.

AKR was member of both Bion’s 1946 study group and subsequent 1947-48 follow-on study groups.

TIHR Council seconded AKR immediately for the purpose of TIHR “institution building and management”. His extensive background in personnel, administration and social anthropology was an obvious asset.

Thus AKR became an early adaptor of leaderless groups for the purpose of development for professionalising managers post – war.

Evidence of AKR’s uses of applied British psychoanalysis can be found in his first Human Relations (1949) article illustrating relations between personnel and executive managers.
FAMOUS GLACIER: From practitioner to scholar through the intensive “conceptual and practice incubator”

- Glacier
- Peculiar “bricolage” brings the anthropological meaning of culture to organisational issues which are then analysed and explained through Bion’s group dynamics.
- Lewinian and socio-technical
- Organisational change as cultural change = the link between culture (sentient system) and working group (task system).


Aerial photograph of the river streams from Icelandic glaciers.

THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE®

Canterbury Christ Church University | CHIST CHURCH BUSINESS SCHOOL
AHMEDABAD GIFTS: Ken Rice with Ten Years R&D
Discovering and testing methodologies for action research, organisational design, and change consultancy; publishing.

- Indian multi-national project in Calico weaving sheds and wider business.
- “Give assistance to the solution of problems causing concern for client”.
- Field experiments attending to sentient and technical systems:
  - Define “primary task”; “financial” added to STS; orders of differentiation for management; detailed case analysis.
- “Productivity and Social Organisation” (1958) & “The Enterprise and Its Environment” (1963)
LEICESTER CONFERENCE: AKR conceptualises the role of mature leader and experiments with challenging adult learning

- Individual, group and organisation levels as an incremental process of management of boundaries and experiential differentiation of levels of analysis
- Leicester Conference becomes then “a purified temporary organisation” shaped and informed by the socio-technical systems psychodynamics (STSP) perspective that is “concerned...to provide those who attend with opportunities to learn about leadership”
- “Learning for leadership” (1965); “Systems of organization” (1967 with Miller)
KEN RICE CLARIFIES: Lays groundwork for organisations as living and STPS systems

- TIHR Archives at Wellcome Library enables locating and positioning Ken Rice precisely in TIHR's first two decades.
- Ken Rice explicitly set out to create and communicate methodologies "flexible enough to be used in any social system regardless of cultural differences" (1969).
- Educating mature leaders as the primary task of a modern university.
PALGRAVE Handbook of Organizational Change Thinkers – First Edition

The Palgrave Handbook of Organizational Change Thinkers - first edition
Thank you