

LOWER LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP IN INDUSTRY

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The distinction between formal and informal organization may serve to delineate the sources of motivation for accepting or rejecting the role-expectations of an organizational structure. Leadership plays a major role in recruiting identification with the organization's objectives, regulations, and directions. Most studies in the field focus on the lower level of leadership, the foreman, who is considered the direct bridge between formal and informal organization. These studies are mainly concerned with the conditions under which organizational demands are accepted and participants experience satisfaction or deprivation.

I

What is meant by leadership in an organizational context is often not clearly defined. Many studies agree that leadership is a social relationship and not a personality characteristic. It is situational in the sense that a person may be a leader in one situation and not in another. But is leadership in organizations a role-characteristic independent of the incumbent? Some studies seem to imply that every foreman is a leader if he has authority, i.e., if his orders are legitimate to the workers. Although this is a matter of definition, we suggest that it is more fruitful to distinguish leadership from a role which carries authority (foreman, army officer).¹ While authority can be rational and external, accepted leadership always includes an emotional commitment to the personality of the leader.² Thus a foreman may have authority but no leadership, his orders being accepted for motives other than a personal commitment to him. This may have no apparent consequences in the ordinary industrial situation. But in crisis situations (e.g., fire, strike) and/or situations of rapid change, when orders outside the specific delimited area of authority have to be given and accepted, only the leader will be followed, while orders of the regular authority holder will be disregarded.

II

If this distinction between leadership and authority is accepted, an intriguing substantive question arises: Does every organization need low

¹ Cf. R. Bierstedt, "The Problem of Authority" in M. Berger, T. Abel, C. H. Page (ed.), *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1954), pp. 67-81.

² In psychological terms one could claim that the relationship between leader and follower includes some elements of identification.

level leadership in order to function? The answer depends on the nature of the organization. The more diffuse its goals and requirements are, the more personal commitment it needs, and therefore the more leadership is required. The more specific its objectives and demands, the less leadership is required. In organizations with specific goals, acceptance of regulations and directions may be based on external needs of the actor which are satisfied through complying with the organizational requirements. A worker may fulfill his organizational role in order to earn a living and derive his psychological rewards for conformity to the factory rules and orders, from his family and his status in the community. Authority may also be accepted on cultural grounds, earlier socialization, etc., without personal commitment to the holder-of-authority in the formal structure.

Economic organizations, e.g., industry, are relatively specific organizations compared with most political parties and religious movements. Economic organizations themselves can be classified from this point of view. It seems that at least the more specific industries can do without eliciting identification by relying on external motivation and rational legitimation. Foremen in industry may be authority holders without possessing any leadership characteristics. We must learn under what conditions they become leaders. To assume that every authority holder is a leader is unwarranted by the existing data³ and makes the connotation of the term "leader" too broad.

III

Some industries, for reasons only partially understood, seem to require recruitment of identification with the organization as an internal source of motivation, since external sources are insufficient. Both formal and informal leadership are considered important factors in this process. It is not clear how the informal organization, when it exists, is linked to the formal organization. Does the authority holder take upon himself the role of leader of the informal group, or are these two mutually exclusive roles?

The Michigan studies seem to suggest that both roles can be combined.⁴ A foreman may be *production oriented*: he emphasizes quality and quantity of performance, acceptance of orders, is not interested in

³ In the initial stage of the process of change described by E. Jaques in *The Changing Culture of a Factory*, no signs of leadership can be recognized in the various authority holders, but orders are still followed and regulations are accepted.

⁴ See Daniel Katz, N. Maccoby, G. Gurin, L. G. Floor, *Productivity, Supervision and Morale Among Railroad Workers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Institute for Social Research, 1950), Part I.

workers beyond their organizational roles, and would rather work than supervise. In short, a production-oriented foreman is an authority holder but not a leader. On the other hand, a foreman may be *human relations oriented*: he is interested in the workers' personalities, in guiding them, and in building a positive human relationship. Thus he attempts to create a personal commitment of the workers toward himself which means that the foreman attempts to become a leader. Whether this attempt is successful or not depends on many psychological and sociological conditions which cannot be discussed here. Thus there seem to be three alternatives: an authority holder without leadership (production-oriented foreman); an authority holder with leadership (some human-relation-oriented foreman), often referred to as a formal leader; and a leader without a position of authority, an informal leader.

Can the formal leader be the only leader of the informal group or must he work through an informal leader? The Harvard studies of Bales and his colleagues, when applied to our problem, seem to suggest that two leaders are needed, as in most cases one person will not be able to carry out both roles.⁵ The two roles require different psychological characteristics and are to some degree contradictory in the very attitudes and actions they demand. The instrumental leader (who comes close to the formal leader) and the expressive leader (who is quite similar to the informal leader) are usually two different people. "Giving ideas" and "guiding" usually do not coincide with being well liked. A leader who puts on the group pressure to achieve more and better performance creates at the same time some amount of rejection and hostility toward himself. Therefore, the roles of tension releasing and increasing solidarity in the group are almost inevitably left to some other actor. Since the foreman, if a leader at all, tends to be an instrumental leader, some other actor, perhaps an elderly worker, will carry out the expressive role of the informal leader.⁶ This problem concerning the possible relationships between the authority holder and the informal leader has practical implications for the human relations instructor and counselor who guide the foreman. Should the foreman strive to fulfill the role of the leader of the informal group or leave it to a worker, who has no authority position, and strive to be accepted by the group and supported by its informal leader?

⁵ See T. Parsons, R. F. Bales, and E. A. Shils, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 111-61.

⁶ In this context a reversal of roles, where the formal leader is primarily expressive and the informal leader takes a primarily instrumental role, is quite unlikely.

The last problem to be discussed here is the pattern of the relationship between the two roles in those cases where they are separated. The relations may vary all the way from a coalition between the foreman and the informal leader to constant collisions between them. Directions given by foremen can be differentiated among (1) those which are given directly to the workers without prior consultation with or "informing" the informal leader, (2) those which "require" such consultation, and (3) those which are given indirectly, i.e., "told" to the informal leader to transfer to the group. The balance of rejection and acceptance has to be more carefully studied. Some rejections of orders by the informal leader are functional for the maintenance of the pattern of acceptance in toto. Too much subordination of the informal leader by the foreman and too much acceptance by the informal leader may undermine the following of the informal leader and in some cases leave room for the emergence of a leader more ready to reject the foreman's directions.⁷

Further analysis of the dynamic relations between the foreman and the informal leader must be complicated by introducing the roles of the steward and business agent. Are they formal or informal leaders from the point of view of the industry? How do they influence the dynamics of the relationship discussed above? Are there more than two basic types (mutually exclusive) of leadership? These are only a few of the questions which need further study in order to understand better the lower levels of leadership in industry in particular and in organizational structures in general.

⁷ This is the main point of tension in the political structure of the classroom in "Blackboard Jungle."