This paper will be concerned with some of the basic cultural and structural conditions which impinge on the application of the human relations approach in industry. Although human relations studies have been criticized for failing to take these conditions or factors into account, little has been done to clarify the specific ways in which human relations theory may be related to the study of cultural systems and social structures.

Sufficient work has been done to make it clear that human relations programs do not operate in a vacuum but are subject to limitations imposed upon them by the existence of a broader framework of cultural and social systems. As an example, there are a number of studies of the process of technological and supervisory changes in industrial organizations which reveal the limits imposed upon the effectiveness of human relations techniques and the success of innovation by structural factors. Typical of the situations thus studied are: classrooms training, where the supervisors’ attitudes and skills are modified without a parallel change in the approach of the supervisors’ superiors; simultaneous training of several levels of management in order to ease the introduction of change and ensure its long run acceptance; introducing the new supervising approach through the regular line with the human relations instructor serving as staff advisor; and finally the application of surveys conducted in the same industry as a “feed back” system, generating support for the change.

For the most part, those basic structural factors that set limits to the human relations approach are regarded as beyond the possibility of manipulation and hence to be ignored. Attention is focused, rather, on ways and means of smoothing transitions and overcoming resistance to innovations. This emphasis on facilitating techniques as against dealing with the broader structural situation may be explained by the practical focus of many human relations studies. It is suggested here, however, that from the standpoint of both basic theory and practical application, it is essential to study the limiting factors to see whether they are really not subject to control, and if so, to learn what the limitations are so as to avoid inappropriate application.

The remaining part of this paper will be devoted to an analysis of two examples where the operation of human relations programs are conditioned and limited by cultural or structural factors. The first will have to do with cross-cultural and sub-cultural differences in the prevalence of democratic vs. authoritarian traditions. The second will examine the alternative structural positions of foremen. In both cases, the analysis will have implications for vision in Industry, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1955, especially pp. 90-92.

the foreman as he attempts to employ human relations methods.

CULTURAL FACTORS

Most human relations studies either avoid the fact of cultural differences by not discussing them or by assuming that the workers are a constant factor themselves from which standard and desirable reactions may be elicited by a standardized program. For instance, all workers are expected to prefer democratic supervision over authoritarian supervision, to welcome responsibility, and to prefer mutual understanding to griping.

Cross-Cultural Factors: Among Societies.

There is very little information about different reactions to the same basic human relations programs in different cultures and societies and even less about the possibilities, if any, of adjusting human relations programs to different cultures. The human relations approach, although basically one idea, has several levels of application. On the most superficial level it means talking in a "nice," "human," considerate way to subordinates instead of using the more authoritative forms of speech. Seen in a deeper way and in more psychological terms, it means being sensitive to the other's psychological needs and expressions, understanding the other, and taking his feelings into account. Basically, it means a democratic rather than authoritarian way of leading people, a minimum of coercion, a maximum of persuasion, two-way communication, direct or representative participation in decision-making, and a sharing of responsibility. Human relations techniques have emerged out of such famous studies as those by Mayo.


6 Some insights on non-work situations can be obtained from John Gyr, "Analysis of Committee Members Behavior in Four Cultures," Human Relations, IV (1951), pp. 193-202.


13 People who do not prefer democratic leadership are described as immature, Chris Argyris, Executive Leadership—Developing It in Yourself and Others, New Haven: Yale University, Labor and Management Center, p. 25.

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raised in a traditional or totalitarian society will temporarily prefer authoritarian supervision because they are used to it from childhood, since every change, even to an improved state from the point of view of psychological equilibrium, involves strains and tensions and therefore some resistance. The alternative hypothesis suggests that, even in the long run, after the workers have been thoroughly exposed to the human relations approach, they will not prefer it. Sociologists cannot answer this question by pointing out the virtues of democracy and the vices of authoritarian leadership. The hypothesis has to be empirically tested. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this test. The findings will be relevant for those interested in the possibilities of introducing political democracy into newly developed countries, as well as contributing insight to the age old controversy about the relative determining power of childhood experience and early socialization (which would mean in this context that democratic leadership would be relatively unsuccessful for people raised in a non-democratic society) versus the relative significance of situational factors in molding behavior (which would mean here that people can, at least after a period of adjustment, be brought to prefer democratic leadership even if raised in a non-democratic society).

Cross-Cultural Factors: Sub-Cultures

Differences in the predisposition of workers toward human relations management can be detected not only among workers raised in different cultures but also among workers raised in the same basic culture, due to differences in sub-cultures and differential membership in social groups. The first clue to these factors can be found in the Lippitt-White experiment. The children with whom the experiment was conducted came from a progressive school, which permits the assumption (uncontrolled in this experiment) that all or most children came from a democratically oriented social environment. There was one child, however, who came from a partially different background; his father was an army officer. This child, we are told, preferred and was more effective under authoritarian leadership. We do not know if he would have continued to prefer authoritarian leadership if he had been exposed to democratic leadership for a longer period.

There are social groups in every modern society which are analogous to the son of the army officer in the sense that their background does not prepare them to accept democratic leadership and the responsibilities of rational behavior which the human relations approach requires. There are two main types of such groups and, respectively, two types of workers: traditional groups and "transitional" groups.

When we speak about modern industrial societies we tend to associate them with assembly lines, large scale organizations, trade unions and the increasing significance of the white collar occupational group. This tends to hide the fact that there are still considerable sectors of these societies where life, despite the processes of urbanization, follows quite traditional patterns. A considerable part of the manual, especially unskilled, laborers of the United States, for instance, have been new immigrants, many of them from traditional societies. How does a Chinese, Japanese, Puerto Rican or Mexican first-generation immigrant accept the human relations treatment? Is he at the beginning more disturbed than gratified, more confused and tense than happy and enthusiastic? What happens later? How, if at all, does he adjust to the new democratic way of supervision?

The "transitional" group is composed of social groups which are half modernized but still half traditional. The father can no longer hold complete control over his children who have independent sources of income and are more assimilated than he is, but he is still much more authoritative than the typical urban middle-class father. Some modern values and norms are introduced in the public schools, but the teacher, often a member of a transitory group himself, is still quite authoritarian. Members of the transitional group include some of the second generation immigrants from traditional societies who come from relatively isolated rural areas in which urbanization only partially changed the old values and patterns of authority, as well as many of the industrial laborers of newly developed countries. Workers of this type may, at least initially, be unprepared to accept human relations supervision as a satisfactory type of leadership. They may consider it too weak and/or too demanding; they may find the transfer from "leader-oriented" to "group-oriented" social control quite disturbing.

The traditional worker tends to accept paternalistic-

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14 Some interesting differences according to age, sex and occupation are reported by Howard M. Vollmer and Jack A. Kinney, *Identifying Potential Supervisors*, State University of Iowa, Iowa Bureau of Labor and Management Research Series, No. 12, especially pp. 13-14, and Howard M. Vollmer and Jack A. Kinney, "Informal Requirements for Supervisory Positions," *Personnel*, 35 (March, 1957), p. 439. Since questions on ethnic origin could not have been asked in these studies, this factor is not controlled nor studied.

15 On the army officer's son see Lippitt and White, op. cit., p. 345.
authoritarian supervision as a natural extension of the father, teacher, patriarchal community and religious authority he experienced before. The "transitional" worker's temporary or long-term attraction to authoritarian leadership may rest on very different grounds. While the predispositions of traditional workers are based on natural groups and their leadership, the preference for authoritative guidance by the "transitional" worker may often rest on the disintegration of the natural groups and the disappearance of their leaders. Mayo, who emphasized this point, thought that this might be a basis for recruitment to Fascist movements. Others have pointed out that the Communists in newly developed countries as well as in Italy and in France are relatively successful in these groups. Mayo hoped that an enlightened industrial elite and intimate work group would supply an alternative outlet to the psychological needs of the workers. Although this may have been a deep insight which became partially true (even though, to some extent, very different factors such as trade unions were involved), one should consider a third alternative: the psychological needs of those who are attracted by authoritarian leadership may be supplied by non-political leaders such as the leaders of trade unions and authoritarian supervisors.

To sum up this point: the application to and acceptance of human relations supervision by the workers, a major structural factor from the point of view of the foreman—has to be studied on comparative grounds. The conditions under which it is accepted, partially accepted, and completely rejected must still be spelled out, and the processes of change in the attitudes of the workers from one type to another have yet to be studied and specified.

HUMAN RELATIONS AND THE FOREMAN

The foreman has often been described as the "man in the middle," a marginal man, a victim of industrialization. He has lost functions (e.g., training, inspection), authority (e.g., the right to hire and fire), power (because of unionization), chances for mobility (because of lack of higher education), and much of his means of control over the worker (because of decline in his influence over distribution of rewards like pay, bonus, over-hours, allocation of vacation, promotion, transfers).


The first line supervisor not only has a weak position; he has a complex and delicate task to perform. On the organizational chart he is the last link in the authority line. He is seen as an integral part of management and is expected to take its side and defend its policies.

How does the human relations approach affect the foreman's problems? Does it strengthen his position and facilitate his task? How do various foremen apply the same basic training? What are the consequences of varying interpretations?

One of the main contributions of the human relations approach is that, when applied in the right way to the right type of workers, it increases the personal commitment of the workers to the foreman. This means that his authority and personal influence are increased. He can obtain more easily the performances he requests without using the limited stock of sanctions he still has. Or, to put it another way, his stock of sanctions is increased by new types of sanctions, mainly of a psychological nature, like giving or withholding praise, which were previously not used or not used in a fully conscious and systematic way. It gives the foreman new forms of control and new means for attaining his objectives.

But on the other hand, the human relations approach, like many other adaptive structures, while solving some problems creates new ones. The foreman under the new labor policy is expected to become a leader. He is expected to increase the workers' commitment to the factory, its management, and its objectives and regulations; to reduce griping, strikes, absenteeism and turnover; to communicate the workers' complaints, feelings and attitudes upward. In doing this he has to come closer to the workers and more involved in personal relations with them. But this puts strains on his loyalty to management and his ability to enforce unpopular orders when necessary. Thus, while the human relations approach increases the potential significance of the foreman's role, it also makes his task more demanding and his authority more difficult to maintain.

Four Types of Foremen's Behavior

Under the human relations regime there seem to be four ways for the foreman to work out his complicated role. Each has its own strains and stresses as well as advantages. The analysis of these four types is highly tentative and should be considered as an outline for further research.


24 Presumably the new stresses are not as serious as those the adaptive structure is intended to solve; otherwise it would either be abandoned or give rise to second degree adaptive structures. Promotion by seniority is such an example. It is functional because it prevents too totalistic competition, yet it also causes strain when incompetent workers are promoted. See Wilbert E. Moore, Industrial Relations and the Social Order, New York: Macmillan, 1946, pp. 156-157.
For the purpose of discussion, we shall assume that the factors discussed above are held constant, and that management, as well as the workers, are favorably oriented to the whole idea of human relations.

1. A foreman may view his role as management representative. In this case he will be inclined to see the human relations techniques as just another tool in achieving the objectives dictated by management through the authority line. Personally he may feel quite uncomfortable over the need to cultivate personal relations with the workers. His reference group will often be management in toto, especially second level superiors. This type of foreman will usually find it relatively easy to refrain from getting too involved, to remember what “really counts” and to insist that orders are orders.\(^{25}\) He may fail partially or completely in his human relations objectives. The workers may respect his clear position on the management side, but tend to be constantly aware of the separating line between management (including the foreman) and the workers, which means that they will be strongly interest-oriented, calculative and uncommitted. In this situation, not only may alienation and unionization be higher, but the workers often will have their own informal leaders.\(^{26}\) What positions the workers will take toward the foreman will depend to a considerable degree on the relationship between the foreman and this leader.

2. The second type of foreman puts extra stress on his relationship with the workers. His first loyalty is to them. In some cases he is a member of the same trade union as his subordinates.\(^{27}\) His disputes with the workers are sometimes handled by the trade union people. He spends his free time with the workers.\(^{28}\) He will tend to forget, distort, delay and water down, any orders which put strain on his relations with his friends, the workers. In his communication with management he will tend to play up the workers’ demands and the difficulties in executing certain tasks and orders.\(^{29}\) The workers may accept him as their leader, but management, as far as it is aware of the situation, can hardly be satisfied. Relationships of this type seem to exist in those working places in which the introduction of human relations caused an increase in the satisfaction of the workers but no increase in production.\(^{30}\) If the foremen are pressed “to be nice and understanding” to the workers, some of them, under certain conditions, will tend to interpret this as not requiring pressure on the workers if relationships would be strained. This is especially so when the foreman-superintendent relationships are dominated by the same considerations. Thus, in the first type, the human relations approach is only partially accepted, while in the second type, it is overdone as far as management is concerned. The workers may be very enthusiastic over this type of lenient supervision; they may feel disturbed because it violates their expectations and cultural commitments (e.g., a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay); or they may be ambivalent and suspicious over the management “guy” who turns out to be a friend.

3. The third type of foreman tries to keep both sides happy and is caught in a dilemma of dual loyalty.\(^{31}\) To the management he conveys the idea of a loyal subordinate eagerly reporting about opinions, activities and moods of the workers. He tries to avoid transmitting workers’ requests and demands in order not to be considered as identifying with the workers. He will tend to promise high performance and to put the blame on the workers for failure to keep these promises. To the workers he conveys loyalty and understanding: he attenuates management’s orders and demands; and he promises to transfer their requests and demands upwards and to “raise hell” if they are not accepted. He tries not to be identified with management. Playing on the “conspiracy psychology” of the workers (as he does on that of the management), he claims the demands have not been fulfilled because management is uncooperative and hardhearted. He is not only an “expert of double talk,”\(^{32}\) but also an expert on double behavior. His success is inversely related to the availability and effectiveness of other lines of communication, e.g., steward-superintendent or steward-business agent-management. The stronger and better they are, the smaller is his maneuvering margin and his chances of success. Unpleasant as the role may seem, one should keep in mind that, although the final responsibility over one’s behavior lies in one’s self, the position of foreman exerts strong pressure toward such

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\(^{26}\) See Daniel Katz et al., op. cit., 1951, p. 15.


\(^{29}\) “Our foreman told us, ‘You men know how to schedule runs, so let me know if you’re overloaded.’ I saw him stick his neck out with the general foreman over work loads.” Turner, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

\(^{30}\) On the reverse relationship between satisfaction with the company and production see Rensis Likert, op. cit. Compare Nahum Z. Medalia and Delbert C. Miller, Human Relations Leadership and the Association of Morale and Efficiency in Work Groups: A Controlled Study with Small Military Units (ditto).


behavior. The requirements of the human relations approach, it seems, do not decrease and may even increase the probability that such behavior will occur.

4. The fourth type is the foreman who is not management oriented, not labor oriented, nor dual oriented, but oriented toward the foremen as a social group. While the first type tries to associate and identify with superiors, the second with the workers, the third with both according to the situation, the fourth type’s membership as well as reference group are his peers. He will be more inclined to support efforts to establish independent foremen’s trade unions or associations. He will try to be fair to both management and workers but will keep the interests of his own group in mind. He will become especially active in cases in which management, through direct contact with workers for workers with management (established mainly through the trade unions’ representatives) tries to further undermine his functions, rights, privileges and authority. He will try to increase his rights by fighting off attempts by staff members to interfere in his work, attempts by superintendents to determine too minutely his tasks, and attempts by workers to share some of his responsibilities. It seems, that he will be less inclined than the other three types to accept the human relations approach of his superiors (which he regards as undermining his loyalty to his peers) or to apply it to his subordinates (which he regards as undermining his authority).

This is an analytical typology, which means that some elements of the various types may be found in the behavior of most foremen. As one element will tend to dominate, we can classify every foreman into one of these four categories. Whether this classification is as exhaustive as we suggest and whether it is fruitful in conducting research must be tested in future studies. We have held constant the various structural factors while the typology was discussed. We point now to some fruitful hypotheses which can be derived when the variations of these factors are taken into account.

We would expect, for instance, that the worker-oriented foreman will be found more frequently among foremen who, previously, have been workers in the same factory, especially in the same department and with the same team. Management-oriented foremen are more likely to have been recruited from outside the particular factory. Whether or not the foreman has been a trade union member seems to have a significant influence on his interpretation of his role. Cultural, ethnic and other background differences—rarely studied in the human relations surveys and experiments—between workers and foremen and between foremen and management, may have considerable influence in determining which interpretation of the human relations technique will dominate. The size of the factory seems to be highly related to these problems. The larger the industry, other things being equal, the higher the probability that the fourth type will emerge.

To sum up: a broader and more successful application of human relations techniques as well as a deeper integration of human relations studies into sociological analyses and theory, call for comparative studies of human relations in various cultural and structural settings. Once these differentiations are established, they can be related to differential interpretations of the human relations approach and differential behavior of various supervisors. Full application and understanding of human relations can hardly be expected before these structural factors are incorporated into human relations studies.

34 The rarity of this type may be reflected in the low rate of foreman unionization. See Robert G. Scigliano, “Trade Unionism and the Industrial Foreman,” Journal of Business, 27 (October, 1954), pp. 293-300.