

## DEMOCRATIC AND NONDEMOCRATIC SUPERVISION IN INDUSTRY\*

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The human relations school has often been criticized for not paying enough attention to structural and cultural factors and for focusing on factors which can be controlled. But little has been done to spell out how the structural and cultural factors impinge on the application of human relations techniques. This paper will discuss some of the factors which influence the response of the workers to the human relations way of supervising.

Most human relations studies, counseling and training programs, seem to assume that the workers are a constant factor from which standard reactions may be elicited when approached with a standard pattern of behavior. Workers are expected to react positively to the human relations way of supervising. All are expected to prefer democratic supervision over authoritarian supervision, sharing responsibility over being left alone and mutual understanding over griping. As Rensis Likert put it, "We thought at first, *of course*, that *all* workers would *love* increased responsibility" (italics supplied). Likert goes on to report that "in fact some did and some did not." In surveys, 15-20 of the workers in the job enlargement groups said they did not like the way of doing things." This reaction is obtained when human relations techniques are introduced to groups of American workers (ethnic and racial factors are uncontrolled and their distributions are not reported in almost all human relations studies in industries). What are the typical reactions of workers to human relations supervision in other cultures?

### *Cross cultural factors among societies*

There is very little information about different reactions to the same human relations programs in different cultures and societies and

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even less on the possibilities, if any, to adjust human relations programs to various 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 the subordinates instead of in 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, taking his feelings into account. Basically it means a democratic rather than authoritarian way of leading people, minimum of coercion, maximum of persuasion, two-way communication, direct or representative participation in decision-making, and sharing of responsibility. It was long believed, and still is by some, that supervisors applying these techniques will achieve higher quality and quantity of production as well as higher satisfaction of the workers; participation is considered an important way for achieving both. There seems to be an implicit cultural assumption behind these beliefs; namely that the worker has a democratic personality. It is overlooked that this may be only a consequence of being raised in a democratic family, school and society, of being used to democratic leadership and having internalized the democratic values. This leaves room for a question seldom raised and almost never studied: What about the worker who has been raised in a different society and has an authoritarian personality—meaning here, being used to an authoritarian way of leadership? There seems to be some material which indicates that workers in such cultures, e.g., in the so-called "traditional societies," will tend to be most effective and most satisfied under paternalistic-authoritarian supervision. For these workers, any other type of leadership, including democratic leadership, may be quite disruptive and disturbing. Nobody seems to have repeated the Lippit-White study with children in such societies. There is no conclusive data about the supervisor-worker relationship. While it seems quite plausible that those raised under one type of leadership will prefer it to any other type, whatever the other type may be, there is at least one significant alternative hypothesis which has to be considered.

The basic assumption of the human relations approach is that it is better tuned to the basic psychological needs of the human being than any other approach. This *may* be so even though workers raised

in a traditional or totalitarian supervision become every change, even to the psychological equilibrium before some resistance. It suggests, after the work human relations approach answer this question by means of authoritarian leadership tested. It is hard to say findings will be relevant introducing political as well as contributing independent determining power of (which would mean it be relatively unsuccessful versus the relative significance behavior (which would period of adjustment, if raised in a nondemo

#### *Cross culture factors a*

Differences in the relations management can be in different cultures but culture, due to differences in social groups. The Lippit-White experiment was conducted came from an assumption (uncontrolled came from a democratic one child who came from was an army officer. They were effective under authoritarian have continued to prefer exposed to democratic.

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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 the psychological equilibrium, involves strains and tensions and therefore some resistance. But in the long run, the alternative hypothesis suggests, after the workers have been thoroughly exposed to the human relations approach, they will 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 nondemocratic 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 nondemocratic society).

### *Cross culture factors and social differentiations*

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 subcultures and differential membership in social groups. The first clue for these factors can be found in the Lippit-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 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 analo-

gous to the son of the army officer in the sense that their background does not prepare them to accept democratic leadership, the responsibilities or the degree and nature of rational behavior which the human relations approach assumes that workers have. There are two main types of such groups and respectively two types of workers—traditional groups and the "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 "transitory" 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 middle-class father. In the public schools some modern values and norms are introduced; but the teacher, often a member of a transitory group himself, is still quite authoritarian. Members of the transitory group include some of the second-generation immigrants from traditional societies; workers who come from relatively isolated rural areas in which urbanization only partially changed the old values and pattern 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 the human relations supervision as a satisfactory type of leadership. They may often 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-authoritarian

supervision as a natural community and religiously "transitory" worker's traditional leadership, many predispositions of the and their leadership, "transitory" worker's natural groups and emphasized this point recruitment to Fascist Communists in newly France, are relatively an enlightened industrial an alternative outlet to this may have been a though at least partial trade unions), one should need of those who be supplied by *non-politic* and authoritarian supervision. To sum up: The acceptance of the on comparative ground they are accepted, rejected. The conditions under democratic supervision in these issues has been self-evident.

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supervision as a natural extension of the father, teacher, patriarchal community and religious authority he experiences before. The "transitory" worker's temporary or long-term attraction to authoritarian leadership, may rest on very different grounds. While the predispositions of the traditional workers are based on natural groups and their leadership, the preference for authoritative guidance of the "transitory" 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 groups would supply an alternative outlet to the psychological needs of the workers. While this may have been a deep insight which partially became true (although at least partially very different factors were involved such as trade unions), one should consider a third alternative: the psychological need of those who are attracted by authoritarian leadership may be supplied by *nonpolitical* leaders as the leaders of most trade unions and authoritarian supervisors.

To sum up: The structural and cultural factors which relate to the acceptance of the human relations techniques have to be studied on comparative grounds in order to find out under which conditions they are accepted, rejected or temporarily rejected and later accepted. The conditions under which workers in various cultures adapt to democratic supervision have to be spelled out. The theoretical interest in these issues has been discussed above; their practical significance is self-evident.

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