

PEER LEADERSHIP WITHIN WORK GROUPS*

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One of the current tasks of industrial psychology is to link concepts of group process and leadership to the performance of work groups. This paper aims to extend this discussion by emphasizing several issues that are critical for the interpretation of research results in this area and for the guidance of future research. The comments emerge from the research program of the Institute for Social Research, which for several years has had an active program of theory development and field observation focused upon factors, such as leadership and group activity, that bear upon the effectiveness and survival of work groups and their organizations. In addition to mentioning five central issues, we will refer briefly to the results obtained in one recent field study.

Conceptions of Leadership

The conception of "leadership" on which this discussion rests is social-psychological (rather than sociological or individual) in character; that is, it is concerned with the behavior of persons insofar as it influences the behavior of others in ways such that the occurrence of "leadership" may be inferred. In formal definition, an act of leadership is any behavior of one person within the context of organizational life that influences the behavior of others with reference to achievement of organization goals. This is a familiar conception, so we need not discuss it further except to remind you that under this definition, leadership may be exercised by any person within an organization or work group, whether or not he is in a position of formal authority, and (2) leadership acts may be of a great variety of kinds.

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Much of our work has been concerned with the creation and use of a system of variables that will allow the description of the amount and kind of leadership that occurs within a work group, the comparison of work groups in these respects. The variables currently in use are four in number. These have been identified through factor analytic methods coupled with correlational analyses to confirm the meaning and predictive power of the resulting conceptual dimensions of leadership. An appended table shows that the four proposed dimensions of leadership are compatible with those proposed independently by others working on related issues. The four leadership dimensions are thought to comprise the basic conceptual structure of the phenomenon called "leadership"; additional and subsidiary dimensions will be found necessary for the description in detail of the leadership found in any particular work group. The proposed dimensions are:

1. Support - behavior which serves the function of increasing or maintaining the individual member's sense of personal worth and importance in the context of group activity
2. Interaction Facilitation - behavior which serves the function of creating or maintaining a network of interpersonal relationships among members of the group
3. Goal Emphasis - behavior which serves the function of creating, changing, clarifying, or gaining member acceptance of group goals
4. Work Facilitation - behavior which serves to provide effective work methods, facilities, and technology for the accomplishment of group goals.

It should be noted that these dimensions of leadership correspond to some extent to the dimensions of individual motivation proposed by several recent writers (Angyal, Bronfenbrenner, Nuttin). "Support" and "interaction facilitation" appear to be related to need to be an accepted part of a group of beings like oneself (broadly, a need for affiliation); "goal emphasis" and "work facilitation" appear related to the need to master one's environment or control one's fate (broadly a need for achievement).

Crude but useful scales for measurement of these dimensions of leadership have been developed based upon interview and questionnaire data

obtained from members of many groups and organizations. Each member is asked to report his perceptions as to whether (or how frequently) certain specific acts occur, these specific acts being chosen to represent each of the four dimensions of leadership.

It should be noted that while the four dimensions of leadership are conceptually independent, they rarely occur in factorially pure form. A single act may carry implications for two or more of the leadership dimensions. For example, a discussion between supervisor and subordinate about production may serve simultaneously to provide support for the employee, to reinforce group goals, to facilitate work and to reinforce the interaction network. The problem of measurement of the four dimensions accordingly rests upon the choice of acts which represent, in relatively pure form, only one of the dimensions. This is sometimes made difficult by the fact that the leadership qualities of an act are inherent in the group member's perceptions of it rather than in the act itself, and the same act may occasionally be differently perceived.

Some Issues

Given this conception of the dimensions of leadership, and means for measuring them, it becomes possible to approach systematically and quantitatively some issues that until recently were approached with speculation. Five such issues or questions are mentioned here in the context of work group performance.

1. The issue of concentration or dispersion of leadership.

Classical theories of leadership hold that leadership is and should be exercised mainly by persons in positions of formal authority and responsibility--by the supervisor in the case of a work group. Contrary views are expressed in the notions concerning the phenomenon of dual leadership (for group maintenance functions and for group task functions, respectively), and in notions concerning informal leadership or peer leadership. Despite all of the speculation on this issue, coupled with some ingenious research, we still do not have dependable information about the dispersion of leadership acts among members of work groups nor about the conditions that lead to various degrees of dispersion.

2. The issue of generality of leadership dimensions. If we assume for the moment that leadership acts are performed by persons other than the formally-designated leaders, then several questions arise. Are the conceptual dimensions developed for describing formal leadership equally applicable to informal leadership? Do informal leaders within a group carry out some kinds of leadership functions but not others? Do informal leaders engage in categories of leadership behavior that are not relevant for describing the behavior of the formal leaders? Our own tentative belief on these questions is that the leadership behavior of supervisors and of group members are indistinguishable except with respect to pattern of emphasis.

3. The issue of relationships between supervisory leadership and peer leadership. On this issue, there exist several competing views, and little factual information. Does the supervisor's pattern of leadership get replicated in the leadership behavior of subordinates or is there instead a compensatory process such that peer leadership adapts to offset any deficiencies arising from the behavior of the supervisor? In instances where both supervisor and subordinates engage in the same class of leadership behavior, are the effects additive, multiplicative or substitutive? Are the relationships circular, or causal in one direction?

4. The issue of relative potency of supervisory and peer leadership. with respect to group and organizational criteria. Is group performance more influenced by supervisory leadership or by peer leadership? Is the relative potency different for different dimensions of group performance or uniform for all?

5. The issue of selective impact on performance. If one assumes that group performance is itself a complex of several dimensions or categories of performance, then the question arises whether a specified leadership act contributes to a specific performance criterion, whether performed by the supervisor or by a group member. It is possible that certain criteria of performance are determined by supervisory leadership alone, others by member leadership alone, or by some combination of the two.

Results From a Recent Study

We wish now to refer briefly to the results from a recent field study in which data were obtained relevant to these issues. Our purposes are (1) to illustrate a method for the resolution of these issues and (2) to advance some tentative conclusions.

The study was carried out in an insurance sales organization system comprising 78 sales groups. Each of the groups studied is composed of an owner-manager together with his salesmen, numbering from 10 to 50 men. Each group is located in a different city. All sell the same kinds of insurance under the same general business policies and with approximately equal opportunities for business success. These groups were selected for study because they provide an unusual set of conditions; a large population of autonomous groups that are nearly identical in their formal structure and purpose but highly variable in their performance, thus allowing the effective comparative study of group leadership phenomena in relation to performance.

Data were obtained through interviews and questionnaires from over 2000 salesmen and their supervisors, including measures of our four dimensions of leadership behavior as they are perceived to occur in the case of the owner-manager and in the case of group members. A number of measures were obtained to represent the performance of the sales groups. These include five measures representing dimensions of group member satisfaction; three representing objective business achievement such as volume of sales, cost of sales, growth in business volume; two variables describing the local group's choice of business style or strategy; and one describing group membership stability.

The analysis of these data has been based mainly upon an inspection of the intercorrelation matrix for these variables, and secondarily upon partial and multiple correlation procedures designed to assess the joint and separate effect of various combinations of leadership dimensions. The following comments indicate our interpretation of the data with reference to each of the issues previously mentioned.

1. Our data sustain the idea that group members do engage in behavior which can be described as leadership, and that in these groups, it appears likely that the total quantity of peer leadership is at least

as great as the total quantity of supervisory leadership. The groups varied greatly from one another with respect to the degree and the pattern of emphasis in peer leadership behavior.

2. The four dimensions of leadership developed initially for the description of formal leaders appear to be equally applicable to the description of leadership by group members.

3. The supervisor's pattern of leadership (i.e. relative degree of emphasis on each of the four dimensions) tends to be replicated in the leadership behavior of his subordinates; that is, the subordinates tend to provide leadership in much the same way as does the formal leader. This correspondence of pattern, however, is not so great as to preclude the possibility that some compensatory member leadership is occurring. Proof is lacking on this point. The joint effects of peer and supervisory leadership are mixed, with some instances of an additive relationship, some of substitution. None of the tested cases appears to involve a multiplicative relationship.

4. With respect to the issue of relative potency, the peer leadership variables are at least as potent as supervisory leadership variables, and possibly more so, in predicting group achievement of goals.

5. Selective impact on performance clearly occurs. Each of the peer leadership variables and each of the supervisory leadership variables appears to be selective in its impact. For example, the variable "peer goal emphasis" relates significantly to group cost performance, to the group's style of business (larger policies, sold to more affluent clients, etc.) and to member satisfaction with fellow agents, but it does not relate significantly to such performance variables as volume of business, business growth rate, satisfaction with job. Peer goal emphasis appears in the case of these groups to play a central role, as it is either the best single predictor, or is a significant additive predictor in relation to a majority of our criteria of group performance.

Concluding remarks

The results briefly reported here must be taken as suggestive as they come from an organization that is not typical. Nevertheless, the study provides confirmation for certain ideas that are of importance in understanding the role of the small group or work team in business and industry.

One of the functions of the group is to provide leadership to its own members, and to supplement the leadership provided by the formal hierarchy of the organization. This factor aids in the explanation of the common research finding that the effectiveness of large organizations often depends closely upon the character and functioning of the work groups of which they are composed.

Comparison of Leadership Concepts of Different Investigators

	¹ Hemphill & Coons	² Halpin & Winer	³ Kahn	⁴ Cartwright & Zander	⁵ Likert
Support	Maintenance of Membership Character	Consideration	Employee Orientation	Group Maintenance Functions	Principle of Supportive Relationships
Interaction Facilitation	Group Interaction Facilitation	Sensitivity	---		Group Methods of Supervision
Goal Emphasis	Objective Attainment Behavior	Production Emphasis	Production Orientation	Goal Achievement Functions	High Performance Goals
Work Facilitation		Initiation of Structure			Technical knowledge Planning Scheduling Coordinating

¹Halpin, A. W. & Winer, J. A factorial study of the leader behavior descriptions. In R. M. Stogdill & A. E. Coons (Eds.), Leader behavior: Its description and measurement. Res. Monog. No. 88. Columbus, Ohio: Bureau of Business Research, the Ohio State Univ., 1957, 39-51.

²Hemphill, J. K. & Coons, A. E. Development of the leader behavior description questionnaire. In R. M. Stogdill & A. E. Coons (Eds.), Leader behavior: Its description and measurement. Res. Monog. No. 88. Columbus, Ohio: Bureau of Business Research, the Ohio State Univ., 1957, 6-38.

³Kahn, R. L. The prediction of productivity. J. Soc. Issues, 1956, 12, 41-49.

Kahn, R. L. Human relations on the shop floor. In E. M. Hugh-Jones (Ed.), Human relations and Modern management. Amsterdam, Holland: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1958, 43-74.

⁴Cartwright, D. & Zander, A. Group dynamics research and theory. Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1960.

⁵Likert, R. New Patterns of Management. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1961.