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ABSTRACT
              To study the effect of democratic and autocratic
leadership styles upon the commitment and productivity of voluntary
adult groups, eight tenant councils, composed of approximately six
persons each, were selected to serve as experimental groups. Trained
researchers acting as discussion leaders for each council functioned
as either democratic or autocratic leaders. The significant finding
of this study was that authoritarian group leaders fostered slightly
greater group productivity and commitment to policy proposals than
democratic leaders. (Author/LG)

LEADERSHIP STYLES

An Experimental Study to Determine the
Comparative Effectiveness of Democratic and
Autocratic Leadership in Adult, "Real World" Groups

by

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and

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1930's under the direction of such investigators as William Foote Whyte, Ronald Lippitt, Ralph White, and of course, Kurt Lewin fairly specific hypotheses and theories concerning interpersonal influence,[1] leadership, and group life[2] began to be posited and systematically investigated.[3] Especially fruitful was the work of Lewin, Lippitt, and White who studied the ways in which the behavior of ten and eleven year old boys varied as a function of authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic styles of leadership.

> These studies . . . demonstrated that group behavior can be studied under controlled conditions similar to those utilized for scientific experimentation. This method revealed that certain forces of social behavior can be measured and analyzed.
> The earlier studies, supported by later work done during World War II by sociologists studying the American soldier under varying group conditions, resulted in wide acceptance of the following generalizations concerning leadership:
> a. Democracy can be efficient.
> b. Autocracy can create much hostility and aggression, including aggression against scapegoats.
> c. Autocracy can create discontent that does not appear on the surface.
> d. There is more dependence and less individuality in autocracy.
> e. There is more group mindedness and more friendliness in democracy.[4]

Leadership, with its many ramifications for styles, techniques, goals and processes continues to be a topic of interest to social scientists. Hare[5] defines the leader as one type of central person who may have the power to control the activity of a group and to have status and influence over other

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group members. He further defines two major categories of leadership as task and socio-emotional behavior. The group leader facilitates those behaviors which will maximize productivity of a group's task.

Autocratic leadership is described in the literature as based on the leader who initiates action, dominates policy, dictates the work techniques and attitudes, controls the future, rewards and penalizes, controls and evaluates his subordinates, and is generally directive.

The democratic leader is the person who involves others in the policy planning, in procedural decisions, and in evaluating effectiveness. Moreover, he tends to create a satisfying and rewarding atmosphere because of these behavioral attitudes.

Drawing upon this body of knowledge, a theoretical hypothesis of leadership may be postulated as follows:

Theoretical Hypothesis

In voluntary groups, the democratic leader will facilitate positive group climate and commitment on the part of the participants to a greater extent than the authoritarian leader. The authoritarian leader, however, will facilitate greater group productivity or efficiency than will the democratic leader.

Working Hypotheses

In order to operationalize the theoretical hypothesis, an experiment was designed in order to test the hypotheses that: (1) Autocratically led tenant councils will be more efficient showing greater productivity in task-related roles than will democratically led groups. (2) Democratic leaders of tenant councils in public housing projects will produce greater commitment to policy suggestions made during the course of a single meeting of the council. (3) There will be a more positive group climate engendered by democratic leaders than by autocratic leaders.

Since these three characteristics seemed to be distinguishing features between authoritarian and democratic leadership, and were consistent within all studies, it was upon these criteria that the study focused.

PROCEDURE

In order to test the working hypotheses, permission was obtained from the Allegheny County Housing Authority of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, to meet twice with eight tenant councils in eight different public housing projects. (See Appendix A for names of projects.)

These councils had been in existence for about three months, and were generally composed of about six persons, three or more of whom were officers. The tenant councils

were of highly equated composition in that members were drawn
from similar socio-economic background, were people of the
same age distribution, were primarily women, and had all been
exposed to similar physical environments. The councils were
told that the Authority had contracted with the University of
Pittsburgh to undertake a research project to determine how
tenant councils could become more effective. The ensueing
group discussions focused on this subject.

The research team consisted of six persons, four of
whom were to act as discussion leaders, performing the role
four times, twice as the democratic leader, and twice as the
autocratic leader. Two members of the team were assigned as
observers at each of the sixteen meetings. To avoid an ex-
pectation bias in the gathering and evaluation of data, a
modified double blind design was used.

The format for performing the role of democratic or
authoritarian leader was established prior to the meetings
with the tenant councils. (See guidelines in Appendix B.)
In order to execute these roles more effectively, role playing
sessions were conducted under the assumption supported by the
studies of Lewin, Lippitt, White, and Bavelas that leaders of
a specific type can be trained.[6]

The experimental sessions were held on the sites of
the individual projects, most often in the community buildings,
and on occasion in a tenant's apartment. During the course

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of each of the meetings, data was gathered recording the inter-
action pattern, the group climate, and the efficiency and pro-
ductivity.

It was expected that if the hypotheses were supported,
the data would reveal that (1) the democratically led groups
would show less productivity or efficiency, but (2) more
commitment than autocratically led groups; and (3) would have
a more positive group climate. The results of the experiment
testing these hypotheses are reported in the Findings repre-
sented in the following section.

FINDINGS

This section presents both a numerical and a verbal
description of the findings of the study. The numerical de-
scription of each unit will precede the verbal description
pertaining to that unit of analysis in the hope that the two
methods of explanation will mutually complement and clarify
each other. For the sake of clarity, each statistical table
will be presented intact without being carried over from the
preceding page, even if a portion of the page bearing the
verbal description must be left blank.

TABLE 1

PRODUCTIVITY OR EDDICIENCY

	Level of Efficiency	
	High	Low
Autocratic	8	0
Democratic	4	4

Leadership

The efficiency of the group was measured by counting the number of policy suggestions made and assessing the average amount of time required to get each suggestion. Thus, the formula for determining the group efficiency was:

Total Time of Deliberation
Number of Policy Proposals

The total amount of time spent in formal meetings with tenant councils was 1500 minutes or 25 hours. The greatest amount of time required to get one suggestion was 24 minutes, the smallest was 7 minutes. The median of this, 15 1/2 minutes, was used to determine high or low group efficiency. The results are recorded in Table 1.

The table indicates that all eight groups operating under authoritarian leadership had high efficiency; whereas, under democratic leadership four groups showed high efficiency and four groups showed low efficiency. Utilizing Yates' correction for continuity chi-square formula,

$$x_C^2 = \frac{N([AD - BC] - N/2)^2}{(A + B)\ (C + D)\ (A + C)\ (B + D)},\ x_C^2 = 3.00$$

which is not statistically significant at any normal level of confidence. (P .05 = 3.841, P .10 = 2.706.) However, the difference which is present does approach the .05 level of confidence and does suggest that the autocratic leaders probably were more effective in engendering group productivity or efficiency than were the democratic leaders.

TABLE 2

COMMITMENT

Level of Commitment

		High	Low
Leadership	Autocratic	6	2
	Democratic	2	6

The commitment of the groups was assessed in terms of how many of the policy suggestions had been acted upon when the groups were contacted two weeks after the meeting under consideration had taken place. Those groups which had acted upon half or more of the suggestions were said to have had high commitment, and those which had acted upon less than half were described as having low commitment.

The results of this assessment are shown in Table 2. The figures here show that the highest commitment was demonstrated in the groups having authoritarian leadership (6 out of 8, or 75%); the lowest commitment was found in the

groups having democratic leadership (2 out of 8, or 25%).
Once again, utilizing Yates' x^2 correction for continuity,
these results were not statistically significant, but, in
contrast to the hypothesis, the trend favored the autocrati-
cally led groups rather than the democratically led ones.

TABLE 3

GROUP CLIMATE

		Climate of Group	
		Positive	Negative
Leadership	Autocratic	8	0
	Democratic	8	0

This type of group climate which existed in the
groups was measured by an instrument developed by the experi-
menters and used by the participants to indicate their opin-
ions of the type of group climate which existed. (See
Appendix C for Group Climate Chart.) The instrument was so
constructed that an individual's assessment of group climate

could be given a numerical value between 0 and 25. The
scores for each group were summed and a mean found. The
group mean then was used to determine if the group felt that
the climate was positive or negative. Those which had means
of 12 1/2 or above were considered positive. Those groups
whose means were below 12 1/2 were considered negative.

Table 3 indicates that the type of leadership had no
statistically significant effect on group climate. All groups
studied rated themselves as having a positive group climate.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the hypotheses are not fully suppor-
ted by the findings. (1) Autocratically led tenant councils
were more efficient, as was hypothesized, and they did show
some greater productivity in task-related roles than did the
democratically led groups, but this difference was slight
$(P < .10)$. (2) Democratic leaders of tenant councils in
public housing projects did not produce greater commitment
to policy suggestions. (3) The group climate resulting
from the differing forms of leadership showed no statistically
significant difference.

We believe that several factors inherent in the
experiment may have been responsible for the results
obtained. (1) Tenant councils in public housing projects

are frequently subjected to an authoritarian environment and
are more familiar with, and perhaps comfortable in, that
situation. Thus, their efficiency was greater when operating
under authority. (2) When the leader took the role of the
authoritarian figure, he represented not only the control of
management, but the authority of the University. In other
words, a proposal from the leader carried with it the weight
of management and the supposed wisdom of a university world.
Under those circumstances, it would be difficult to resist
following his suggestions. Thus, the commitment to the
suggestion might be more presumed than in the case of the
democratic leader who, while also representing management
and the University, played down these factors, thereby casting
himself more on a par with the members of the group and,
therefore, decreasing the distance between himself and the
others. Suggestions were thus seen as coming more from the
group than the leader and would not carry as much weight as
in the authoritarian case. Moreover, (3), the findings must
be interpreted in light of the limited number of meetings
which could be held with the tenant councils.

Based on the results of the analysis of data and
subject to the previously discussed limitations, this experi-
ment warrants the following conclusions:

Under certain circumstances, and insofar as this pop-
ulation is concerned, authoritarian group leadership fosters

slightly greater group productivity and commitment to policy proposals than does democratic group leadership. Both leadership methods engender approximately equal group climate. This is in contrast to the findings of Lewin, Lippitt, and White whose studies indicate that while authoritarian leadership should foster somewhat greater group productivity, it also produces less group commitment and greater group hostility.

With increasing emphasis being placed upon involvement of tenant organizations in the management of their housing communities, these findings may have significance for the effective development of such councils. As Homans points out in *The Human Group*

> The fact is that leadership in a group may be at one time abrupt, forceful, centralized, with all communications originating with the leader, and at another time slow, relaxed, dispersed, with much communication back and forth between leader and followers. Each mode is acceptable, appropriate, and authoritative, but each in different circumstances.[7]

To say, therefore, that tenant councils can be more effective under autocracy rather than democracy is not to make a value judgement that such leadership is either good or bad. This conclusion represents a proposition of fact not value.

APPENDIX A

Housing Projects Used in Study

(1) Ohio View Acres (Stowe Township)

(2) McKees Rocks Terrace (McKees Rocks)

(3) Morgan (South Fayette)

(4) Hawkins Village (Rankin)

(5) Burns Heights (Duquesne)

(6) Sharps Terrace (Sharpsburg)

(7) Groveton (Coroapolis)

(8) Park Apartments (Natrona Heights)

Training Guidlines

Since the experiment deals with relationship be-
tween two distinctive styles of leadership (autocratic and
democratic) and group interaction and production, one needs
to delineate the major characteristics of each style so to
"create and learn" those behaviors which typify the style we
are to emulate as discussion leaders. A seminal study re-
garding differential leadership styles is that of Lewin,
Lippitt, and White's comparison of a democratic and autocra-
tic atmosphere and their effects on group dynamics. In this
study using groups of ten to eleven year old children in a
mask making club, they created differing atmospheres by using
specific techniques. Utilizing this model, the following is
a suggested guideline for the training to operationalize the
different styles of leadership. For this study, the style of
leadership began with the set-up of the meeting and carried
through to departure. A comparison of techniques is suggest-
ed as follows:

DEMOCRATIC

(1) All policies a matter
of group determination, en-
couraged and drawn out by
the leader.

AUTOCRATIC

(1) All determination of
policy by the strongest per-
son (leader).

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(2) The room is set-up in circular seating arrangement. No seating preference for leader.

(2) Long table preferred with discussion leader at head or pivotal spot.

(3) Informal conversation and pleasantries exchanged to all on an equalitarian basis. Leader and observers mobile and friendly.

(3) Limit informal conversation to president of the tenant council. Communication to flow through the president or to designated heirchal roles. Observers may circulate.

(4) Determine from the group why they are present and encourage group determination of goals. Brain storm and listen. Leader may define limits within which the group may function.

(4) State clearly the purpose of the meeting, as coming from the power structure. Engage the president in explaining as a secondary measure as to the goals of the group...what they should be. Make known our goals.

(5) Primarily, encourage and elicit participation from all to enhance the socio-emotional atmosphere and group process. Share freely and frankly own limitations but belief in shared responsibility to do something about the problems.

(5) Opposite - autocratic leader. Refer frequently to management as the final authority. May assure group of skills in dealing with management.

(6) Following involvement, leader may feedback group's position on problems and develop with the group procedural perspective or priorities. Members free to choose problems to be discussed.

(6) Select out a likely problem to be discussed. May cite own appeal to the selected one. Stick to the agenda.

(7) Where technical advice is needed, present several alternatives or options to the group. Encourage discussion around the solutions. Inquire of members as to their knowledge or skill in these areas. Acknowledge own lack of knowledge or expertise, but suggest ways of finding out.

(7) Steer discussion on limited choice or/and restrict discussion space on the basis of power approval, your past experiences, or theoretical knowledge. Speak in terms of threatening consequences and play into concept of limited group powers. Emphasize the practical.

(8) Free communication of member to member (circular). Use members names to involve or to give credit to ideas of members. Permit some irrelevant discussion, and use skill to relate this to the topic at hand.

(8) Create barriers to communications by maintaining status position whereby the communication flows from leader to member and vice-versa. Interrupt side conversations as destructive to the group process. Use decisive manner. Call on members to respond to your queries.

(9) The leader attempts to be a group member in spirit and in discussion but does not perform much of the actual task. Use the terms "we" and "us".

(9) The leader establishes himself apart from the group and carries a distinct role He remains aloof from active participation ever mindful of his role as authority figure. He is distinct in separating "you from I".

(10) Give objective praise and criticism. Reward and reinforce individual and group behavior for achievement of task and socio-values, including personal satisfactions.

(10) Criticize or praise without giving objective reasons, but emphasize personal preferences. Discredit ideas on basis of practicality or wisdom, in view of the group's needs rather than goals. Demonstrate expertise as much as possible.

(11) The democratic leader seeks to facilitate the group's task and process for the experience value to the members.

(11) The autocratic leader seeks to facilitate <u>his own</u> tasks and goals <u>in behalf</u> of the group's needs and goals as he perceives them. Sells his own ideas for solutions.

(12) Give members opportunities to guide, initiate, determine, interpret, administer, or evaluate as group functions. Silences may be interpreted as thinking time.

(12) Do not relinquish leadership functions as invested in the leader for directing, initiating, administering, and evaluation. Silences mean consent and agreement with leader.

(13) Agree with group on concluding discussion.

(13) Remind group of time limits and end meeting as a leader's perrogative.

Measuring Instrument for Group Climate

Each of the statements below refers to a different aspect of group climate in the discussion. In <u>one</u> of the five spaces at the right of each statement, please place a check mark to indicate your best estimate of that aspect of climate. One (1) represents the lowest score and five (5) the highest.

ASPECTS OF GROUP CLIMATE	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Pleasantness: everyone seems to enjoy the discussion.					
(2) Involvement: members are eager to participate and do so. They feel safe in speaking and contribute to the best of their ability.					
(3) Permissiveness: members and leader do not dominate; group makes most decisions; atmosphere relaxed, accepting, informal.					
(4) Productivity: members keep at the job, produce effectively.					
(5) Flexibility: group adjusts to changing needs, profits from mistakes					

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FOOTNOTES

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