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Sven Lundstedt

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MANAGEMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES*

SVEN LUNDSTEDT

Sven Lundstedt, Ph.D. is an associate professor of psychology at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, and a social psychologist. He is a former assistant director of the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior in Ann Arbor, Michigan, author of several articles in the field of social psychology, and a member of various professional societies including the American Psychological Association, Ohio psychological associations, and the Society for International Development. His interest in police management arose during a recent symposium organized by him at the 1963 annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.—EDITOR.

To what set of conditions can such a thing as criminal behavior among police be attributed? Are poor management practices, working conditions, and low morale related to this management problem in law enforcement agencies? How can the performance and over all effectiveness of police be improved? While public concern for reform in time of trouble is quick to be reflected in the press, few references to actual programs of workable reform also appear at such times. It has, therefore, usually been easier for many people to criticize than to find workable solutions to this and other problems of police management.

In what other directions may one expect to find possible answers to this complex problem and related problems of management and administration? We can be reasonably sure now that the solution, if one exists at all, is not just a matter of better personnel selection, weeding out undesirable members of a department, increasing salaries, and more discipline. In part, a management philosophy is at fault. A case can be made that all kinds of delinquent behavior, large or small, ranging from theft to the simplest possible broken regulation, goes well beyond these factors to include all that falls under the heading of organizational mismanagement of human resources. This is fostered in part by neglect of important psychological needs which all people have. It is also fostered by a lack of awareness of the important principle that a balance is necessary between organizational needs and individual needs.

* Based on a recent symposium held at the American Psychological Association annual meeting, Philadelphia, 1963. The author wishes to thank Dr. Arnold Tannenbaum for his contribution to this paper.

THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE ORGANIZATION

A traditional aspect of police management is that it occurs within a quasi-military organization. The military model is very old and is easily recognized by its reliance upon direct hierarchical control, rigid superior-supervisor relationships in an ascending order from the lowest ranks to the highest which, in contrast to the lower ranks, contain most of the decision making power.

The principle of span of control tends to be inflexibly applied. Supervision is usually based upon a pattern of downward communication from higher ranking members to lower ranking members, with less opportunity for lower ranking members to communicate upward other than to acknowledge receiving an order to carry out. Such organizations seem to have a permanent moratorium on expression of grievances from below, and an absence of a flexible mechanism by which communication from below to higher positions can occur with the ease and frequency often needed. In another sense, grievances in such organizations can be said to exist because of the absence of appropriate informal adjudication procedures between superiors and subordinates.

A familiar argument is, or course, that the war against crime requires a military type of organization geared to the resolution of the unending crises precipitated by criminal behavior. It has often been argued that is a "war." This point of view is familiar and popular, but not easily defended by existing facts or the historical record. For the concerted attack on crime has *not* been wholly successful in spite of the widespread use of the military model of police organization. One can

safely ask, if it is so good then why has it not worked better?

What may be missing in this model? How does that which is missing relate to such important things as morale, productive effort in pursuit of a public good, and general organizational effectiveness? Is there an alternative model for a law enforcement organization which might increase effectively the level of performance of police, reduce delinquency among them, and perhaps even increase measurably the so-called "war" on criminal behavior? A tentative answer to these questions is suggested by an emerging theory of organizational behavior based upon recent social psychological research. The theory is not yet complete; but some important elements in it are now known, and others are emerging as research continues. Our argument here will be by analogy the strength of which rests on the fact that all organizations are similar in structure although different in purpose. They are, for example, all inhabited by people, possess identifiable structures such as goals, communication networks, reward systems, and a distribution of social power and control which affects in a profound way the behavior of all members of the organization. Certain extrapolations are here made from research in the neighboring field of business and industry to the field of police work.¹ While these extrapolations are not intended as a substitute for actual empirical studies of police organizations which eventually must be done, they will allow us to make several important points clearly and forcefully. Also it will be apparent that many of these points are not new by any means. Nor were they invented in the twentieth century.

INSIGHTS FROM OTHER FIELDS

Every social organization, be it a business or industrial organization, government agency, or other, has a problem of internal law enforcement. We infrequently talk about such law enforcement with respect to organizations, and usually view it as enforcing rules and regulations, and official standards or norms. Whatever words we choose to use to describe this phenomenon we have to agree that some effort is required on the part of any organization to assure that too many rules are not broken, and that minimum standards are main-

¹ While the research findings used as examples in this paper were taken from one source, they are confirmed by other publications examples of which are cited in the bibliography in this paper.

tained. It is always revealing that some organizations seem to be more successful in this process than others. What role should the organization play in this process?

It is now common knowledge that achieving "law enforcement" in organizations of any kind, or for that matter in society as a whole, is partly a problem of motivation and of identification with organizational goals on the part of members of social groups within an organization or society. Motivation is always involved because the individual has to see law-abiding behavior as a source of some material or psychological reward. There has to be something in it for him or it will not work. It cannot be all give and no take. Identification is involved because people need to connect their personal goals with the goals held by the organization, and they can do this best when they can see their way clear to achieving the rewards available for good behavior in the organization. A person's self-image, or self-concept, reflects his own norms and values about that which is either good or bad in life, and these need to be lined up with the values which exist within the organization and are part of its rules for living in it. If the relationship between the individual and organization is such that only a few values held by the individual match those values held by the organization, then little incentive for "good" behavior will exist, and conflict between the individual and the organization will result. When organizational norms and personal norms are far apart there is a significantly greater chance that the person will engage in behavior that will be seen by agents and caretakers of the organization, its "police" so to speak, as "misbehavior." It is not incorrect, or fruitless, occasionally to ask, therefore, when a law is broken whose law is it that is being broken? The organization's law or the individual's law?

We are now beginning to learn that it is a good idea for managers in any organization to ask: Do the personal goals of the members of the organization have any relation to the goals established by the organization as its formal rules of operation? This is a problem area where recent social psychological research on organizations can be helpful in pointing out the importance of understanding the needs of both the individual and the organization.

Let us take an employee's ideas about reasonable productivity as an example. If both the employee and the company man, a foreman, see eye

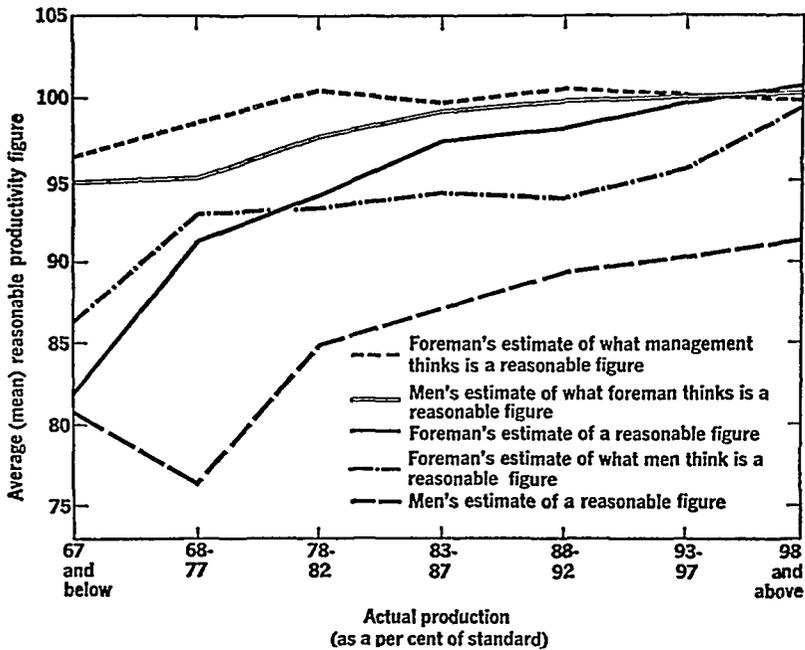


Figure 1

Productivity increases when foremen and men agree in estimates of reasonable productivity. (From *New Patterns of Management* by Rensis Likert. Copyright 1961. McGraw-Hill Book Company. Figure used by permission.)

to eye about production rates, then ideally we might expect conflictless effort on the part of the employee and also acceptable productivity by company standards. In other words, the employee's needs under these "ideal" conditions are in line with management's needs as conveyed by the foreman. Is this what actually tends to happen in real organizations? Results from recent research say yes. Look, for example, at figure 1 which summarizes findings in a large manufacturing company.

Notice that the actual production of employees increases when foreman and men agree about that form of activity which constitutes reasonable output, or productivity. As the estimates converge at the right hand side of the figure actual production is higher than before when they disagreed in their estimates (left hand side of figure). It is a short step in thought from the shop floor to the police department where, instead of foremen and men, there are patrolmen, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains interacting with one another. Do the principles illustrated in figure 1 have any application to police management? A fair answer is that they probably do apply just as they applied on the shop floor.

INFLUENCE AND CONTROL OVER OTHERS

Like all military forces (and some industrial units), many police organizations have power, authority, influence, status, prestige, privilege, and personal rights distributed throughout the organization in a particular way. In many police departments, there is more of all of these things at the top than at the bottom of the organization. So we have the ironic and possibly significant fact that the policeman who symbolizes power and authority to the man on the street may share little of this in his own department. Little, if any, systematic research has been done on this subject in police departments.

But surveys in other organizations indicate that rank and file members are often psychologically deprived persons who would like to have more say in what goes on in their organizations. When they do receive such influence upward they seem to be more satisfied with their jobs, with their supervisors and managers, and they are more likely to express an identification with their organization and feel a sense of responsibility for meeting organizational goals. Actual cases can be documented in which control and influence were more evenly distributed throughout the organization that sub-

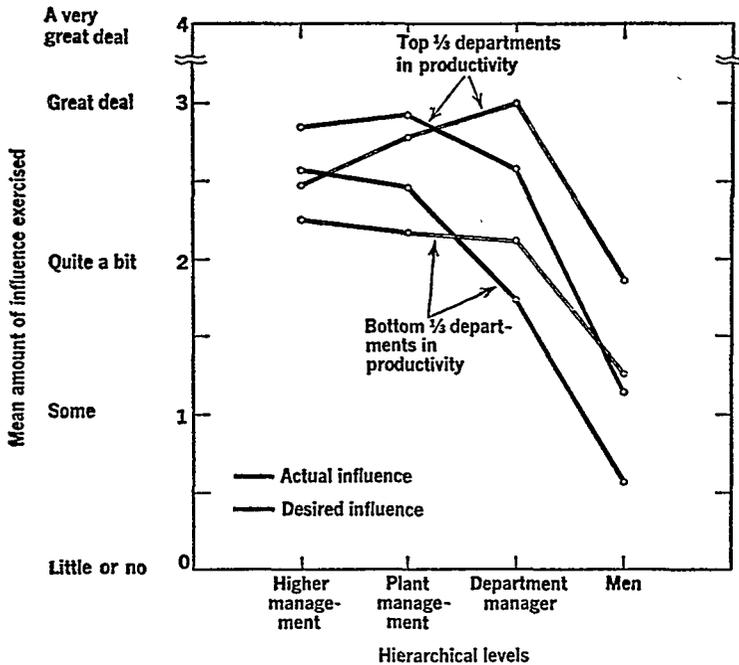


Figure 2

Relation of department productivity to average amount of influence and control actually exercised by different hierarchical levels and to average amount of desired influence (as seen by nonsupervisory employees). (From *New Patterns of Management* by Rensis Likert. Copyright 1961. McGraw-Hill Book Company. Figure used by permission.)

stantiate such results. What happens in such organizations when employees throughout the organization are allowed more say about their own specific work and related decisions? An answer is suggested by the research findings in figure 2.

The slope of the curves in figure 2 reflect the amount of influence exercised by the different ranks in the organization starting with top management at the left and ending with the men at the right of the figure in descending order of their organizational responsibility. Notice especially the curve for the departments which are in the top one-third in productivity. Contrast this curve with the one for the departments in the bottom one-third in their productivity. The most productive departments seem to have a greater distribution of influence and control among employees.

An important point in this set of findings is that even though the control and influence are more evenly distributed with respect to some activities, the status hierarchy *still remains intact* and is actually strengthened because more influence on the part of employees leads to greater identification with the organization. It is interest-

ing to note that the curve for desired influence is *not* "revolutionary" in the sense that employees want complete control. There will always be a need for a division of labor and responsibility in any organization. There seems to be no radical departure from reasonable expectations, and the men do not expect, or even want, to do management's job. This suggests that a "fair share" principle seems to be at work. People want as much freedom as possible to do their *own* jobs and not necessarily their bosses' jobs. Paradoxically then, giving up control over others does not always mean losing control over them in the organization.

These points are clarified further by a closer look at supervision in organizations. Supervision is an activity which reflects closely the way in which control and influence are distributed. Supervision is, after all, another form of police activity in the broadest sense of the term. As experienced supervisors know, there are many ways to "police" the work of an employee. An alternative to close supervision is shown in figure 3. When close supervision is the rule, and employees are "over-policed"

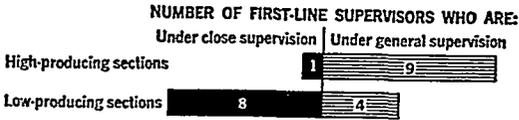


Figure 3

Low-production section heads are more closely supervised than high-production section heads. (From *New Patterns of Management* by Rensis Likert. Copyright 1961. McGraw-Hill Book Company. Figure used by permission.)

a result is usually lowered productivity. Higher productivity is associated with general supervision in which the employee receives appropriate guidance and support, but is not closely supervised by a superior in the fashion common in military organizations. Under the latter form of supervision there is maximum freedom to perform a job within the broad limits of a personal style and job requirements.

Personal recognition for work done and attention are two cardinal requirements in good supervision. There must be recognition of important human needs in others, and more than a token kind of attention has to be paid to these needs in order to produce in others an incentive to work well. When emphasis in supervision is only upon work activities to the neglect of important human needs on the job then a result is often to create a job environment in which starvation of such needs invariably leads to lowered personal effectiveness and productivity. A balance between production needs of the organization and the human needs of employees seems to lead directly to increases in on-the-job effectiveness and productivity whether the productivity is creating some material object or performing a service for another person or group as in police work. The results of several studies in figure 3 make a telling point about on-the-job supervision which leads to higher productivity. The studies show that "Employee-centered" supervisors tend to be higher producers than "job-centered" supervisors.

ALTERNATIVES

The weathered veteran of police work might well ask by what alternative form of organization are police administrators to achieve the kinds of improvements which the research findings cited above suggest are possible? If the traditional pattern in figure 4 with its predominately downward and isolating pattern of communication is not the best available model then what form of organization is?

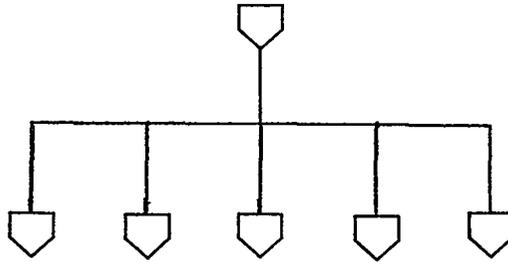


Figure 4

A traditional organization chart

An organizational structure which allows meaningful and constant exchanges between superiors and subordinates is part of the answer. Essentially, all ranks require an opportunity to influence one another about their individual functions within the organization. Verbal commitment is, however, usually not enough. Administrators need to go to greater lengths to insure that the organization has mechanisms by which a variety of important psychological conditions are met in daily routine activities, not just when crises occur and immediate mobilization of effort required "to put out fires" created by poor management of human affairs.

Likert² has used the term "linking pin" function to characterize the supervisor or manager in that form of organization which gives such staff members influence upward and downward to enable them to handle effectively problems which involve their own well being and the well being of their subordinates. In the overlapping structures of such an organization each hierarchical level has its functioning "linking pin" personnel, usually a supervisor, who are there to insure that channels of communication between levels of the organization remain open and operating continuously. In this way top men in the organization do not lose touch with the daily needs of subordinates, and avenues are open for upward communication and adjustment about employee needs and job associated problems. This organizational concept is illustrated in figure 5.

An important functional aspect of this kind of organizational pattern is the system of interaction and influence which operates through formal groups in the organization called organizational families. Each "family" is made up of a supervisor and his subordinates. A function of the groups is to meet regularly to talk fully and freely about

²R. LIKERT, *NEW PATTERNS OF MANAGEMENT*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1961.

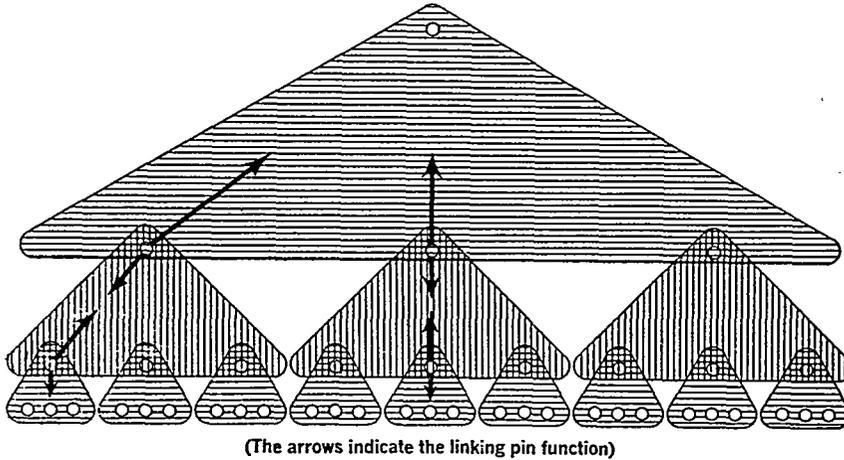


Figure 5

The "linking pin" organizational pattern. (From *New Patterns of Management* by Rensis Likert. Copyright 1961. McGraw-Hill Book Company. Figure used by permission.)

work problems, and then for the supervisor to communicate on-going problems upward to higher levels so that remedial action and adjustment can take place at the appropriate level of decision making in the organization. Downward communication and action can then take place rapidly and on the basis of full information.

Informal groups will always exist among employees. It is often hard for an administrator to tell if such groups are beneficial or harmful to the organization. As some police departments have learned too late, informal groups which exist among rank and file members of the police organization who are dissatisfied and unhappy may lead to criminal behavior. Under the open system of communication this form of behavior is less likely to occur, and if it does tend to arise, corrective measures can be taken early before real damage is done. It is not surprising under the older form of organization to learn that the chief of police is often the last person to learn about important specific problems at the patrolmen's level of the organization. Just an improvement in upward and downward communication would be of considerable assistance to the police chief and to other administrators in a department.

The patrolman on a beat is required to take initiative and to act independently. He is required by his role to do this much more than many other kinds of employees. Few will argue that to perform this role effectively he requires frequent consultation with others in the police department who

are guiding its policies and mandates. When, for example, should a foot patrolman use his discretionary powers? Their use is recognized as complex and each new application of them requires special consideration based on the merits of the individual case. Few can argue with the wisdom of providing a law enforcement officer with ample opportunity to discuss his problems of interpreting his role in such cases. Apprehending a criminal in a clearly defined act of aggression against society is certainly difficult and often perilous, but the actual decision to act against the criminal may not be hard to make. The crime is underway and the law enforcement officer intervenes to stop it. But the decision to act officially in a case where a crime is *suspect*, but where the patrolman is *uncertain* about the guilty party is of another order of complexity. Here the task becomes much more complex requiring even closer coordination with other officials in a department.

This example brings up an underlying problem in all organizations which can be stated as a continuing need on the part of the organization to reduce role conflict in job performance. To the extent that role conflict is acted out by policemen in the conduct of important police activities one can then be reasonably certain that supervisory and other organizational problems will also tend to increase. Conflict and uncertainty about one's role as a policeman would appear to be especially serious because of the important place occupied by the law enforcement function in society.

SUMMARY

To remain effective public servants law enforcement personnel may require a re-evaluation of the organizations in which they are working members. This paper has discussed an alternative approach to police management in contrast to the traditional military organizational model which has been the rule in police departments. While the manifest goals of organizations will vary widely, their internal structure and the patterns of human relations in them have many things in common. In this paper research findings from business and industry have been discussed in terms of police management. This social psychological research on organizations suggests that many facets of police management can be improved leading to increased on-the-job effectiveness, improved communication, and better morale among members of the police organization. The job of achieving these things is not easy, but the return of investments in these newer approaches in other organizations suggests that police organizations will benefit from them also.

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