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Leader Behavior and Member Reaction in Three "Social Climates"

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This investigation was carried out in two different parts: an exploratory experiment and a second, more extensive research. The primary aim of the first study was to develop techniques for creating and describing the "social atmosphere" of children's clubs and for quantitatively recording the effects of varied social atmospheres upon group life and individual behavior. Two degrees of control of group life, labeled "democratic" and "authoritarian," were used as the experimental variables. The second study had a number of purposes. The one most relevant to this report is to examine the effects upon individual and group behavior of three variations in social atmosphere, labeled "democratic," "authoritarian," and "laissez-faire." The actual meaning of the adjectives used to label these social climates is necessarily somewhat different from the meanings attributed to them in political and economic discussions. The accompanying tabulation describes briefly the chief characteristics of these three treatment variations.

In the first study (Experiment I), the same leader met with two clubs. One group was led in a democratic manner, the other in an autocratic style. Both groups had five members, ten years of age. The behavior of the leader and the members was recorded by observers. A fuller description of the experimental plan for this investigation may be found in Lippitt (1).

In the second study (Experiment II), four groups of ten-year-old boys were used. These were also five-member clubs which met after school to engage in hobby activities. The groups were roughly equated on patterns of interpersonal relationships, intellectual, physical, and socio-economic status, and personality characteristics. Four

Condensed from a fuller discussion contained in Chapters 3 and 5 of a book by the same authors, *Autocracy and Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1960. Reprinted by permission of the authors and the publishers.

<i>Authoritarian</i>	<i>Democratic</i>	<i>Laissez-faire</i>
1. All determination of policy by the leader	1. All policies a matter of group discussion and decision, encouraged and assisted by the leader	1. Complete freedom for group or individual decision, with a minimum of leader participation
2. Techniques and activity steps dictated by the authority, one at a time, so that future steps were always uncertain to a large degree	2. Activity perspective gained during discussion period. General steps to group goal sketched, and when technical advice was needed, the leader suggested two or more alternative procedures from which choice could be made	2. Various materials supplied by the leader, who made it clear that he would supply information when asked. He took no other part in work discussion
3. The leader usually dictated the particular work task and work companion of each member	3. The members were free to work with whomever they chose, and the division of tasks was left up to the group	3. Complete nonparticipation of the leader
4. The dominator tended to be "personal" in his praise and criticism of the work of each member; remained aloof from active group participation except when demonstrating	4. The leader was "objective" or "fact-minded" in his praise and criticism, and tried to be a regular group member in spirit without doing too much of the work	4. Infrequent spontaneous comments on member activities unless questioned, and no attempt to appraise or regulate the course of events

adult leaders were trained to proficiency in the three leadership treatments. The leaders were shifted from club to club every six weeks, each one changing his leadership style at the time of this transition. Thus, each club experienced each of the leadership styles under different leaders. All clubs met in the same place and did the same activities with similar materials. The behavior of the leaders and the reactions of the boys were observed during every meeting. The members and their parents were also interviewed concerning their feelings about the club in the case of the boys and the nature of parent-child relations in the case of the home visits. A more complete description of the experimental plan for the second study may be found in Lippitt and White (2).

In the following pages we shall first describe in some detail the nature of the leadership behavior typically used in each of the three leader treatments. The second part of this report describes the behavior of the members when under the direction of a leader using each of the variations.

LEADER'S BEHAVIOR

To some extent, the observation of what the leaders actually did was a process of discovery, both for the observer and for the leaders themselves. As we shall see, some of the statistically significant differences in leaders' behavior could not have been directly deduced from our central definitions, although they tend to be consistent with these role definitions. The adult who was faced with the constantly changing problems of leading a group of children found himself doing things which he could never have anticipated he would do. And the unanticipated things which the leader with the predetermined autocratic philosophy did were quite different from the things which he did in the same situations when he changed to the democratic role. The data described the different types of leader-behavior which resulted from the attempts at consistent application of the varying philosophies of leadership represented by the definitions of autocracy, democracy, and laissez-faire.

Figure 1 presents a summary graph of the

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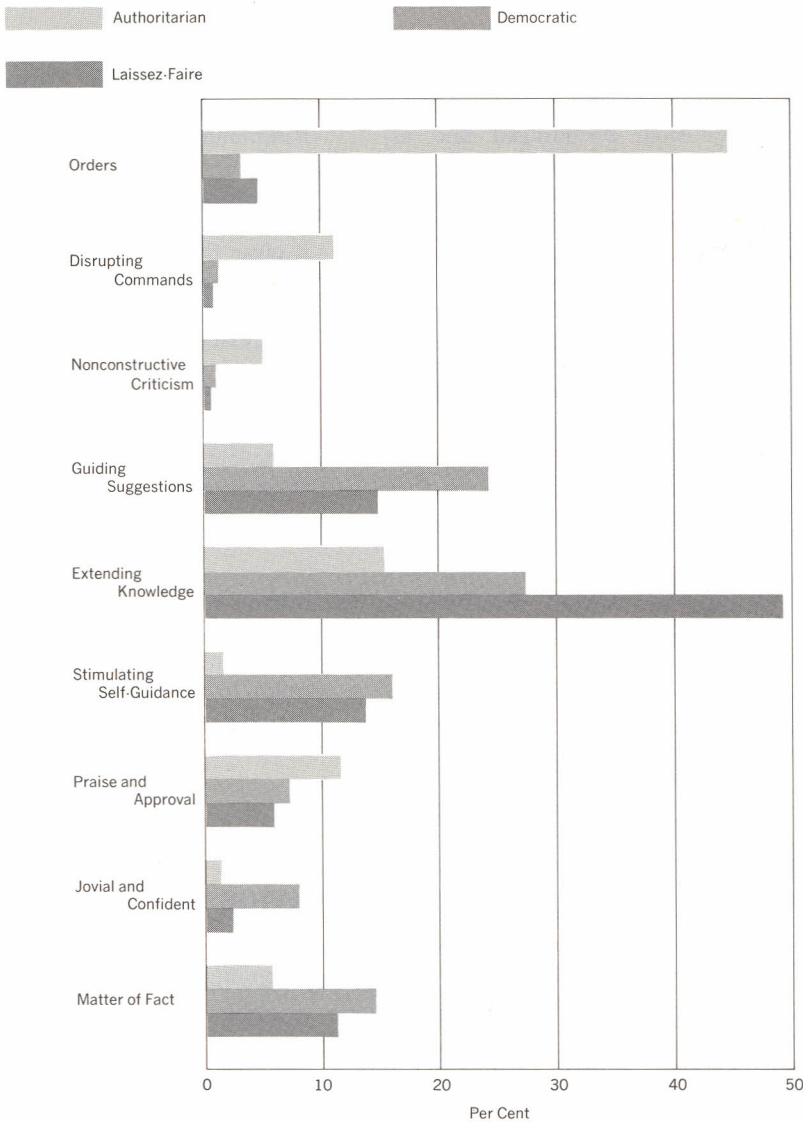


FIGURE 1. Comparison of behavior of average authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire leader.

leader behavior in terms of the percentage of total behavior in each category. These percentages are based upon the grand total of behavior in a given style of leadership over six meetings. All differences concerning leadership behavior which are discussed are statistically significant at the 5% level of confidence or better.

GIVING ORDERS

Statistically, the chief single characteristic of our autocratic leader role, as distinguished from both democracy and laissez-faire, is the

giving of orders. Forty-five per cent of the verbal behavior of the autocrats, in contrast to 3% in democracy and 4% in laissez-faire, consisted of this simplest form of the imposition of one human will upon another. Many of these were direct orders or statements in the imperative form:

“Get your work aprons on.”¹
 “All right, put your brush away.”

¹ The illustrations used throughout this chapter are sample episodes or units of descriptions taken from the continuous research records of the group process.

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"Each of you turn yours over and try on the back."

And many were indirect orders, not in the imperative form, but recognizable as autocratic if given in certain contexts and in certain tones of voice:

"Now we need some plaster."

"That should be about two-thirds full."

"Today we've got to paint and letter the sign."

"Before we start there's something we have to do. That's to make work aprons."

Such orders clearly correspond to the part of our strict experimental definition of autocratic leadership which calls for "high goal and means control."

DISRUPTING COMMANDS

A more ambiguous criterion of means and end control is the giving of "disrupting commands"—commands which cut across an expressed wish or ongoing activity of a member of the group, and substitute for it some wish of the leader. Such commands represented 11% of the verbal behavior of our autocratic leaders, as contrasted to 1% or less for our democratic and laissez-faire leaders. For example:

"I want to saw."

"No, Bill, you and Hamil make another leg."

Mr. Bohlen says he wants "two fellows." Fred volunteers, "Let Reilly and me do it." But Mr. Bohlen appoints two others: "I'm going to let Sam and Leonard do this." Mr. Bohlen consistently refuses to let Fred do what he wants to do—painting on the sign.

The data show that the laissez-faire leaders were consistent in restraining themselves from initiating goals and means.

NON-OBJECTIVE CRITICISM AND PRAISE

A third type of behavior which was more characteristic of our autocratic leaders was "non-objective criticism"—criticism which was adverse and personal in character and which did not point objectively toward improvement by suggesting a reason for failure or a way of doing the thing better. Such criticism constituted 5% of the leaders' behavior in our auto-

cratic atmospheres and 1% in the democratic and laissez-faire atmospheres. For example:

"You're not making a sack, you're making an apron."

"No, you can't make it like that. That isn't a good job at all."

"Who was it left the tool box on the floor again?"

Praise was also found more often in the autocrats' behavior (11%) than in that of the democratic (7%) or laissez-faire (5%) leaders. For example:

Fred is doing a nice job of lettering, and Mr. Bohlen compliments him on it—the second compliment he has given him today. "That's the best side view there. But I think I want a front view."

(In democracy) Bill to Mr. Rankin: "Eddie really did a swell job on that, didn't he? I couldn't do as good a job as that."

Mr. Rankin: "Yeah, it's swell."

Different kinds of praise in different contexts can obviously (like different kinds of criticism) have widely different psychological meanings. Yet it is probably significant, from more than one standpoint, that *both* praise and criticism were especially characteristic of our autocratic leaders. From our present standpoint, however, the most interesting implication of the large amount of both praise and criticism is that both suggest an emphasis on *personal evaluation from the leader's standpoint*. Both suggest an emphasis on a status-hierarchy, and both suggest that the leader is setting himself up as chief judge of the status and achievement of the members of the group.

GUIDING SUGGESTIONS

We come now to the forms of leader-behavior that were more characteristic of democratic or of laissez-faire leadership than of autocratic. For example, as a direct counterpart of the order-giving which was characteristic of the autocratic style, we find "guiding suggestions" to be one of the two most frequent forms of verbal behavior on the part of democratic leaders. It represents 24% of the democratic leaders' behavior, as compared with 6% of the autocrats' behavior. The line between "guiding suggestions" and the indirect type of order-giving is, of course, somewhat

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difficult to draw. However, the reliability of making this distinction in the coding of the conversation was satisfactory. The way in which we defined "guiding suggestions" can be seen from the following examples, which were classified in this way:

"Did you ever try going the other way—with the grain?"

"That's a knife-sharpener so you can have sharp knives to carve wood with."

Bill holds up his model for Mr. Rankin to see. "That's pretty weak there." Mr. Rankin: "If you don't get it any thinner I think it will be all right."

Mr. Rankin sits down beside Van as he works. "That's good, Van, because if you leave as big a piece as that you can try again."

The distinguishing characteristic in each of these examples is that a given course of action is implicitly or explicitly related to one of the boy's *own* purposes. Very similar in psychological meaning is the *clarifying of alternatives*, between which the boys themselves are free to choose (which was included in this same category):

"Motion carried. Now the question is, who wants to be the G-man?" (All speak.) "Should we choose from everybody that wants to be, or just those that haven't had a chance yet?"

And similar, too, is the giving of suggestions by example rather than by precept:

Reilly discovers that Mr. Rankin is making papier-mâché, and stops throwing to join him. He tears up paper too, and so does Fred. Leonard stops throwing. The group is gathered around Mr. Rankin and is listening to him and paying attention.

Bill: "Let's get ready to go home."

Mr. Rankin (picking up a broom): "We don't have much cleaning up to do today."

It should be especially noticed that a very active readiness to give guiding suggestions at precisely those moments when they are appropriate and appreciated, and to point out the operating procedure which lies behind the efficient action, was in practice the chief single difference between the democratic and laissez-faire leaders. In laissez-faire such suggestions made up only 14% of the leader's verbal behavior, as compared with 24% in democracy and 6% in autocracy.

In other words, democracy (as distinguished from laissez-faire) did not imply freedom alone, i.e., a relatively passive "regard" for the child's welfare, in the sense that the child's desires were not needlessly thwarted. If either individual welfare or group achievement is to be fully attained, the democratic leader took the viewpoint that it is necessary to have also a very *active* respect for those individual desires in the sense of a constant active thinking about how they can best be realized. Only by such full participation in the life of the group can the leader really lead. For instance, the following are examples in which a boy wanted guidance and did not get it. In some situations exactly the same behavior by the leader—throwing back the question the boy asked—would be a constructive device for stimulating self-guidance. In these situations, however, it seemed to be merely a result of insensitivity to the boy's legitimate needs for goal or means suggestions:

Reilly: "Where can we put this up?"

Mr. Rankin: "Where would you like to put it up?"

Leonard: "How do you cut it?"

Mr. Rankin: "What do you think? Cut it in the right shape. . . ."

But, at the other extreme, the democratic leader had to avoid overcomplicated suggestions, such as the following, both of which are double-barreled and at least slightly confusing:

"Who wants to help who to get things finished up?"

"Have you been thinking about a G-man Club? Do you want a meeting now, fellows?"

The effective use of guiding suggestions seems to depend on timing. The democratic leader had to have a keen sense of awareness of the shifting momentary needs and interests of the boys so that he could make his suggestions at just the moments when they fitted into those interests.

GIVING INFORMATION

Another major activity of the democratic leader was simply giving information, or extending the knowledge of the members of his group. This constituted 27% of the democratic leaders' behavior, and 15% of the autocratic

leaders'. (In laissez-faire it was 49%, which is natural in view of the fact that the laissez-faire leaders' role was explicitly confined very largely to the giving of technical information when asked for it.) Actually the amount of technical information given by the three leader types was not significantly different, even though the proportion was so much greater in laissez-faire. Here are some typical examples of information-giving:

Finn (holding up orangewood stick): "What's this for?"

Mr. Rankin: "That's an orangewood stick, and the flat end is for smoothing down this way." (Demonstrates.) "This is more curved here, and you can get a smoother tip of soap because it's narrower than this."

There is a dispute between the two groups about the ages of the knives. . . . Reilly, Sam and Fred listen to Mr. Rowe talk about the ages of the knives. They are all very much interested.

(In laissez-faire) Finn (very plaintively): "Why can't we have a crime?"

Mr. Davis: "I could have a crime for you next week if you wanted me to."

One meaning of information-giving, as compared with either orders or guiding suggestions, is that there is almost no chance of its being a form of social influence or pressure. The information is simply there. The boy can take it or leave it, use it or not use it, depending on his needs at the moment.

STIMULATING SELF-DIRECTION

Less frequent numerically is a group of leader-behaviors which we have called "stimulating self-direction." This type of behavior was fairly frequent in democracy and almost nonexistent in autocracy; the percentages were, respectively, 16 and 1.2. Although this made up 13% of the behavior of the laissez-faire leaders, this only represented an average of 30 such acts per meeting, as compared with 59 by democratic leaders. The meaning also tended to be quite different. In laissez-faire this type of leadership act tended to be a throwing back of responsibility on the individual member. In the democratic style it was more frequently a teaching of the total group to learn to depend on itself as a group.

One way of stimulating democratic self-direction in setting new goals and choosing

means is to inculcate the democratic procedure directly: group decision, majority vote, free discussion with an opportunity for every interested person to have his say, secret ballot when appropriate, delegation of special tasks to committees, minority acceptance of majority decisions, etc. For example:

Finn: "Guess I'll change the name of our club."

Bill: "No, it's still the Law and Order Patrol."

Mr. Rankin: "If the group wants to change the name, they can—if a majority wants."

Bill: "Eddie should be captain and Van should be a lieutenant-assistant."

Van: "Hey, that's lower than I am now, and I got a high score!"

Mr. Rankin: "In an army, the general decides the promotions; but here, even if it is organized like an army, it seems to me the group ought to decide who should get the promotion."

Bill: "Now you stay out of it and we three will vote." Mr. Rankin steps in to confer with Bill about taking a vote. He gives him a formal wording. "All in favor say aye, opposed, no," etc. (Bill is especially keen on formality and "having things regular.")

Finn votes for adjournment, and the motion passes. Bill starts to ignore the vote and keep on with the discussion. Mr. Rankin: "All right we don't have any meeting now if the majority votes to adjourn."

It will be noticed that in some of the above examples the role of the democratic adult leader is chiefly one of supporting or bringing to clear expression the feeling of the majority. He is a catalyst, releasing energies that already exist in the group. This was done formally by insisting on a majority when dispute had arisen and backing up the majority with his own prestige. It was also done informally by simply listening to and drawing out the less articulate or less vociferous members of the group. It is also sometimes necessary to support a minority, especially if it is opposed by an even smaller minority. This occurred, for instance, when Finn and Hamil were refusing to accept the arbitrary leadership of Bill. The other two members did not take part in this contest so that it was actually a conflict of two against one.

Bill: "It's time for our meeting. The second half of our meeting will come to order. Come on boys."