

A Tribute to Stanley E. Seashore

Robert L. Kahn and Arnold Tannenbaum

Editor's Note: It was brought to my attention that an obituary for Stanley E. Seashore was never published by the American Psychological Association or in TIP following his death in 1999. Given his contributions to I-O psychology, a tribute to Dr. Seashore is long overdue.

Stanley E. Seashore died on October 7, 1999 in Bloomington MN. He was born on September 4, 1915 in Wahoo, Nebraska to Pastor August T. Seashore and Jennie Rose Seashore. In 1940 he married Eva Danielson.

Their older daughter, Karen Seashore Louis, is a professor of education at the University of Minnesota; her sister, Christine Seashore, is a school-based educational consultant.

Dr. Seashore received his BA degree in psychology from the University of Iowa in 1937, his MA in psychology from the University of Minnesota in 1939, and his PhD in social psychology from the University of Michigan in 1953. He was drawn to the study of psychology in part as a result of family connections: His uncle, Carl Seashore, had been president of the American Psychological Association; his older brother, Harold Seashore, was a founder of the testing division of the Psychological Corporation; his cousin, Robert Seashore, was chair of the Psychology Department at Northwestern University. A younger cousin, Charles Seashore, directed the National Training Laboratories, and Charles's sister, Marjorie Seashore, was a professor of social psychology at San Francisco State University.

When he began doctoral work at the University of Michigan, Stanley Seashore also began research at the then new Institute for Social Research and was, thus, one of its founders. Like many of that closely knit group, he chose to stay on at Michigan. As a professor of psychology, he concentrated on the development of the doctoral program in organizational psychology and, as a program director in the Survey Research Center, he conducted a series of studies in large-scale organizations. He also served for some years as associate director of the Institute for Social Research.

Dr. Seashore was active in professional associations: He was president of Division 14-Industrial Psychology (now known as SIOP) of the American Psychological Association (APA), served on the committee that wrote the first code of research ethics for the APA, and participated on the editorial boards of numerous journals. He had a continuing interest in comparative research on organizations and collaborated with colleagues in Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. After his retirement in 1987, he worked intensively with the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, of which he was a long-time member.

Seashore's contributions to organizational theory began early. His dissertation research (1953), on the relationship of work group cohesiveness to productivity, corrected the overoptimistic prediction that cohesive groups would be more productive than others. Seashore's data, from a large manufacturing plant, showed that the main effect of group cohesiveness was on the variability of individual production rather than the mean. Whether the cohesive groups were more or less productive than others depended on attributes of their supervisors and the policies of management. These findings led Seashore to a concern for the larger system within which workers and work groups function. His research was leading slowly but surely up the organizational hierarchy to a concern for the organization as a system, a territory then not often within the purview of industrial psychology. It seemed apparent to Seashore that getting supervisors to behave effectively requires conditions in the organization as a whole that are conducive to effective behavior. Simply telling supervisors how to behave would not be sufficient. A better way to get supervisors to respect subordinates, for example, would be to make subordinates respectable, that is, to change the organization in ways that would give them some control and responsibility over significant aspects of their work life; in short, that would give them respectability.

These developments in his thinking were apparent in his later research, which involved field experiments based substantially on Rensis Likert's concepts of participatory organizational structure. In these experiments, the systematic feedback of survey data was the primary method for inducing such changes. The success of these experiments and the durability of the changes they created were summarized by Seashore and Bowers in the *American Psychologist*, 25, 227–233 (1970).

Seashore was prominent among those whose broadening view contributed to the transition of an individually oriented industrial psychology, with its emphasis on personnel selection and placement and on problems of individual worker attitudes, into a more system-oriented and interdisciplinary psychology. This development was reflected in the name change of APA's Division 14, from Industrial Psychology to the Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. The expansion of the field is also visible in universities, where organizational psychology has become an important subject in schools of business, education, social work, and public health. Seashore encouraged this evolution; his own work exemplified its contributions, and it remained a great source of satisfaction to him in his later years.

Our acknowledgment of Stanley Seashore's contributions to the profession would not be complete without remembering his modesty, generosity, and open mindedness. They elicited the respect and affection of all who had the good fortune to know him.